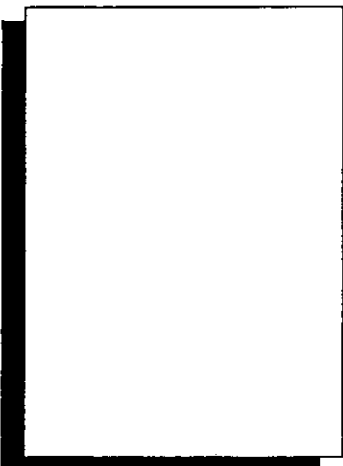


**First Call
Theological Education**

Churchwide Standards
& Guidelines



First Call Theological Education

Churchwide Standards & Guidelines¹

Preface

Ministry in our changing mission context requires faithful leaders with abundant gifts and special qualities, such as: depth in the faith, practical congregational skills, competence to communicate across cultures, capacity to reach out to unchurched people, and ability to make connections between faith and everyday life.

The foundations for these competencies are laid in the gifts people bring to ministry and the learning they receive in seminary. To a large extent, however, these ministry strengths are finally realized only in the practice of ministry in the setting of a specific congregation and its larger social, economic, and cultural context. Newly called leaders learn to do ministry and develop life-long patterns of theological reflection and spiritual discipline during their early years of service. Their transition could be greatly enhanced by collegial support and a structure for learning.

First Call Theological Education was introduced in the Report on the Study of Theological Education to the 1993 Churchwide Assembly. That assembly directed the Division for Ministry to encourage synods to develop pilot programs of structured theological education in the first three years of ordained ministry. The 1995 Churchwide Assembly took action to require all pastors and rostered lay leaders, during their first three years under call, to participate in structured programs of theological education. These programs are to be

designed and supervised by the synods, following churchwide standards. On the basis of broad consultation and the experience of pilot programs sponsored by more than forty synods, the Division for Ministry has prepared these churchwide standards and guidelines.

The *churchwide standards* define what is required of all programs of First Call Theological Education. They describe common outcomes to be achieved, the essential elements in the program design, and the administrative flexibility and responsibility necessary for the program to be effective. The standards do not prescribe specific courses or procedures. The *guidelines* which follow offer concrete examples and practical advice for those responsible for developing programs of First Call Theological Education.

First Call Theological Education needs both churchwide standards and synodical flexibility. Agreement on overall purpose and intended outcomes is essential for churchwide coherence and for the general compatibility of the various synodical or regional programs with one another and with basic seminary education. Synodical flexibility is essential for local initiative and for genuine contextualization, which is one of the principal values of the program. Every phase of implementation should thus attempt a creative balance of churchwide coherence and local variations.

¹ Appendix E in "Faithful Leaders for a Changing World: Theological Education for Mission in the ELCA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Study of Theological Education, Report to the 1995 Churchwide Assembly.

Part I. Churchwide Standards

All newly rostered pastors, associates in ministry, diaconal ministers, and deaconesses in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will participate in structured programs of theological education during their first three years of service under call. Qualified programs of First Call Theological Education will meet the churchwide standards promoted here.

A. Goals

The common purpose of First Call Theological Education is to enhance the transition from seminary to parish. The desired outcome is that during their first three years under call, pastors and rostered lay leaders in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will have made the initial transition into their respective leadership roles and will have grown in knowledge of God's Word and the Lutheran confessional witness, in love for Jesus Christ and his Church, and in commitment to its mission.

In order to address this common purpose, ELCA programs of First Call Theological Education will give special attention to three goals:

1. The personal development of leadership style and collegiality, spiritual discipline, and ministerial identity appropriate to the respective rosters;
2. Competence in and overall integration of various aspects of the practice of ministry;
3. Discernment of the local and regional context of ministry.

B. Design

1. Components

Every ELCA program of First Call Theological Education will include the following four learning components:

- a. *Core program*, that is, the common events designed for and by all rostered leaders in a geographical area: synod, multi-synodical, regional. These events are to total approximately one week per year (i.e., 25 contact hours). Core programs should provide the flexibility to meet the specific needs, patterns, and geographic distribution of persons on the respective rosters: ordained min-

isters of Word and Sacrament, associates in ministry, diaconal ministers, and deaconesses. First call rostered leaders should participate in planning the core programs.

