



NEPA SYNOD
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Licensed Lay Ministry (LLM)

*Growing Young,
Gaining Strength,
Going Beyond Death to Life*

**A Handbook
for LLM Candidates,
Active LLMs and LLM Mentors**

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Welcome

Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod LICENSED LAY MINISTRY (LLM) is one way that Christians use their gifts in service to the Gospel through partnership with the Synod and local congregations. It is an intentional way of supporting and forming leaders for the purpose of faith development and nurturing aptitude in the areas of spirituality, biblical knowledge, Church history, worship leadership, pastoral care, and the proclamation of the Gospel (preaching). Licensed Lay Ministry also connects individuals as colleagues throughout the synod to support and encourage one another through the LLM journey and beyond.

Why should I consider becoming an LLM?

Have you ever asked yourself, “What is God calling me to do right now? How can I best serve God and my neighbor? What gifts do I have that I am not using?”

If so, perhaps becoming a Licensed Lay Minister could be the answer to those profound, discerning questions.

The Church has always needed and benefited from lay leaders and the variety of gifts they bring to the Church community. The LLM formation path provides lay leaders an opportunity to dive deeper into their knowledge of the Bible, the Church, and our Lutheran-Christian beliefs. The LLM formation path also provides the opportunity for rich engagement with others discerning this call to lay ministry and time to build those supportive, collaborative relationships. In addition to the community of other LLM candidates, the LLM formation path builds in an intentional, long-term relationship with a Mentor Pastor who can accompany you throughout the process. All these opportunities are ways to encourage you as an LLM along your formation journey and create the space for ongoing reflection to the questions of where God is and continues to call you.

Whether you are considering serving your individual congregation, a nearby congregation in transition, or are interested in serving in a 6261 Ministry Community, your gifts are treasured. God calls each of us to use our particular set of skills and talents to serve our neighbor through loving service and by sharing the Good News we have in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Together we are the Body of Christ - one Church community bound together for worship, transformation, and lives of service. This priesthood of all believers, alongside the LLM formation path, is one place for you to explore and share your spiritual gifts.

What do LLMs do?

LLMs serve congregations and 6261 Ministry Communities in a variety of ways. They make themselves available for pulpit supply when a pastor is away, visit members at home and in the hospital, become assisting ministers for worship, and serve on a variety of synod and congregational committees. Some even serve as the primary minister in a congregation during a pastoral vacancy. Some participate in the LLM formation path because their pastor saw gifts in them; others want to broaden their knowledge of the Bible and the Church.

Application to Become a Licensed Lay Minister

Individuals seeking to become a Licensed Lay Minister (LLM Candidates) are active, confirmed, communing, and contributing members of Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod congregations, who have been members of their congregations for at least one year. They are recognized as leaders by their congregations, uphold the highest standards of the Christian life, are faithful in their personal lives, and agree to live by the standards expressed in *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline* ([Appendix E](#)). They work closely with a mentoring ordained minister (normally the pastor of their home congregation or a pastor of a nearby congregation if there is no current pastor) throughout the formation process and beyond. Alternatively, a mentor may be assigned by the Synod leadership.

To become an LLM candidate, applicants must submit the following items:

1. A completed application.
2. Request that a letter of reference be sent from the applicant's pastor (or a former pastor if no current pastor) to the LLM Coordinator. llm@nepsynod.org
3. Request that a letter of reference be sent from the applicant's congregation council, along with the Congregational Education Agreement to the LLM Coordinator ([Appendix C](#)). llm@nepsynod.org
4. Copies of Child Abuse Clearances , State Police Clearances, and FBI Clearances sent to the LLM Coordinator. llm@nepsynod.org

Based on the above items, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod determines whether an applicant may become an LLM candidate. The cost for the entire two years of an LLM's formation path (not including the costs of the four foundation courses taken at an institute of higher education) is \$1,200 (\$600 per year). The cost of the four foundational courses will be paid directly to the institute of higher education that the LLM candidate chooses. Accepted applicants and/or their congregations are expected to pay \$600 per year for two years in a timely manner, or by arranging with the NEPA Synod office to set up an installment plan.

Age: Individuals seeking to become a Licensed Lay Minister must be at least a High School graduate, must be able to complete the assigned work, and must be able to work with a mentor. If you have questions, talk to your pastor or contact the LLM Coordinator.

Note: Those who have been removed from rostered leadership will not be considered to enter the LLM formation path. Those who were removed from candidacy into rostered leadership will require further discussion with the bishop before entrance into the LLM formation path.

LLM Curriculum & Retreats

The LLM course consists of 3 parts over the course of two years:

1. **Foundational Courses** (Taken through an approved institution or Synod course)
Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)
Christian Scriptures (New Testament)
Theology and Beliefs
Church History
2. **Four Weekend Retreats** (Two times per year)
Lutheran Preaching
Lutheran Theology/Confessions
Pastoral Care
Lutheran Worship
3. **Mentor Guided Activities**
Preparation for Preaching, Sermon Development, Sermon Critique
Planning and Leading Bible Study
Visitation, Prayer, and Care of Souls
Teaching the Catechism

During their two-year preparation period, LLM candidates will attend all four weekend retreats, will complete the four Foundational Courses through one of our preferred institutions of higher learning (or another institution approved by the LLM Director), and will have completed the mentor guided activities.

Licensed Lay Ministry formation is designed to be finished in two years (though some extensions may be allowed by the Bishop). LLM candidates can begin their course of study at any point after being approved to be an LLM candidate. Licensed Lay Ministers will be recognized at the Synod Assembly only after all the requirements have been met.

Foundational Courses

Students are expected to complete courses in four areas:

1. Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)
2. Christian Scriptures (New Testament)
3. Theology and Beliefs
4. Church History

The cost of Foundational Courses will be managed by the institute for higher education that was chosen by the LLM candidate. Congregations lifting up LLM candidates or requesting their service are expected to pay for the foundational courses and required books. (In some limited circumstances the cost may be shared with the LLM candidate).

LLM candidates are welcome to take classes in any order they choose. The LLM formation path is designed so that LLM candidates take 1 course per semester over 2 years, though an individual candidate may choose to take some courses simultaneously. In some cases, and

depending on course availability, it may take more than two years. In most cases, these classes will be held online.

Please note that the names of the individual classes provided by the approved institutes for higher education may not exactly match the names of the subjects listed above. If you have any questions, please contact the LLM Coordinator.

Approved Institutions:

United Lutheran Seminary (Certificate in Theological Studies/TEEM)

Compass (Moravian University and Lancaster Theological Seminary)

Select Learning (Synodically Authorized Ministry)

Faith + Lead (Luther Seminary)

Exceptions: Course work from other institutions may be approved by the LLM Coordinator. Course substitution may be allowed by the LLM Coordinator depending on the offerings of each institution. If an LLM candidate has already taken a class equivalent to one of the four required foundational courses - within the past seven years - it may count toward the LLM course requirements. Submit a transcript to the LLM Coordinator for course approval consideration and reach out with any questions. Other exceptions may be allowed for those with extensive theological training.

Weekend Retreats

There are no good substitutes for attending the retreats, the value of which goes far beyond the practical and advertised learning that takes place while attending the session. The relationships fostered and collegiality formed by coming together is as important as the education received. It is for this reason that we rarely offer a substitute for a missed retreat. Attendance at all four retreats is required to become a Licensed Lay Minister.

Each retreat focuses on one of these four subject matters:

Lutheran Preaching

Lutheran Theology/Confessions

Pastoral Care

Lutheran Worship

Additionally, the basics of Lutheran Preaching will be offered on Saturday morning of every retreat, focusing on different aspects of preaching: Sunday preaching, funeral preaching, wedding preaching and preaching the church holidays.

Each retreat includes a review of the expectations and limitations of LLMs and LLM candidates. The retreats are organized by a synod representative, and the subjects are taught by someone with appropriate knowledge of the subject matter. The titles of any books needed for the retreat will be provided at the time of registration for the retreat. Retreats are held in the fall and spring of each year, beginning Saturday morning and ending Sunday afternoon.

