



*Virginia Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

## **First Call Theological Education – Purpose**

### **Why do we have First Call Theological Education?**

First Call Theological Education (FCTE) is a three-year structured program of theological education designed to assist newly called leaders in the transition to rostered ministry.

### **Who has responsibility for FCTE programs?**

FCTE programs are designed, offered, supervised and evaluated by synods, following churchwide standards. Synods may do this individually or in cooperation with other synods in their region. The majority of ELCA synods are offering core programs with other synods.

Theological education does not end with graduation ceremonies at our seminaries. Rather, theological education is a process of lifelong learning, which addresses ministry in our changing community and societal contexts. This requires faithful leaders with abundant gifts and special qualities such as: (a) depth in the faith, (b) practical congregational skills, (c) competence to communicate across cultures, (d) capacity to reach out to unchurched people, (e) ability to make connections between faith and everyday life.

Foundations for these competencies have been laid in seminary education. To a large extent, however, the ministry skills 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 a “habit of the heart” for lifelong learning during these early years of service.

### **What is FCTE?**

One of the most dramatic transitions in the life of a newly rostered person is the transition from seminary or non-rostered status to the first call to public ministry.

For that reason, the ELCA has prescribed standards and expectations for continuing theological education during the first three years of rostered service under Call.

## **What are the responsibilities of participants?**

- Attend core events sponsored by their synod or region
- Participate in a colleague group on a regular basis
- Work with congregational committee (Mutual Ministry Committee, Parish Support Committee, etc.) to develop a “Learning Covenant” and select continuing education electives which will benefit the congregation’s ministry goals as well as one’s own professional development goals
- Commit to sharing with the congregation one’s learnings from FCTE
- Set aside some personal continuing education funds

## **What does FCTE look like?**

The 1995 ELCA 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 and leadership education. In the Virginia Synod, each First Call Rostered Leader is assigned a Mentor or Ministry Partner. The first call leader and ministry partner attend a yearly overnight retreat, meet face to face monthly, are available for phone call conversations, and live out the Covenant mutually agreed upon each year of the three year relationship (see FIRST CALL ROSTERED LEADERS COVENANT).

## **What kind of learning is involved in FCTE?**

The goal areas for learning in FCTE are:

### **Ministerial Identity**

Assuming a religious leadership role and finding a balance between ministerial and personal identity.

### **Ministry Skills**

Learning how to provide leadership for the variety of functions in the life of a congregation or agency being served.

### **Context of Ministry**

Discovering the history, values, and commitments that shape ministry in this particular place.

### **Missional Heart and Voice as an Ambassador for Christ**

Discerning God’s call to reach out with the Good News, and equipping others to live and share their faith in daily life so as to build up the Body of Christ.

Learning in FCTE involves theological reflection, experimental learning and learning from peers and colleagues as well as from congregational leaders. The congregation is considered part of the broad theological education network, providing a context for mutual learning between rostered leaders and congregational leaders for the purpose of strengthening faith

commitments of members. Such mutuality can result in revitalizing mission and ministry within the congregation and to the broader community.

**Every ELCA program of FCTE will include four components:**

- Core program of twenty-five (25) contact hours (one “contact hour” equals fifty (50) minutes of educational activity to meet the goals of the program).
- Electives directed toward specific needs and interests totaling twenty-five (25) contact hours.
- Mentoring and/or colleague groups for peer support and guidance.
- Structured reading which supports and extends the other educational components and overall goals of the program.