- b. *Electives*, that is, offerings directed toward areas of specific need or interest which are available through a wide variety of seminars, workshops, summer school classes, synodical or churchwide events, advanced graduate courses, distance learning programs. These programs are to total approximately one week per year (i.e., 25 contact hours.)
- c. *Mentoring* with an experienced colleague on an individual basis or in small groups that meet regularly. In consultation with the synod, new pastors will establish a relationship with a mentor or a colleague group.
- d. *Structured reading* designed to support and extend the other educational components in fulfilling the overall goals of the program.

2. Integration

First Call Theological Education programs will include a balance of contextual awareness, theological analysis, and action/reflection methodology. Theological study is to be integrated with reflection on the practice of ministry.

3. Individualized Learning Contracts

First call pastors or rostered laypersons in consultation with synod and congregational representatives will develop individualized learning contracts to achieve the stated purpose and goals through the four educational components. Programs will vary according to the creativity of the planners and the possibilities of the context.

C. Administration

Every synod is responsible for providing a program of First Call Theological Education, either alone or with other synods, in which all first call pastors and rostered lay leaders participate for three years. The synod or synods working together are free to create and adapt specific programs as they see fit, within the stated standards regarding the goals and the design.

Synods are encouraged to call on seminaries, continuing education centers, and/or churchwide units as partners in providing the First Call Theological Education programs.

As synods develop programs of First Call Theological Education, they should consult regularly with ELCA seminaries in order to assure that this phase of ministerial formation is in continuity with and complements the degree programs offered by the seminaries in preparation for rostered ministries. These conversations will provide data and insight for the ongoing curricular adjustment at the seminaries.

Part II. Guidelines for Implementation

These guidelines provide a commentary on the standards and offer fuller explanations and examples of the goals, design, and administration of First Call Theological Education programs. The guidelines are intended to stimulate thought and provide practical advice, not to impose restrictions upon local flexibility.

A. Goals

First Call Theological Education programs focus on three dimensions of developing leadership of pastors and rostered lay leaders. To assist synods in their planning, each dimension has been developed in greater detail by a working group, including representatives from synods, seminaries, continuing education centers, churchwide units, and first call pastors.

1. Ministerial Identity

- Believing in God and living from the promise that God's Word will accomplish God's purpose in the lives of people and congregations.
- Moving from being a ministerial candidate to being a pastor or rostered lay leader involved in life-long learning.
- Articulating a vision of evangelical pastoral or diaconal ministry.
- Balancing ministerial and personal identity through the development of appropriate boundaries and an understanding of appropriate and inappropriate conduct.
- Collegiality in ministry, accountability, and mutuality of the various rosters.

- Developing spiritual discipline that deepens one's relationship with God.
- Learning to wrestle with the complexity of demands, expectations, challenges, and disappointments of ministerial leadership.
- Finding fulfillment and joy in ministry.
- Addressing one's own personal, emotional, physical, and interpersonal health.
- Learning to live in the conversation between God's Word in scripture and human life in the concrete context of one's ministry.

In addition, an in-depth study specifically related to Pastoral Identity, is available through the Division for Ministry.

2. Discernment of Context

Listening, respecting, and attending to the following contextual realities:

- the history and present character of the congregation and its members
- the neighborhood and wider community
- the state and region
- the nation and the world
- synodical, churchwide, and ecumenical expressions of the church

Bringing the following factors to bear in the consideration of these contextual realities:

- interpersonal relationships
- cultural/ethnic presence
- socio-economic conditions
- historical and contemporary dynamics
- geo-political issues
- religious pluralism

Giving special attention to the outcast, the unbeliever, and the spiritually impoverished.

3. Ministerial Skills and Practice

Integrating ministerial skills and practice with the gospel.

Assessing and developing capabilities in the following specific areas of congregational ministry:

- preaching
- worship leadership
- teaching
- evangelism and intentional outreach
- stewardship

- community building in the congregation
- encouragement and support of the laity in ministry
- administration
- work with conflict
- youth and family ministry
- social ministry
- ecumenical dialogue and cooperation

Learning to understand and implement these various capabilities as dimensions of apostolic ministry within the ministry of the whole people of God, by bearing witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the world and by showing concern for the poor.