Contact the LLM Coordinator for exact dates and locations (llm@nepsynod.org).

Retreat Costs

The cost of the retreat (including housing arrangements, meals, and instruction) is included in the \$1200 (\$600 yearly) formation path cost. Cost of books is not included.

Serving Congregations During LLM Formation

Under the direction of their Mentor Pastor, Licensed Lay Ministers candidates will serve within their congregation, or within a nearby congregation, to gain insight and experience into being an LLM. As described above, activities will include preaching, visiting and caring for others, praying with others, leading Bible study, and teaching catechism.

Licensed Lay Minister candidates will be licensed by the Bishop to preach at the congregation(s) authorized by the Bishop. This will be spelled out clearly in the Lay License to Perform Ministerial Acts.

Licensed Lay Minister candidates will **NOT** typically be authorized by the Bishop to preside over the Eucharist during their formation period.

Mentor Guided Activities

Mentoring Pastors are a key partner in the formation of individuals to become Licensed Lay Ministers. They assist the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod and class instructors by supporting an LLM Candidate's education and providing supervision. Mentor Pastors make a commitment of their time and expertise to support the equipping of lay leaders for ministry. They provide individual attention and support to LLM candidates as they engage in theological education and ministry practice. Mentor Pastors invite and encourage LLM Candidates to apply what they have learned in their own congregational setting through experiences of leadership and of study. Through such, Mentor Pastors also provide valuable feedback both to the LLM candidate and to the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod about a candidate's development.

A Mentor Pastor shall:

- Be an ordained minister of word and sacrament on the roster of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA (or full communion partner.)
- Be the LLM Candidate's own home pastor or a pastor assigned by the Bishop.
- Be approved as a Mentor Pastor by the Bishop.
- Clearly understand and be committed without reservation to the LLM formation path.
- Be an effective model for and guide to the LLM candidate.
- Maintain the mentor relationship with the LLM candidate after the formation path has been completed unless the relationship is terminated in consultation with the Bishop.

Expectations for Mentor Pastors

*Please note that these are **guidelines** which may have to be adapted to meet the contextual needs of each LLM candidate and congregation.*

Mentor Pastors are a key partner in the continued formation of LLMs. Mentor Pastors are local, ordained ministers who, in conjunction with the Bishop's office, provide the ongoing supervision and accountability of Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod LLMs.

A Mentor Pastor is expected (*as are all rostered leaders*) to always uphold the standards outlined in their letter of call (as applicable) and in the ELCA documented “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline.” A Mentor Pastor who violates these standards and practices may be terminated by the Bishop in his/her role as a mentor and be subjected to further discipline according to the practices of the ELCA.

If a Mentor Pastor is unable to fulfill his/her role as mentor OR is considering a new call outside of the NEPA Synod, he/she is to alert the Synod office as soon as possible to allow time to find a new Mentor Pastor.

General Guidelines for Mentor Pastors

Regular (at least monthly) meetings with the LLM candidate. This is the opportunity to address questions that come up in the everyday context of serving a congregation, i.e.:

- worship planning for regular Sunday services and special services (including funerals)
- sermon preparation and resources
- theological questions
- ministry of sacrament questions
- working with the congregation council
- visitation and care of souls
- challenges in congregational life
- personal spiritual practices
- personal boundaries with others

Sharing resources. The Mentor Pastor can be tremendously helpful by sharing resources from his or her own library or their Church's library and other resources.

Worship planning meetings, classes, etc. Invite the LLM candidate to attend various meetings and classes at the Mentor's Church to learn and get exposure to various ideas and ways of teaching, planning, and carrying out the work of the Church.

Introducing the LLM candidate to clergy in the area. Facilitating the establishment of relationships with area-wide clergy helps give LLM candidates a network of support and an opening to work together with other congregations in ministering to the community.

Inviting and encouraging the LLM candidate to participate in clergy activities. This would include Mission District meetings, workshops, education opportunities, retreats offered by the Synod, installations and ordinations, pastor's retreats, etc. The introduction of ordained clergy to LLM candidates is helpful because many may not yet be familiar with the Licensed Lay Ministry formation path.

Detailed Guidelines for Mentor Pastors

Mentor Pastors will provide for learning in four specific areas during the LLM formation path.

[\(Appendix G: Mentor Guided Activity Form\)](#):

1. Planning and Leading Bible Study
2. Preparation for Preaching
3. Visitation, Prayer, and Care of Souls
4. Teaching the Catechism

Ways in which Mentor Pastors might integrate these three foci into their congregation's week-in week-out activity include:

1. Over the LLM candidate's two years be deliberate about asking them to lead in these areas:
 - Going away on vacation? Ask them to preach.
 - Need some variety in your Sunday morning Adult Education study? Ask them to lead a six-week Bible Study either by developing their own study or by using one already made.
 - When doing hospital and nursing home visits invite the LLM Candidate to go along with you, eventually supporting them to do a few visits on their own.
 - What about teaching the confirmation students for a few lessons?
 - Do not forget to offer feedback. The student will be eager to hear how they did and what you think.
 - This kind of support is crucial for their encouragement, confidence, and identity-development as a ministry leader.
2. Other Suggestions:
 - It is important and helpful to have regular meetings to discuss how the education is going for the LLM candidate.
 - You will want to meet at least once every month. A one-hour meeting will suffice.
 - This is a time for feedback, constructive criticism, and encouragement in regard to the areas of the learning mentioned above.
 - Just as important, this can be a time to check-in on how the process is going. Taking on leadership roles in the congregational setting can be a dynamic process. The student may have doubts about their ability.
 - They may not be sure about how to handle a particular situation that comes along with the tasks an LLM candidate is licensed to carry-out. So, this regular time of checking-in will be helpful to get a read on how the student is handling the process both inwardly and outwardly.
3. Discuss how the learning is going:
 - Many students will be coming into contact with new forms of biblical criticism. And most of this learning is done through online courses, so there is reduced opportunity to ask the professor questions.
 - You will be needed to answer questions, help make sense of the various forms of biblical criticism, help the student understand the purpose of reading the Bible in

these various ways, and to encourage them to keep an open mind about what they are being taught.

- Of course, this should be done in a "mentoring sort of way." That is, it is important for you to respect the integrity of the student's growth and learning process.
- You will want to explore with them the resources they are using, familiarizing yourself with their coursework.

Most importantly, just try things. The mentor/student relationship can develop in a variety of ways. The only way it should not develop is as no relationship at all. Other than that: do whatever works to nurture the growth and experience of the LLM Candidate.

6261 Mentor Pastors/Deacons

Please note that LLM candidates serving in a 6261 Ministry Community may have a slightly different formation process in terms of their Mentor Pastor/Deacon.

LLM candidates serving in a 6261 Ministry Community will have the benefit of gaining feedback and interacting with 2 pastors and 1 deacon on a regular basis. LLMs will have the additional benefit of regular interaction with other LLMs and/or LLM candidates.

Mentor-guided activities will still include the four foci listed above. However, reflection upon the mentor-guided activities as well as ongoing reflection and discernment may take place in both small group and one-on-one settings. If there are multiple LLM candidates serving the same 6261 Ministry Community, reflections and conversation will be held together, led by one of the pastors or deacon, or a combination. LLM candidates will also be assigned to a one-on-one mentor who would be one of the pastors or the deacon of the 6261 Ministry Community. This provides dedicated time to address individual concerns, work through individual candidate goals, and allow for one-on-one reflections throughout the formation process.

