

**Alaska Synod ELCA
Synodically Authorized
Ministers (SAM)**



**Handbook for Candidates
& their Congregations**

What is the SAM program?

The Alaska Synod established in 1997 a program of training and equipping qualified lay persons for congregational-based ministries of preaching, sacraments and worship leadership, and where appropriate, providing leadership for bible study, catechetical instruction, visitation and spiritual growth.

The ELCA, through its Vocation and Education Program Unit, recognizes that certain congregations are in situations where--by reason of geography or economics--they find it impossible to support the ministry of a full time or part time ordained pastor. Thus the church makes provision for training and approving "Synodically Authorized Ministers." In most instances these persons will already be members of the congregations to be served. But they also may be persons residing in areas adjacent to the communities where the ministry will be conducted. In either case, however, Synodically Authorized Ministers serve at the request of the bishop and are under the supervision of an ordained pastor.

In addition, the Alaska Synod encourages people to participate in the SAM training as preparation for lay preaching, teaching and leading.

Ecumenical Partners

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Anchorage
225 Cordova Street
Anchorage, AK 99501
Phone: 907-279-7700 Fax: 907-279-3885
www.archdiocesesofanchorage.org

Presbytery of the Yukon
616 W. 10th Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99501
Phone: 907-276-0914 Fax: 907-276-0175
<http://pbyukon.synodnw.org>

Episcopal Diocese of Alaska
1205 Denali Way
Fairbanks, AK 99701
Phone: 907-452-3040 Fax: 907-456-6552
<http://home.gci.net/~episcopalak/>

Alaska United Methodist Conference
1660 Patterson Street
Anchorage, AK 99504
Phone: 907-333-5050
www.alaskaumc.org

Qualifications & Accountabilities

Acceptance into the program of preparation

Prospective candidates are to be nominated in writing by their pastor and church council (or just the council if there is not a pastor currently serving their church). Qualifications for nomination are:

- (1) evidence of mature Christian faith and commitment;
- (2) membership in an ELCA congregation; and
- (3) a willingness to adhere to the standards and expectations for Synodically Authorized Ministers as outlined in this handbook.

Evaluation during the program

The SAM program coordinators and the mentor will evaluate the progress of each candidate. The expectation at the end of each course is that the candidate will be able to articulate how the knowledge gained may be applied to ministry in the church. The evaluation will attest to the candidate's satisfactory fulfillment of the course expectations for the semester and will be the basis for recommending additional or supplemental work.

Certificate of Completion

The program coordinators working in conjunction with the Alaska Synod staff will provide a certificate of completion to candidates who satisfactorily fulfill the requirements of the program. The certificate, however, does not guarantee that the candidate will be authorized by the synod for public ministry. Authorization comes only as there is a synodically recognized need for such ministry.

What is involved in the program?

The program, which follows, is designed in accord with guidelines established by the ELCA Vocation and Education Program Unit. Churchwide guidelines are provided so that there will be regularity to authorized lay ministry--as there is for the ministry of pastors, associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers--across the ELCA. ("No one should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call," Augsburg Confession, Art. 14) These guidelines, however, while specific in matters of curriculum and questions of accountability, permit each synod to tailor its program to local needs and circumstances.

Preparation

Areas of Study and Formation: The program of preparation for a SAM includes study in Bible, Lutheran theology, Lutheran polity and the Confessions, Worship, Spiritual Discernment and Faith Formation, Leadership Expectations, Contextual Understanding, and Skill Development.

Structure: The program will span four "semesters" over a period of two years. In each of the four semesters participants will:

- 1) attend & participate in foundational classes and retreats offered and, complete assigned reading;
- 2) work with a designated mentor.

Deaconesses) with the call process, rostered mobility, transitional periods, Mission and Ministry, Healthy Congregations, Natural Church Development, conflict resolution and disciplinary matters, Community Organizing, Stewardship Education, communication between congregations and more.

Our Mission:

The Alaska Synod of the ELCA is all of us working together as interdependent congregations to invite, welcome, grow, and serve in Christ by helping each other through sharing prayer, encouragement, financial and pastoral support.

The Alaska Synod

Called to Mission, Relationship, Empowerment and Abundant Living

The Alaska Synod is the 64th out of the 65 synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) in membership, but the largest in geographic size. Geographically we stretch from our congregation in Shismaref to our congregation in Ketchikan 1400 air miles away. These 31 congregations range in size from an average worship attendance of 15 (Wales on the Bering Sea) to 250 (urban Anchorage area). We have the largest and only Inupiat (Alaskan Eskimo) population of the ELCA who make up almost 20% of our baptized membership. Those members are concentrated in our northern Seward Peninsula area where historically Norwegian reindeer herders were responsible for bringing their religion with them in the early 1900s. We also are making an effort to connect with our Tlingit and Haida brothers and sisters in Southeast Alaska. Other than our Native brothers and sisters, we have very few other people of color in our congregations. The diversity and large distances between congregations both enrich and complicate our mission and ministry.

The Synod has been divided into five different clusters, geographically defined with the exception of the Alaska Native congregation in Anchorage that align with their sister congregations in the Seward Peninsula Cluster. The Synod Council is elected from each of these clusters (one clergy and one lay representative), three executive positions, two at-large representatives, a multi-cultural representative and the president of the statewide Women of the ELCA. The council is responsible for business of the synod between yearly synod assemblies.