B. Core Program Participation

Some core program events could integrate persons from several roster groups in order to explore shared areas of concern such as faith issues and spiritual development as well as the complementarity and interdependence of ministries. In order to honor the particularity of the rosters and to meet practical needs, core programs may be offered for each specific roster group:

a. Ministers of Word and Sacrament

Core programs will normally include all the first call pastors within an individual synod or a group of synods working in cooperation with each other, sometimes on a region-wide basis.

b. Rostered Lay Ministers

Diaconal Ministers. As an alternative for diaconal ministers, synods might utilize a core program provided to one common site for one week during the summer, in conjunction with the ELCA formation program for diaconal ministers. A summer program for all new ELCA diaconal ministers would enhance their group identity within the ELCA. Even where attendance may involve considerable travel costs, it is expected that at least one such week will be part of every diaconal minister's three-year plan.

Associates in Ministry. For first call associates in ministry, some core program events could be part of the annual synodical or regional events provided for all associates in ministry in the area.

Deaconesses. The core program for deaconesses could be tied to their biennial assembly.

Because of the geographic distribution of rostered lay ministers, it may be difficult in some cases for synods to provide them with core programs that are appropriate and accessible. In such cases the entire first call requirement (two weeks or 50 contact hours) could be met through electives, designed by consultation among the first call rostered leader and representatives of the synod and the congregation.

Participation in an area's core program of First Call Theological Education for several days each year will provide a context for developing mutual collegiality. The core program is intended to enhance the relationship of new pastors and rostered lay ministers with one another, with their mentors, with synodical staff and with the leaders provided by a continuing education center and/or seminary. The fresh perspectives, insights, and discoveries of the recently rostered ministers can be shared with their more experienced colleagues in the core events to enrich the ministry of all.

C. Accountability and Supervision

This entire process of First Call Theological Education involves a consensus among the individual, the congregation or agency, and the synodical representative. The mechanism or leverage to require participation in this program must be found within the ongoing life of the synod, since a seminary has already granted its degree and a candidacy committee has given its final approval for rostered ministry. Following direct discussions with the calling body and the candidate, the bishop will make sure that support for such a program is written into the letter of call. Once an individual plan is agreed upon within the terms of the call, a person designated by the synod has the responsibility of overseeing its progress. Upon completion of the program there could be a certificate or other formal recognition by the synod.

Normally, participation and completion of this program by the first call pastor or rostered lay minister will be presupposed prior to the bishop's recommendation for a new call to a congregation or specialized ministry. A few bishops have expressed an interest in linking this three-year program with a three-year term

call. Whatever the specific mechanism, this program involves mandatory participation, just as the M.Div. is a normal requirement for ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. In extreme cases, willful disregard of the letter of call could occasion the process of discipline according to the governing documents of this church.

1. The First Call Pastor or Rostered Lay Leader

In accepting and signing the letter of call, the first call pastor or rostered lay leader expresses her/his commitment to involvement in First Call Theological Education.

The pastor will make use of the time provided by the congregation for participation in all components of the program.

The pastor will contribute PACE funds as fully as possible, and will apply for ELCA Growth in Excellence in Ministry PACE Growth Awards should that assistance be needed.

The pastor will work with the congregation's Staff Support Committee (or other designated group) and the synodical representative to develop the learning contract or continuing education covenant, and to provide periodic reports of progress toward the goals of the contract or covenant.

2. The Congregation/Institution/Agency

The congregation (or other calling body) will express its commitment to providing both time and financial support for First Call Theological Education in its call documents.

Time will be provided for the first call pastor to participate in all components of the program.

Financial support will be provided to the best of the congregation's ability. It is hoped that in most cases PACE standards can be met. Where this is not possible, the congregation will support the pastor's application for an ELCA Growth in Excellence in Ministry PACE Growth Award.

The congregation's Staff Support Committee, Mutual Ministry Committee, or other designated group, will work with the pastor and synodical representative to develop the learning contract or covenant, and to provide periodic review of progress toward the goals of the contract or covenant.

3. Synod

The initiative and responsibility for this program will reside with the synods. A synodical program should focus on the particular needs and strengths of that synod. The new pastors assigned to a given synod will have been educated at many different seminaries and approved by the candidacy committees of many different synods. The rostered lay ministers will also vary in educational background, number, and distribution from synod to synod.

The synods may delegate responsibilities for the core program to another entity. Pilot projects have shown the complexities in developing core programs, especially in the second or third year when multiple groups are involved. Potential administrators or providers for a given area's core program include an ELCA seminary, a specialized unit of an ELCA seminary cluster, and the continuing education center(s) related to that area. Actual staffing of the sessions could come from many sources, such as local pastors or laity with special expertise, churchwide or synodical staff, and the staff of social service organizations.