Requirements for a Certificate of Completion

Licensed Lay Ministry Candidates who have satisfied all requirements will receive a certificate of completion at the end of the formation path. Those students will have:

- Attended all 4 retreats. If it is necessary that a student miss a retreat, an acceptable replacement may be negotiated with the Synod office or the student is welcome to participate in the next LLM retreat on the missed subject.
- Completed and passed all foundational courses. Transcripts must be sent to the LLM Director.
- Completed all assignments as required in the retreats and as required in the mentor portion of the formation path. ([Appendix G](#))
- Initiated regular meetings with their Mentor Pastor. Students are expected to meet with their mentor pastor after each retreat to reflect on the students' learning experience.
- Received a final recommendation for licensing from their mentor.

Requirements for Continued Leadership as an LLM

Once all the requirements have been met and an individual has been recognized as an LLM in the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, to remain active as an LLM the following annual requirements must be met:

1. 20 hours of Continuing education each year
2. Annual Report to the Bishop. (Sent by the Synod in December)
3. A typed manuscript of a preached sermon may be requested.
4. Remain in good standing in an ELCA congregation.
5. Remain in relationship with a mentor pastor.

“Authorization to provide ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the synodical Bishop, who need not specify the reason” (“Guidelines Related to Synodically Authorized or Licensed Ministries” of the ELCA--CC95.04.47t) ([Appendix A](#)).

The Synod will provide an opportunity each year for Licensed Lay Ministers to connect and gain continuing education that is specific to their type of ministry. Subjects that may be explored include:

- Congregational Administration
- Congregational Legacy and Purpose
- Conflict Resolution

Licensed Lay Ministers will be required to take Boundary and Racial Justice trainings at least every 3 years. (Any similar trainings required of Rostered Ministers will also be required).

Code of Practice for LLMs

Permission for Worship Leadership

Leading worship in an ELCA congregation does not, by itself, require an authorization by the Bishop. However, if a Licensed Lay Minister is to preside over Communion, he/she will need to be authorized by the Bishop to do so.

A Licensed Lay Minister may preside at the Eucharist provided they receive the permission of the Bishop ([Appendix E](#)). Permission to preside at the Eucharist will normally be granted by the Bishop on a yearly basis. The Bishop reserves the right to revoke this permission at any time with no reason provided.

The congregational bulletin should list that the LLM is licensed by the Bishop to preside at the Eucharist.

Deployment of LLMs in Typical Congregational Settings

Congregations actively utilizing an LLM outside of a solo minister setting or a 6261 Ministry Community will pay a \$100 per year licensing fee to the NEPA Synod to help pay for the continued administration of Licensed Lay Ministry. This \$100 fee is per congregation and not

per LLM within the congregation. Failure to pay will result in the removal of the license allowing the LLM to minister in that congregation if other arrangements are not made in a timely fashion with the NEPS.

LLMs are not authorized to serve in congregations outside of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA. LLMs will not preach or preside at congregations that have disaffiliated with the ELCA. Preaching and presiding at congregations that have not been explicitly authorized by the Bishop will lead to the removal of the LLM from Licensed Lay Minister status.

LLMs may lead worship in union congregations with the permission of the office of the Bishop under the supervision of the Lutheran pastor of the union congregation. When a union congregation is served by a non-Lutheran pastor, special arrangements will be made through the office of the Bishop.

LLMs are not authorized to participate as a worship leader in local ecumenical worship services except with the permission of their mentor pastor.

Deployment of Licensed Lay Ministers Functioning as Solo Ministers

The Bishop (in consultation with the Synod Council) may call upon a Licensed Lay Minister to serve a congregation or a particular 6261 Ministry Community for a needed period of time, functioning as a solo minister of Word and Sacrament. Typically, the Bishop would provide a letter of authorization for the LLM to serve in a specific congregation or particular 6261 Ministry Community, performing the pastoral duties agreed to by the LLM, the Congregation, and the Bishop for that congregation or 6261 Ministry Community only. To serve as an LLM in these situations, the LLM must provide to the Synod:

- A favorable psychiatric evaluation (cost will be paid by the congregation in which the LLM will be placed unless the synod has arranged to pay.)
- Up-to-date clearances (child abuse clearance, a state police background check, and an FBI background check)

This type of authorization will be reviewed and renewed on a yearly basis by the office of the Bishop.

Congregations will pay \$100 a month to the Synod if employing the use of an LLM who functions as a solo minister. This will apply to LLMs serving 20 hours or more per week. This expense per LLM shall not exceed \$400 a month for a 6261 Ministry Community who employs the use of multiple LLMs. This expense will help facilitate the cost of administering the use of LLMs and the cost of providing an off-site mentor for solo LLM ministers. Failure to pay will result in the removal of the license allowing the LLM to minister in that congregation if other arrangements are not made in a timely fashion with the NEPA Synod.

A limited number of LLMs (normally those who have had seminary training equivalent to a Rostered Leader) may be called upon and authorized at the discretion of the Bishop to serve as pulpit supply throughout the synod without the need for authorization in each location. This type of authorization will be reviewed and renewed on a yearly basis.

Expectations for LLMs

All LLMs shall:

- Represent God, the Church universal, the ELCA, and the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod with the grace, dignity, respect, and responsibility required of their position.
- Report any difficulties and/or irregularities to the office of the Bishop within 48 hours of their designated visit to a congregation.
- Use only the official title of LLM (Licensed Lay Minister) to identify themselves in person or in print. They may be referred to as “Minister,” “Lay Minister,” or “LLM” in their daily vocation. They shall never use the title of “the Reverend,” “Pastor,” “Deacon,” etc., in person or in print.
- Follow the normal worship practices of the congregations in which they are serving.
- Be diligent in preparing to lead worship.
- Carry written authorization from the Bishop when presiding at the Eucharist.
- Have a written statement of authorization by the Bishop included in the worship bulletin of congregations in which LLMs are presiding at the Eucharist.
- Never wear a clerical collar or other attire which specifically identifies those individuals called to and ordained for the Office of Word and Sacrament.
- Wear a white alb when leading worship, and a cincture and/or cross, if desired. Stoles of any kind and chasubles are inappropriate and shall not be worn. Street clothes are also fine where appropriate.
- Normally NOT baptize someone during a regular service of worship or in private except under the provisions of the Church for emergency baptisms. (Any Christian may baptize in an emergency situation and report such a baptism to the pastor of the congregation.) The Rostered Leader may ask the LLM to baptize. Those who are serving as a solo minister will be called upon to regularly baptize within the congregation they are authorized to serve.
- Not officiate at a wedding, unless explicitly authorized by the Bishop to do so. LLMs serving as a solo minister may be authorized by the Bishop to officiate at weddings of congregational *members* - only of the congregation they are authorized to serve.
- Conduct funerals in the absence of a pastor and with proper authorization from the congregation council.

Continuing Education for LLMs

Licensed Lay Ministers need opportunities for continued growth in competence and understanding as they utilize their gifts for ministry. Continuing education is how leaders enhance their ministry abilities, acquire new skills, and experience personal growth for more effective ministry. It is the expectation of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod that each LLM participate in at least 20 hours of continuing education experience annually. LLMs are highly encouraged to complete the lay certification courses offered by their chosen institute of higher learning as a part of their continuing education (though only the Foundational Courses are required to become an LLM). Other continuing education experiences may include formal classes or workshops, independent study, participation in pericope study groups, and the like. Continuing education should be decided in conversation with an LLM’s Mentor Pastor in order to find ways to strengthen their ministry. The continuing education experience shall be included in their annual report to the Bishop.

Compensation

All Licensed Lay Ministers will be compensated by the congregation for worship services according to the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod's pulpit supply guidelines, including reimbursement for mileage at the current IRS reimbursement rate. For all other tasks assigned by the congregation (including attendance at council meetings), LLMs will be paid at an hourly rate by the congregation. The hourly rate will be set by the appropriate synod body.

Costs of the LLM formation path (retreats, classes, books, and Synod organizational expenses) will normally be covered by:

1. The congregations lifting up a particular LLM candidate for service within their own congregation, or
2. The congregation receiving the benefit of having an LLM candidate assigned to provide pastoral leadership, or
3. The 6261 Ministry Community uplifting an LLM candidate for service within that 6261 Ministry Community, or
4. The individual LLM candidate if formation is taken for personal, spiritual edification.

