

Virginia Synod ELCA
Synod Authorized Ministry
(Adapted from the ELCA Roster Manual, pp. 77-79)
May 2024

I. Synod Authorized Ministries

Synod authorized ministry is intended to honor the God-given office of Word and Sacrament (Article V, The Augsburg Confession). As such, synod authorized ministry is intended to assist this church to respond pastorally and effectively to emerging opportunities in Christ's mission where it is not possible to provide a minister of Word and Sacrament. Synod authorized ministry, first and foremost, is in response to a ministry need in a particular setting.

II. Identification of Need

The synod identifies a congregation or other ministry where pastoral leadership is not available for an extended period of time and where synod authorized ministry may be appropriate. Congregations and other ministries within each synod are expected to assist in making this ministry available and beneficial by commending to the bishop individuals who should be considered for possible service in synod authorized ministry. Individuals who demonstrate potential for service as synod authorized ministers are invited by the synod to enter a program of preparation.

III. Qualifications

A person invited to prepare for a synod authorized ministry must be an active member of an ELCA congregation, preferably for at least one year. In addition, prior to preparing to serve in synod authorized ministry, an individual must have:

1. been recommended by the individual's pastor and Congregation Council;
2. met with and been interviewed by the bishop or the bishop's representative;
3. demonstrated the ability and willingness to participate in a program of preparation leading to possible service in a synod authorized ministry or provided satisfactory evidence of prior preparation toward the goals and standards of the program outlined in this policy;
4. submitted to the Virginia Synod office written responses to the questions on the Synod Authorized Ministry Autobiographical Information Form; and
5. identified references within and outside the church for contact by the synod, completed the Virginia Synod required boundary training, and authorized the synod to obtain an in-depth background check (national criminal and sex offender searches).

IV. Authorization for Service

1. The synod determines that a specific need exists.
2. The congregation/ministry to be served provides written consent for the individual to serve.
3. The bishop of the synod in which the congregation served exists, and in consultation with the Synod Council, authorizes the individual.
4. The bishop will authorize for this ministry only those individuals who have been well prepared and who will serve under supervision, as outlined below.
5. Completion of a program of preparation does not mean that authorization for service will follow. There is no guarantee of service within the synod.

V. Expectations and Responsibilities

1. Synod authorized ministry of Word and Sacrament is limited to a specific congregation or other identified ministry where a pastor is not available for an extended period of time.

2. Individuals authorized for such ministry within a synod are not rostered by the ELCA but are authorized to provide a ministry only with a particular ministry setting for a designated period of time, not to exceed one year.
3. Synod authorized ministry may be renewed annually, when a demonstrated need exists for its continuation and at the determination of the synod bishop. Such determination is made following consultation between the congregation/ministry served, the synod authorized minister, and the synod bishop (or bishop's representative).
4. Individuals authorized for such ministries are not to wear clerical stoles and should not wear clerical collars unless authorized by the synod bishop.
5. The title "Pastor" is reserved for ministers of Word and Sacrament and is not to be used by synod authorized ministers.
6. Synod authorized ministers are not to offer therapy or counseling as a part of their ministries but may provide appropriate pastoral care.
7. Specific details of responsibilities and expectations are included in the Virginia Synod Authorized Ministry Initial Ministry Agreement: [W](#) TEMPLATE - SAM Initial Ministry Agreement (05.2024).docx

VI. Supervision and accountability

1. Accountability for synod authorized ministry in a congregational setting is the direct responsibility of the Congregation Council.
2. A synod authorized minister (SAM) is to be under the direct supervision of a minister of Word and Sacrament appointed by the synod bishop.
 - a. Specific details for this ministry supervision are included in the Virginia Synod SAM Supervision Agreement: [W](#) TEMPLATE SAM Supervision Agreement 05.2024.docx
 - b. The SAM should meet regularly with the supervising pastor, at least monthly.
3. Authorization to provide ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the synod bishop, who need not specify the reason. Failure to adhere to the expectations, responsibilities, and accountability of Synod Authorized Ministry could result in the revocation of authorization.