Flexibility in planning and the maintenance of churchwide standards for theological education are two basic values to be considered by the synod in designing and administering First Call Theological Education.

Synods are encouraged to work together to develop inter-synodical or regional programs, especially for the "core program."

The Leadership Support Committee or its equivalent may be assigned the responsibility for all components of the program. Consultation with first call pastors, providers, synod staff, churchwide units (Division for Ministry and Division for Congregational Ministries), experienced pastors, and others (e.g., community resources) should be an integral part of the planning. Decisions regarding the development of the program shall be lodged with the synod.

Below is a suggested list of steps a synod may follow in the start-up of the program and its implementation in congregations.

- a. Develop the synodical or multi-synodical planning group.
- b. Invite and train mentors or colleague leaders.
- c. Integrate newly rostered ministers into the program.

- d. Initiate, within 3 months of installation, a consultation among the pastor or rostered lay leader and the congregational representatives, to approve an overall covenant or contract.
- e. Receive the annual continuing education report.
- f. Assess the results of their program, in consultation with their providers, other synods, and the Division for Ministry, in relation to these standards and guidelines.

4. Churchwide Organization

The Division for Ministry, in consultation with the Division for Congregational Ministries and other churchwide units, assists in the overall implementation, research and evaluation of the program. This includes:

- a. Appointing and staffing an advisory committee.
- b. Preparing these standards and guidelines and distributing them to synods, congregations, and rostered leaders.
- c. Distributing information about the program to seminaries and seminarians.
- d. Serving as a consultant and communications link with those administering the program throughout the ELCA.
- e. Assessing the results of synodical programs in relation to these standards and guidelines.
- f. Reviewing these churchwide standards and guidelines.

D. Timeline

The requirement for all rostered ministers to participate in First Call Theological Education programs will become effective in fall 1997. Synods are encouraged to begin planning in the fall of 1995 and, where possible, to have programs in place for first call rostered leaders in the fall of 1996. Most of the synods that are participating in pilot programs will begin holding events for first call pastors in the fall of 1995. The pilot programs demonstrate that it takes considerable time, energy, and long-range planning for a synod or group of synods to launch such a program.

E. Costs

The costs for First Call Theological Education should be distributed among several parties:

1. The first call pastor or rostered lay leader (\$250 annually is expected, but not always possible given their indebtedness and low starting salaries);
2. The congregation's compensation package (\$550 annually is expected, but not always possible since many first calls are carved out of small budgets);
3. Grants from ELCA PACE Growth funds administered by the Division for Ministry are available to rostered leaders whose congregations are not able to provide continuing education funds at the recommended churchwide level;
4. Subsidies from the synod for administrative costs, need-based scholarships, and travel equalization, as determined by the synod;
5. Churchwide subsidies for administrative, travel, and program costs for those synods with a larger than average number of first call pastors and rostered lay leaders.

Subsidies are necessary and appropriate since this program is assisting leaders not only within the first call, but for future calls throughout this church. It would be unfair for the graduates and the first call congregations to shoulder a churchwide responsibility on their own. Therefore, churchwide and synodical support will be provided as needed and possible.

F. Further Development and Resources

As with any new program, this initiative will need considerable creativity. It will require periodic review and adjustment. There should be substantial latitude for regional variations and attention to specific contexts. Even the nomenclature used in this proposal (e.g., "First Call Theological Education" or "core program") is intentionally generic rather than specific, in order to leave room for regional creativity also in the names chosen. The Division for Ministry should monitor all programs carefully, facilitate an exchange of insights, and conduct a general review by 1999.

As resources for those who will be planning and administering these programs, the Division for Ministry is preparing a number of documents:

1. Churchwide standards for First Call Theological Education;
2. Guidelines, which contain ideas and examples for planning and administering the program;
3. Questions and options for synods starting a First Call Theological Education program;
4. A substantial study regarding the meaning of pastoral identity and the experiences which may enhance its development;
5. Information regarding resources available from other churchwide units;
6. Appropriate programs that can be accessed electronically; and
7. Reports of learnings from pilot projects.

These resources will be available upon request from the Division for Ministry following the 1995 Assembly.

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