As an expression of Christian unity with other congregations in need, congregations within this Synod are encouraged to consider providing financial resources to the NEPA Synod office for the purpose of covering the expenses of individuals who are pursuing the LLM formation path so that they may serve in our more marginalized areas of the Synod. To this end, the Synod may have scholarships available to help with these expenses.

Current SALMs (Synodical Authorized Lay Ministers)

Those individuals who are currently recognized by the NEPA Synod as SALMs (Synodical Authorized Lay Ministers) will be recognized as Licensed Lay Ministers after the Bishop reviews and approves of their prior service and training, and will receive the license appropriate to their context from the Bishop. In many cases, little to no additional training will be required for current SALMs, but SALMs are welcome to participate in any of the retreats offered to LLM candidates (the expense of which will need to be negotiated with the congregation they currently serve).

All continuing education requirements, compensation expectations, and monthly/annual Synod fees (on the part of congregations) will apply to all LLMs who were formerly SALMs in the NEPA Synod.

Discipline

LLMs hold a unique and important public position and responsibility in the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod and the Church at large. This position should never be taken lightly. Failure to function appropriately as an LLM shall result in immediate discipline through the office of the Bishop (in consultation with the Deans) and may include termination of authorization and removal from the role of LLM of this Synod. Questionable or inappropriate behavior on the part of an LLM shall be reported to the office of the Bishop immediately.

All LLMs in the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod agree to live by the standards expressed in *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline* ([Appendix E](#)).

Typical Process of LLM Formation

1. Interested Person does the following:
 - a. Completes an [application](#) and submits online or via postal service.
 - b. Requests a letter of reference be submitted from their pastor (or a former pastor if there is no current pastor) to the LLM Coordinator. llm@nepsynod.org
 - c. Requests a letter of reference to be submitted by the applicant’s congregation council to the LLM Coordinator as well as a signed [Congregational Education Agreement](#). llm@nepsynod.org
 - d. Obtains Copies of Child Abuse Clearances, State Police Clearances, and FBI Clearances ([Instructions for Background Checks](#)) and submits them to the LLM Coordinator. llm@nepsynod.org
2. The Bishop (in consultation with the LLM Coordinator) reviews the application, references, and clearances and then either approves or denies the interested person as a Licensed Lay Minister candidate.
3. If approved, the congregation pays the Synod’s education fee and arranges to pay for the foundational classes in consultation with the LLM candidate.
4. The LLM candidate starts education in three areas over the course of two years. These are done simultaneously:

<p>Four Weekend Retreats (In the Spring and Fall)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lutheran Preaching - Lutheran Theology/Confessions - Pastoral Care - Lutheran Worship 	<p>Four Foundation Courses (Though an approved institute of higher learning)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hebrew Bible (OT) - Christian Scriptures (NT) - Theology and Beliefs - Church History 	<p>Mentor Guided Activities (Led by the LLM’s Mentor)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sermon Development - Leading Bible Study - Learning Visitation - Teaching the Catechism
<p>Proof of Completion LLM Coordinator will issue certificates of completion and keep track of completed retreats.</p>	<p>Proof of Completion Student will send a transcript to the LLM Coordinator after completing each course.</p>	<p>Proof of Completion The LLM’s Mentor Pastor will turn in the completed and signed Guided Activity form to the LLM Coordinator, along with a recommendation for Licensing.</p>

5. The Bishop and LLM Coordinator review the completed coursework and the Mentor Pastor recommendation. If approved, the Bishop issues a license for the individual to serve as an LLM.
6. The Bishop will present to the Synod Assembly all new Licensed Lay Ministers and they will be officially recognized at that time. LLMs can be licensed to serve before this introduction to the Assembly.

Appendix A: ELCA Guidelines for Synodically Authorized or Licensed Ministries

(CC95.04.47t)

These guidelines relate to bylaw 7.61.01. in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* that addresses the issue of providing Word and Sacrament ministry through the use of synodically authorized ministry, where it is not possible to provide appropriate ordained pastoral leadership. Those who are authorized for such ministry within a synod are not rostered by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (unless already serving on a roster of this Church) but are authorized to provide a specific ministry within a particular setting for a designated period of time.

Principle 40 and related sections in “The Use of the Means of Grace—A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament,” which was adopted “for guidance and practice” by the 1997 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, also addresses this issue.

- A. **Identification of Need:** The synod identifies a congregation or other ministry where ordained pastoral leadership is not available for an extended period of time and where synodically authorized ministry may be appropriate. Because of the relationship of an authorized lay ministry to those serving in the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament, pastors serving congregations within the area where this ministry need is located normally will be consulted in this determination.
- B. **Invitation to Service:** An individual who demonstrates the potential for service is invited by the synod to enter a program of preparation. An individual who has been removed from rostered ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by reason of misconduct or has been denied continuance in candidacy by reason of misconduct is precluded from serving in a synodically authorized ministry of this Church.
- C. **Qualifications:** A person invited to prepare for a synodically authorized ministry should be an active member of an ELCA congregation for at least one year. Prior to preparing to serve in synodically authorized ministry an individual must have:
 1. Been recommended by the individual’s pastor and congregation council;
 2. Consulted with synodical staff and/or the synodical committee responsible for the synod’s program of preparation; and
 3. Demonstrated the ability and willingness to participate in a program of preparation leading to possible service in a synodically authorized ministry.In making its determination concerning an individual’s eligibility to serve in a synodically authorized ministry, the synod will interview the applicant and will obtain written responses to the “Entrance Information Questions” in the “Candidacy Manual.” The synod will also obtain a background check, as outlined in the “Candidacy Manual,” on each individual being considered for authorization in the synod.
- D. **Synodical Committee for Authorized Ministry:** An appropriate synodical board or committee may be appointed by the Synod Council to provide the synodical Bishop with recommendations concerning the authorization of and accountability for authorized ministries within the synod. This committee may be a sub-committee of the synodical Candidacy Committee. When it is a separate committee, it should be closely related to the synod Candidacy Committee. In either case, the work of the two is distinct. The synodical committee or synod staff determines the educational program within the synod for persons considered for service in an authorized ministry; determines the eligibility for individuals to enter this program of preparation; and advises the Bishop on the suitability of an individual for service in a synodically authorized ministry.
- E. **Program of Preparation:** The synod defines the program of preparation for an authorized ministry of Word and Sacrament, consistent with guidelines developed by the Division for Ministry, and in consultation with an ELCA seminary. Such programs shall prepare persons to have knowledge and abilities in the following areas:
 1. Bible;
 2. Lutheran theology, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Confession of Faith and polity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;
 3. Worship;
 4. Spiritual discernment and faith development;
 5. Leadership expectations and identity;
 6. Contextual understanding; and

7. Pastoral skills including preaching, catechetics, worship leadership, visitation, pastoral care, and outreach. The program of preparation can be accomplished in a variety of ways including educational programs that utilize current rostered leaders within the synod, ELCA seminaries and continuing education centers, the ELCA *SELECT* curriculum, and other appropriate resources.

The synod determines when an individual is prepared for service within the synod. There is no guarantee of service within the synod and participation in a program of preparation does not mean that authorization for service will follow.

- F. **Authorization for Service:** When the synod has determined that a specific need exists, and with the consent of the congregation to be served, an individual may be authorized for service within the synod by the synodical Bishop, in consultation with the Synod Council. Such service shall fulfill assigned responsibilities, and authorization shall be for a specific period of time not to exceed one year, unless terminated earlier. Persons who serve in synodically authorized ministry are to meet the following criteria:
1. evidence of mature Christian faith and commitment to Christ;
 2. satisfactory participation in the synodical program of preparation, including demonstration of appropriate ministry skills;
 3. knowledge and acceptance of the Confession of Faith of this Church; and
 4. willingness to meet this Church's expectations concerning the personal conduct and behavior of persons serving in public ministry as described in "Vision and Expectations – Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America."
- A person authorized by the synodical Bishop is then installed in such service.
- G. **Supervision and Accountability:** Accountability for synodically authorized ministry in a congregational setting is the direct responsibility of the Congregation Council. Accountability for a synodically authorized ministry in a non-congregational setting within a synod is the direct responsibility of the governing body of the entity that conducts that ministry, or if there is no such entity, the Synod Council. In all cases, a synodically authorized minister is to be under the direct supervision of an ordained minister appointed by the synodical Bishop. The supervising ordained minister shall report to the governing body and seek the advice and counsel of the synodical Bishop or appropriate synodical staff person in relationship to the synodically authorized minister.
- H. **Renewal and Revocation:** Renewal of authorization after one year may be given when a demonstrated need exists for its continuation. This need is determined by the synodical Bishop at the request and with the consent of the congregation or other ministry within the synod being served, consultation with the supervising ordained minister, and a review of both the ministry setting and the service of the authorized minister. Authorization to provide ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the synodical Bishop, who need not specify the reason.
- I. **Letter of Authorization:** The authorization may be evidenced by an appropriate letter describing the terms and conditions of the authorization or license. The description also may limit activities authorized to be conducted.
- J. **Marriage Services.** Where permitted by law, synodically authorized ministers may officiate at marriage services for members of the congregation in which they are authorized to serve, with the concurrence of the congregation and the approval of the synodical Bishop.
- K. **Other Matters:** Persons may serve in a synodically authorized ministry only within the synod that has authorized that ministry. A synod may consider for authorization an individual trained and authorized by another synod, based on the individual's qualifications and ability to meet the new synod's criteria for authorized ministry. Persons authorized for such ministries are not to wear clerical stoles, and should not wear clerical collars unless authorized by the synodical Bishop. The title "Pastor" is reserved for ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament and is not to be used by synodically authorized ministers. Synodically authorized ministers are not to offer therapy or counseling as a part of their ministries but may provide appropriate pastoral care.

Adopted by the Church Council as policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, April 1995 [CC95.04.47t] and amended April 2005, and April 2006

Appendix B: LLM Candidate Application

Licensed Lay Minister Candidate Application

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY OR TYPE

Personal Information

Today's Date: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Full Name: _____
Last *First* *M.I.*

Address: _____
Street Address *Apartment/Unit #*

City *State* *ZIP Code*

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Personal Email _____ Are You Involved in a 6261? Yes No

Congregation's Name: _____

Congregation's Address: _____

Congregation's Phone Number: _____ Congregation's Email: _____

Current Pastor (or "None"): _____ Years at Current Congregation: _____

Employment Information (If Applicable)

Employer: _____ Work Address: _____

Employer Phone: _____ Employer Email: _____

May We Contact your employer for a reference? YES NO How many hours a week do you work?

Emergency Contact Information

Name: _____
Last *First*

Address: _____
Street Address *Apartment/Unit #*

City *State* *ZIP Code*

Primary Phone: _____ Alternate Phone: _____

Relationship: _____

Are there food allergies or special needs for retreats? _____

Applicant's Signature: _____

Appendix C: Congregational Education Agreement

Congregational Education Agreement for LLM Candidates

Licensed Lay Minister Candidates require ongoing support from their congregations in terms of financial support and in terms of dedication to their education and development as a follower and minister of Jesus Christ. To this end, congregations are asked to commit to supporting LLM candidates in their formation.

Licensed Lay Minister Candidate's Name: _____

Congregation's Name: _____

Congregation's Address: _____

Congregation's Email: _____

Congregation's Phone#: _____

We commit to supporting the education of this Licensed Lay Minister candidate, including paying for the cost of the candidate's Synod education expenses (\$1200 total, \$600 per year), the tuition for the candidate's foundational courses at a Synod approved college, university, or seminary of their choosing, and the cost of the candidate's required course books. We understand that the Synod expenses should be paid in a timely manner, and that a payment plan can be made with the Synod.

If other payment arrangements have been made, they are detailed below:

We understand that the LLM candidate will need a mentor who is an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament in the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA (or a minister of an ecumenical partner approved by the Bishop) who will aid in education and supervision. We agree that the mentor shall be:

Mentor's Name: _____

Signed: _____

Name Printed: _____
Council President LLM Candidate LLM Mentor Pastor LLM Coordinator

Appendix D: Instructions for Background Checks

INSTRUCTIONS FOR BACKGROUND CHECKS IN THE NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD

To be a Rostered Minister or Licensed Lay Minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is to be in a position of public trust. The Church expects those who serve as ordained pastors, deacons, deaconesses, and as Licensed Lay Ministers to be exemplary in terms of their personal and professional conduct. Out of care of the Church and its members, and in line with legal mandates from the state regarding child safety, background checks are required of all Licensed Lay Ministers and Candidates for Licensed Lay Ministry.

All LLM candidates are required to complete and submit the results of these three background checks to the Synod to participate as a Licensed Lay Minister or Licensed Lay Minister Candidate. Please submit these documents to the LLM Coordinator.

Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Certification (\$13 Fee)

<https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/Clearances/Pages/PA-Child-Abuse-History-Clearance.aspx>

Pennsylvania State Police Criminal History Record Check (\$22 Fee)

<https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/Clearances/Pages/Criminal-Background-Check.aspx>

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Criminal History Background Check (\$25.25)

<https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/Clearances/Pages/FBI-Fingerprinting.aspx>

Appendix E: Sample Lay License to Perform Ministerial Acts



*Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod*

Lay License to Perform Ministerial Acts

I hereby certify that _____ is licensed to provide ministerial service, including:

- Preaching
- Funerals
- Presiding at Holy Communion and Holy Baptism
- Marriages

in the following congregation(s):

CONGREGATION

CITY AND STATE

Town, State

For the following date(s): Date - Date

Signed,

Christopher deForest
Bishop of the Northeastern
Pennsylvania Synod
10/19/2025

The following notice should appear in the Church bulletin any time someone other than a pastor presides:

"Name, a Licensed Lay Minister, has been authorized by the Bishop of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod to provide pastoral services in this congregation."

The Lutheran Center, 2354 Grove Road, Allentown, PA 18109-3044(610) 266-5101www.godslove.org

Appendix F: ELCA Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline

DEFINITIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE

**ROSTERED MINISTERS,
CONGREGATIONS, AND
MEMBERS OF CONGREGATIONS**



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Originally approved November 19, 1989, and subsequently approved December 5, 1993, on April 10, 2010, on November 10, 2014, on March 8, 2020, April 17, 2021, and on November 12, 2021 by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, pursuant to ELCA constitutional provision 20.21.

Published November 2021

Citations from the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* are based on the 2019 edition of that document.

DEFINITIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE

Grounding Values

Rooted in God's grace and steadfast love, we are called as followers of Jesus to live a life "of bold trust in God and joyful, generous service to everyone we know and meet in daily life."¹ Affirming God's gracious covenant made with us in baptism, we commit to live in right relationship with God and our neighbors.

When the gift of relationship with God and our neighbors is violated or used inappropriately, there is a need for accountability and just action. It is in this context that we, as a church body, establish guidelines for our conduct, actions, and ways in which we communicate with one another. These guidelines are necessary as we "continue in the covenant God made with us"² in our baptism to ensure that all people, and the church in particular, are protected from harmful or inappropriate actions, speech, communications, or other misconduct. As church, we must abide in a context that holds ourselves, and one another, to account for the sake and care of the whole church.

The following definitions and guidelines for discipline are set forth with the understanding that, following misconduct, the desired outcome is restoration of right relationships with God and with one another. This church embraces disciplinary processes which may include elements of counseling, admonition, and correction with the objective of healing and reconciliation. This church also acknowledges certain circumstances where reconciliation and restoration to the community may not be possible or may cause further harm. Particularly egregious conduct may result in suspension or removal from the roster or from membership.

¹ <https://elca.org/Faith>

² In the rite of Affirmation of Baptism (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 236), the presiding minister asks:

"You have made public profession of your faith. Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:

to live among God's faithful people,
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?"

Grounding Context

The *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA* (CBCR) outlines the grounds for discipline, the discipline that may be imposed, and who may bring charges:

- for ministers of Word and Sacrament at 20.22.01. through 20.22.03.;
- for ministers of Word and Service at 20.23.01. through 20.23.03.;
- for congregations at 20.31.01. through 20.31.03.; and
- for members of congregations at 20.41.01. and 20.41.02.

The constitution also outlines the processes for discipline. The disciplinary process for ministers of Word and Sacrament is set forth at 20.22.04. through 20.22.24. These same processes also apply to ministers of Word and Service by operation of 20.23.04. and 20.23.05. and to congregations by operation of 20.31.04. and 20.31.05. The detailed operations of these processes are set forth in the rules governing disciplinary proceedings, a separate document also created by the Committee on Appeals and approved by the Church Council (20.22.14.). The disciplinary process for members of congregations is set forth in 20.41.03. through 20.41.11. and also in *C15.01. through *C15.07. of the *Model Constitution for Congregations*.

The CBCR assigns primary responsibility for the discipline process to synods (20.11.). Accordingly, it provides synod bishops with substantial discretion in the investigation of misconduct (20.22.04. through 20.22.06.).

Provision 20.21. of this church's constitution specifically calls for the Committee on Appeals "to establish **definitions and guidelines**, subject to approval by the Church Council, to enable clear and uniform application of **the grounds for discipline** of officers, rostered ministers, congregations, and members of congregations." The purpose of this document is to elaborate on the grounds for discipline and to guide rostered ministers, congregations, and members in our lives together. Additionally, it is intended to help bishops, synod staff, hearing officers, discipline committee members, and consultation committee members in their work and to clarify what conduct is not acceptable in this church.

This document is written in accordance with the decisions of churchwide assemblies. It is grounded in our biblical and Lutheran confessional sources, which help to shape this church's social teachings. No language in this document may be construed to contradict or override a current authorized social teaching of this church.

DEFINITIONS

Unless the context indicates otherwise, for the purpose of this document:

1. “Adultery” means voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and someone other than that person’s current spouse.
2. “Constitution” means the *Constitutions, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*.
3. “Church” or “this church” means the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
4. “Family” means not only persons related by genetics or marriage³ but may also include “a variety of forms, more akin to the older term of ‘household,’ exclusively employed by Luther to include immediate family members, relatives, and others.”⁴
5. “Harass” means to persistently annoy another or to create an unpleasant or hostile situation by uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical conduct. Mere criticism or disagreement is not harassment.⁵
6. “Hate speech” means the expression of animosity or disparagement of an individual or group on account of a group characteristic such as race, sexual orientation, national origin, age, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, language, socioeconomic status, gender, gender identity, or immigration status.
7. “Infidelity” means the act or fact of having a romantic or sexual relationship with someone other than one’s spouse or partner.
8. “Intellectual property” means property that derives from the work of the mind or intellect and can be registered and protected under state or federal copyright, trademark, or patent laws.
9. “Libel” means a written defamatory statement or representation that conveys an unjustly unfavorable impression.
10. “Plagiarism” means wrongly representing the works of others as one’s own, in oral or written form.

³ In 2009, the ELCA adopted “A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust” as a social statement of this church. In its section on marriage (pages 15–21), “Gift and Trust” described a range of views existing within this church. Included among these views was both a recognition of an understanding of marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman and a commitment to the support of couples in lifelong, monogamous, same-gendered relationships. In the intervening decade, the action of the United States Supreme Court in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015), guaranteed access to legal marriage to LGBTQIA+ couples in all fifty states.

⁴ See “A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” p. 21. See also pp. 15ff. and 25ff.

⁵ See the social message, “Gender-Based Violence.”

11. "Promiscuity" means having casual or indiscriminate sexual relations which do not proceed from or contribute to mutual respect, intimacy, commitment to, and care of others.
12. "Retaliation" or "retaliatory action" means the discharge, suspension, demotion, or other punitive action taken against an individual. Appropriately defending oneself against false accusations is not considered retaliation.
13. "Rostered minister" includes ministers of Word and Sacrament, ministers of Word and Service, and, in this context, candidates for rostered ministry.⁶
14. "Slander" means a false and defamatory oral statement about a person.
15. "Serious crime" means a crime that could be punishable by imprisonment for more than six months.
16. "Sexual abuse" means rape; sexual assault; sexual harassment; sexual relations with a minor child or a person otherwise not capable of consent; sexual relations resulting from threats, intimidation, coercion, blackmail, extortion, or manipulation; and sexual relations (outside of marriage) between a rostered minister and a person with whom the rostered minister has a pastoral or supervisory relationship, including, but not limited to, an employee, volunteer, student, or counselee, or a person in the congregation or other ministry served by the rostered minister.

⁶ See paragraph 3, "Report of Actions of the Church Council (March 6–8, 2020)." The Church Council voted to include the following language in the candidate statement on the Entrance Information form provided in the ELCA Candidacy Manual:

"As a candidate for rostered ministry in this church, I understand I will be held accountable to the synod's candidacy committee regarding this church's expectations for my speech and conduct as set forward in *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline of Rostered Ministers*. I understand that my candidacy for rostered ministry brings increased attention to my life. I am responsible for informing my bishop regarding any circumstance that might subject me to discipline according to *Definitions and Guidelines* were I a rostered minister. I understand that the candidacy committee may modify my candidacy status in response to my speech and conduct."

GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE OF ROSTERED MINISTERS

The normative expectations of this church for its rostered ministers focus on faithful and effective exercise of ministerial leadership. In all matters of morality and personal ethics this church expects its rostered ministers to be exemplary in conduct.

Grounds for discipline of rostered ministers are as follows:

- A. Preaching or teaching in conflict with the faith confessed by this church** is grounds for discipline of rostered ministers. A summary of the faith confessed by this church is found in Chapter 2 of this church's constitution.
- B. Conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office** is grounds for discipline of rostered ministers. These guidelines define and describe kinds of behavior which are incompatible with the character of the ministerial office and may be grounds for discipline.
- 1. Confidentiality:** Ministers of Word and Sacrament must comply with 7.45.⁷ of this church's constitution and not disclose information protected by that provision unless expressly permitted by that provision. All rostered ministers must respect and protect other confidential information and not disclose it absent good cause. Good cause includes, but is not limited to, permission of those who shared the confidence, disclosure required by law, or disclosure necessary to prevent great harm.⁸
 - 2. Integrity:** Rostered ministers must be honest and forthright in their dealings with others. Dishonesty, deception, duplicity, or the manipulation of others for personal benefit or gain is conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.
 - 3. Professional attention to duties:** A rostered minister of this church has made commitments through ordination and through acceptance of a letter of call or appointment. Continued neglect of or indifference toward such commitments constitutes conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.

⁷ "In keeping with the historic discipline and practice of the Lutheran church and to be true to a sacred trust inherent in the nature of the pastoral office, no minister of Word and Sacrament of this church shall divulge any confidential disclosure received in the course of the care of souls or otherwise in a professional capacity, nor testify concerning conduct observed by the minister of Word and Sacrament while working in a pastoral capacity, except with the express permission of the person who has given confidential information to the minister of Word and Sacrament or who was observed by the minister of Word and Sacrament, or if the person intends great harm to self or others." (CBCR 7.45.)

⁸ Communication in the nature of confession may be privileged by law. Other confidential information does not fall under this privilege. The question of which communications between a rostered minister and member are "privileged," such that their disclosure may not be compelled by law, varies from state to state. Questions regarding this issue should be directed to local legal counsel.

- 4. Care of family:** For rostered ministers in a family, the following conduct is considered incompatible with the character of the ministerial office:
- Desertion or abandonment of a family member;
 - Abuse of a family member; or
 - Repeated failure to meet legally determined support obligations of a family member.
- 5. Sexuality and public ministry:**⁹ This church does not tolerate the abuse of the ministerial office for personal sexual gratification or exertion of authority over others. This church's understanding of human sexuality is stated in its authorized social teachings.
- Rostered ministers who abuse the trust placed in them by engaging in infidelity, adultery, promiscuity, or sexual abuse of another are engaging in conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.¹⁰
- 6. Addiction and substance misuse:**¹¹ Misuse of substances (such as alcohol or drugs) or compulsions (such as gambling or use of pornography) that impair the ministerial function of a rostered minister is conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office. Continued high-risk behavior or refusal to comply with treatment also constitutes conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.¹²

⁹ See "A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" and the social message, "Sexuality: Some Common Convictions."

¹⁰ In 2009, this church expressly addressed the question of sexuality and public ministry in "A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," which states (p. 35):

This church does not tolerate the abuse of the ministerial office for personal sexual gratification. This church holds high expectations for those individuals called to serve as rostered leaders. Pastors, associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers who abuse the trust placed in them by engaging in promiscuity, infidelity, adultery, or forms of sexual abuse violate those high standards. Such violations severely damage the credibility of the public ministry to which this church and its leaders are called.

Provision B.5. is substantially based on this teaching of this church. This provision does not change the aspirational teaching of this church, set forth in its social statements, that all members of this church should abstain from sexual intercourse until married. See "A Social Statement on Abortion" (p. 4) and "A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" (p. 31).

¹¹ See the social message, "Commercial Sexual Exploitation."

¹² Consistent with the value of restoration of right relationships, the approach of this church to such misuse may be referral for and insistence on evaluation, and the church may counsel inpatient or outpatient treatment should addiction be identified. Refusal to explore the possibility of misuse may result in referral to behavioral health resources with the expectation that they will be used and recovery maintained. Public ministry may not be appropriate until health and wellness are restored.

7. Fiscal responsibilities:¹³ The following fiscal misconduct is considered conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office:

- a. Indifference to or avoidance of legitimate and neglected personal debts;
- b. Embezzlement of money or improper appropriation of the property of others;
- c. Using the ministerial office improperly for personal benefit or financial gain;
- d. Soliciting members or others to directly or indirectly acquire gifts, bequests, or similar benefits for personal gain.

8. Membership in certain organizations: This church has specifically declared in 7.31.11.¹⁴ and 7.61.05.¹⁵ that discipline may be administered to any of its rostered ministers who belong to any organization other than the Church which claims to possess in its teaching and ceremonies that which the Lord has given solely to the Church.

Conduct considered incompatible with the character of the ministerial office includes membership in, or taking actions in concert with, organizations that encourage or promote hatred or bigotry on the basis of race, sexual orientation, national origin, age, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, language, socioeconomic status, gender, gender identity, or immigration status.

9. Commission of a serious crime:¹⁶ A rostered minister who commits a serious crime is subject to discipline for engaging in conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office. If the violation of law is purposefully and exclusively done as a principled act of civil disobedience to protest or to test a law which is reasonably perceived as unjust or contrary to Christian beliefs, it may not be grounds for discipline. Rostered ministers charged with a crime shall promptly notify the bishop's office in their synod of roster.

¹³ See "A Social Statement on: Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All."

¹⁴ "No person who belongs to any organization such as a lodge or fraternal order which claims to possess in its teachings and ceremonies that which the Lord has given solely to the Church shall be called and received onto the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament or otherwise received into the ministry of this church, nor shall any person so called and received onto the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament or otherwise received by this church be retained in its ministry who subsequently joins or is discovered to be a member of such an organization. (CBCR 7.31.11.)

¹⁵ "No person who belongs to any organization such as a lodge or fraternal order which claims to possess in its teachings and ceremonies that which the Lord has given solely to the Church shall be called and received onto the roster of Ministers of Word and Service or otherwise received into the ministry of this church, nor shall any person so called and received onto the roster of Ministers of Word and Service or otherwise received by this church be retained in its ministry who subsequently joins or is discovered to be a member of such an organization. (CBCR 7.61.05.)

¹⁶ See "A Social Statement on: The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries," Section 2D.

10. **Hateful speech or actions:**¹⁷ A rostered minister's use of harassing, abusive, discriminatory, libelous, slanderous or hateful speech or actions, at any time, whether in person or on any form of social media, is conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.
11. **Abusive activity:** A rostered minister's physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual abuse of staff, colleagues, congregation members, or others is conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office. Such abuse could include, but is not limited to, bullying or harassment in written or verbal form, either in person or by remote communication.
12. **Intellectual property:** Rostered ministers will remain committed to protecting and honoring all intellectual property. Rostered ministers must also work to ensure that they do not misuse the intellectual property of others without appropriate permission and/or citation. Plagiarism is conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.
13. **Retaliatory action:** A rostered minister may not take retaliatory action toward anyone who submits a complaint against the rostered minister to the leadership of a congregation; to the dean of a conference; to a synod bishop, synod council member, or synod staff member; to the presiding bishop or churchwide staff; or to any other person who holds the capacity to receive a complaint. Such retaliatory actions constitute conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.
14. **Relationship with prior congregation(s) or ministry:** Rostered ministers who have resigned or retired from or otherwise no longer officially serve a congregation or other ministry shall honor the integrity of the congregation or ministry. They shall respect and honor the current rostered minister(s) and mission of the congregation or ministry they no longer are called to serve.¹⁸ They shall decline invitations from members to perform pastoral acts and refrain from asking members to directly or indirectly seek permission to perform such acts from the currently serving rostered minister. They shall not participate or interfere, whether personally or through a proxy, in the life of the congregation or ministry in any way, unless invited to participate by the current rostered minister(s) in conjunction with the congregation council or governing board. Such interference constitutes conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office or retirement status.

¹⁷ See "A Social Statement on: Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture," "A Social Statement on: Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action," and the social policy resolution, "Condemnation of White Supremacy and Racist Rhetoric."

¹⁸ "Ministers of Word and Sacrament shall respect the integrity of the ministry of congregations which they do not serve and shall not exercise ministerial functions therein unless invited to do so by the pastor, or if there is no duly called pastor, then by the interim pastor in consultation with the Congregation Council. (*Constitution for Synods*, †S14.19.)

- 15. Adherence to covenantal relationships:** Rostered ministers who actively and affirmatively incite, initiate, or encourage a congregation to leave the ELCA are engaged in conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.¹⁹ This does not apply to exploring a cooperative relationship with a full-communion partner congregation.
- C. Willful disregard or violation of the functions and standards established by this church for the rostered ministries of this church** is grounds for discipline. Such standards and responsibilities established by this church are found in Chapter 7 of this church's *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions*.
- D. Willful disregard of the constitutions, bylaws, or continuing resolutions of this church** is grounds for discipline of rostered ministers.

¹⁹ "Consistent with the faith and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ... Each pastor with a congregational call shall, within the congregation ... encourage adherence to covenantal relationships with this church as expressed in the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*." (CBCR 7.31.02.)

GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE OF CONGREGATIONS

- A. **Departing from the faith confessed by this church** is grounds for discipline of a congregation of this church. A summary of the faith confessed by this church is found in Chapters 2 and 3 of this church's constitution.
- B. **Willful disregard or violation of any of the criteria for recognition as congregations of this church** is grounds for discipline of a congregation of this church. These criteria are set forth in 9.21. and 9.22. of this church's constitution.
- C. **Willful disregard or violation of the constitutions, bylaws, or continuing resolutions of this church** is grounds for discipline of a congregation of this church.

GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE OF MEMBERS OF CONGREGATIONS

- A. Persistent and public denial of the Christian faith by a member of a congregation of this church** may be grounds for disciplinary action against the member. The behavior must be seen to bring harm to the faith of others and detract from the mission and ministry of the congregation. The Christian faith as confessed by this church is expressed in Chapter 2 of the *Model Constitution for Congregations*. A congregation member who persists in denial of this faith and seeks to convince others to do so may be subject to discipline. In order to warrant discipline, such behavior must be more than occasional expressions of doubt, private comments, or conduct contrary to the Christian faith.
- B. Willful and/or criminal conduct grossly unbecoming of a member of the Church** is grounds for disciplinary action against a congregation member. Commission of violent crimes including murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, rape, attempted rape, sex crimes, hate crimes, child abuse, intimate partner abuse, elder abuse, or any similar offense is seen as reprehensible to the Christian community and may warrant discipline. Persons who are found to have engaged or who are currently engaging in such actions remain in need of pastoral care and compassion.
- A member's use of harassing, abusive, discriminatory, libelous, slanderous, or hateful speech or actions, at any time, whether in person or on any form of social media, may be grounds for discipline.
- Conduct which includes membership in, or taking actions in concert with, organizations that encourage or promote hatred or bigotry on the basis of race, sexual orientation, national origin, age, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, language, socioeconomic status, gender, gender identity, or immigration status may be grounds for discipline.
- C. Continual and intentional interference with the ministry of the congregation** is grounds for discipline of a member engaging in such behavior. A congregation member who repeatedly interrupts the congregation's gatherings, worship services, fellowship or educational activities, congregation or council meetings, or disparages the congregation or its ministry to others in ways that damage or destroy the ability of other members to carry out the church's mission may be disciplined by the church. In order to warrant discipline, such conduct must be more serious than a member merely expressing disagreement, being impolite, or even exhibiting anger. The member must have engaged in a course of conduct and communication so persistent, inappropriate, and objectionable that the congregation's ability to perform ministry is being impaired.
- D. Willful and repeated harassment, abuse, bullying, libel, or slander of member(s) of the congregation** are grounds for discipline of a member. If the treatment of another, including rostered ministers or staff, by a member of the congregation repeatedly devolves into slanderous, vicious, or intentionally hurtful communications,

no matter the means of such communications, the behavior is unacceptable and may warrant disciplinary action. Similarly, if any members, rostered ministers, or staff are being constantly harassed by another member for any reason, whether such harassment is based upon race, sexual orientation, national origin, age, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, language, socioeconomic status, gender, gender identity, or immigration status or any other reason, perceived or real, the behavior may warrant discipline without regard to the nature of the harassment. The use of phone, email, text messages, social media or other remote communication, and behaviors including anything from shouting and gestures to actual stalking, may all be means of unacceptable defamatory or harassing behavior between members.

Appendix G: Mentor Guided Activity Form

Licensed Lay Minister Candidate Name: _____

Mentor Name: _____

These activities are required activities for mentoring Licensed Lay Minister Candidates, but the mentor/candidate relationship is not limited to these activities. These activities can be completed at any time during the Candidate's two years of formation. Sign when completed.

Preaching

Sermon 1 – Prepared, preached, and evaluated with mentor Date: _____

Sermon 2 – Prepared, preached, and evaluated with mentor Date: _____

Sermon 3 – Prepared, preached, and evaluated with mentor Date: _____

Sermon 4 – Prepared, preached, and evaluated with mentor Date: _____

Planning and Leading Bible Study

Planned, prepared, and led a Bible Study Date: _____

Worship

Discussed Assisting Ministers and helped to lead worship Date: _____

Prayer

Learned the form and preparation of the "Prayers of the People" Date: _____

Led the "Prayers of the People" in worship Date: _____

Discussed "Personal Daily Prayer" with mentor Date: _____

Discussed "Praying with Others" with mentor Date: _____

Visitation/Care of Souls

Discussed "open ended questions" and "listening" with mentor Date: _____

Reviewed "Sending of Holy Communion" with mentor Date: _____

(Found in ELW Pastoral Care)

Accompanied the mentor on a pastoral visit Date: _____

Solo pastoral visit (with prayer) done and evaluated with mentor Date: _____

Solo pastoral visit (with communion) done & evaluated with mentor Date: _____

Discuss appropriate Boundaries and issues of Racial Justice Date: _____

Teaching the Catechism

Discuss the "essentials" of catechetical education with mentor Date: _____

Review "Luther's Small Catechism" with mentor Date: _____

Planned, prepared and led a catechetical lesson Date: _____

Administration

Discuss with mentor keeping records of baptisms, confirmations, etc. Date: _____

Attend a council meeting with mentor and review role of council Date: _____

LLM Candidate's Signature

Date

Mentor's Signature

Date

Appendix H: Licensed Lay Minister Request

Congregation's Name:

Congregation's Location:

(Address)

(City)

(State)

(Zip Code)

Name of the person requesting the license and role served in the congregation:

(Name)

(Role)

Name and role of the person receiving the license:

LLM, Intern, etc.

(Name)

(Role)

Specific date(s) or date range of worship leadership:

Please include what ministries are needed of the LLM (preaching, communion, teaching, visiting, etc.)

Return this information to llm@nepsynod.org so that the request can be reviewed and granted.
Call the LLM Coordinator (570) 250-8563 with any questions or concerns.

Appendix I: Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Guidelines for Licensing Worship

April 2026

WHO?	Lay License?	For what?	How often?
Ordained Clergy, ELCA	No		
Ordained Clergy (or equivalent), Ecumenical Partners	No		
LLM (Licensed Lay Ministers serving as solo ministers)	Yes	HC, Preaching, and Long-term ministry	Once a Year (in January) – Authorized and renewed by the Bishop
LLM (single service pulpit supply)	Yes	HC, Preaching	For the single specific date only
LLM (weekly fill-in for limited time)	Yes	HC, Preaching	For a specific date-range or indicated dates
LLM Candidate (LLM in formation)	Yes, in limited circumstances	Preaching	For specific date-range or indicated dates
Intern	Yes	HC as allowed by Bishop, Preaching	Upon start date for the whole year
Clergy Candidate for ministry (as supply preacher only)	Yes	HC (after internship), Preaching anytime	For specific date

How to request a license?

- Email the LLM Coordinator, Pastor Jira Albers at llm@nepsynod.org and he will pass your request along to the bishop.
- Call the LLM Coordinator, Pastor Jira Albers (570) 250-8563 with any questions or concerns.

When to request a license?

- If requesting a license for a congregation other than the one listed on the license, the best option is to make the request at least 14 days in advance of starting, but as soon as possible before any worship service. Lay people who are not LLMs can lead a service without Holy Communion.

What to include in the license request?

- The name & role of the person requesting the license.
- The name and location of the congregation(s).
- The name of the person receiving the license.
- Their role: LLM, lay person, intern, or clergy candidate. (Please include contact info if the clergy candidate is not from the NEPS).
- Specific date(s) or date range of worship leadership. No general licenses will be granted.
- Holy Communion Request.

Who may request a license?

Current pastor, church secretary, council member, worship committee member. Only when none of the above are able or available to do so should the LLM make the request themselves.

Appendix J: Contract Between LLM and Congregation



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

CONGREGATIONAL CONTRACT WITH A LICENSED LAY MINISTER

A. Responsibilities of Licensed Lay Minister:

(please attach additional sheet if necessary)

B. Obligations of Congregation Council:

(please attach additional sheet if necessary)

C. Remuneration for services:

1. Basic remuneration shall be \$ _____ per worship service and \$ _____ per hour of time spent on other agreed upon tasks, paid on the _____ day of the month.
2. A car allowance of _____ per mile shall be paid on the _____ day of the month.
3. Other reimbursements:

D. Time expectations: _____

E. Effective Date: _____

Cong. Council Secretary (print & sign)

Licensed Lay Minister (print & sign)

Cong. Council President (print & sign)

Date

Congregation

Location

Bishop

Please send this completed form to:
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod
2354 Grove Road
Allentown PA 18109-3044
OR: llm@nepsynod.org

Date