The synod assists congregations and rostered leaders (Clergy, Associates in Ministry, Diaconal Ministers and

Qualifying foundational courses may be:

- (1) designated SELECT videotape courses,
- (2) foundational courses offered by the Alaska Synod Lay School of Theology
- (3) Religion Department of the University of Alaska or Alaska Pacific University (available on campus) or through the Seattle University distance learning program, or
- (5) their equivalents on other campuses.

Other options are available. The candidate should check with the Bishop's office before substituting other programs.

Each SAM candidate will be responsible for finding an ELCA pastor to serve as a mentor/supervisor. The pastor/mentor should be geographically proximate to the SAM Candidate.

Course requirements:

Catechism/Theology/Systematics Salvation The Trinity (Father/Creator, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit)	12 hrs
Biblical Studies Lutheran Hermeneutic Old Testament Survey New Testament Survey	24 hrs
Bible Practicum The Church & Scripture Teaching Discipling Preaching	12 hrs

Lutheran Polity & Practice 16 hrs
Reformation & Martin Luther
Core Theology
Lutheran Worship & Sacraments
Lutheran Witness
Social Statements & Ecumenical Relations

Pastoral Care 6 hrs

Required Reading:

A current required reading list will be negotiated with each SAM candidate upon acceptance to the program

Mentoring requirements:

Supervision in:

Planning and leading Bible study
Preparation and practice preaching
Visitation, prayer, care of the sick
Teaching of the catechism

Discussion on required readings
1 on 1 conversation

For Questions about the SAM Program:

The Rev. Carol A. George (907) 227-7501
Pastor, St Mark Lutheran Church
3230 Lake Otis Parkway
Anchorage, AK 99508
pastorcarol@alaska.com

For SELECT Course Information and Registration

SELECT Multimedia Resources
1568 Eustis Street
St. Paul, MN 55108
(toll free) 1-877-675-6275
<http://www.selectlearning.org>
info@selectlearning.org

An excellent source of books and materials is Augsburg Fortress, the publications ministry of the ELCA.

Augsburg Fortress, Publishers
P.O. Box 1209
Minneapolis, MN 55440-1209
612-330-3300 or 800-426-0115
www.augsburgfortress.org

Luther Seminary Bookstore
2481 Como Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108
Phone (612) 641-3440
www.luthersem.edu/bookstore/
bookstore@luthersem.edu

What are the Congregations' Responsibilities?

- A request to the bishop is to be made by a congregation for the services of a Synodically Authorized Minister. The request may come in the form of a letter, an e-mail, or even a phone call.
- The bishop, upon receiving a congregation's request, will assess the missional value of authorized lay ministry in that setting.
- Congregations that call on SAMs for supply preaching and presiding need to secure permission in writing from the bishop's office.
- Synodically Authorized Ministers will receive a stipend, the amount of which will be determined by the particular circumstances and expectations of the congregation being served.
- Congregations will cover any expenses incurred by the authorized minister in the service of the congregation. Such expenses would include: mileage driven on parish business, parish printing and office supply expenses, etc.
- Congregations are expected to make provision for authorized ministers to participate in regular programs of continuing theological education.
- Accountability and supervision for a Synodically Authorized Minister working in a congregational setting will be the direct responsibility of the church council. The mentor/supervising pastor will work with the council and the bishop in providing oversight for the authorized minister

Placement and Authorization

- The authorization and placement of candidates for service within the synod is the responsibility of the office of the bishop.
- Alaska Synod candidates are authorized for service only within this synod and their authorization is not transferable to other synods of the ELCA. Likewise, SAM candidates or their equivalent trained and licensed in comparable programs in other synods have no automatic authority for such ministry in the Alaska Synod.
- Transfer into the Alaska Synod preparation program or to the synod's SAM roster is possible, but cases are considered on an individual basis.
- In the long term absence of an ordained pastor, authorization may be given for a term of one year, which may be renewed, if a demonstrated need continues for authorized ministry in that location. SAMs will NOT be given a one year term license when providing periodic or short term pulpit supply.
- A mentoring/supervisory relationship with an ordained pastor will be established for each SAM.
- It is expected that the SAM will engage in disciplined continuing theological education annually.
- Authorizations for such ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the bishop, after consultation with the associate to the bishop, the synod

vice president and other appropriate representatives if needed. In the interest of confidentiality the reason for revocation need not be specified.

- Authorization will be documented by a license or letter describing terms and conditions. The description may also limit or prohibit activities on the part of the licensed minister. Because of liability considerations, for example, SAMs are not to offer counseling as a part of their authorized ministry responsibilities. Also, outside of the alb which may be worn when presiding at worship, SAMs have no distinctive symbols or garb associated with their calling, viz., the stoles, clerical collars, etc. are not worn by SAMs nor by Associates in Ministry.
- On-going programmatic support for Synodically Authorized Ministers will be the responsibility of the office of the synod bishop.

What does all of this cost?

- One time program fee:** \$500. This fee to be paid when the candidate enters into the training program to cover expenses associated with the program.
- Course costs:** The candidate is responsible for the cost of tuition and fees for the foundational courses in Bible, church history and theology--e.g., the participant's fees for the SELECT courses--as well as the cost of books and other materials.

Several of the core courses are offered throughout the state each year at no cost to participants.

Cost assistance:

The Alaska Synod has a limited number of scholarships available for those seeking a SAM designation. Please consult the office of the bishop to check on the availability of scholarship assistance.

- Congregational responsibilities:** Congregations are encouraged to cover or assist with the expenses of those members who are candidates for licensed service in their communities.

What can I do with a SAM Certificate of Completion?

As a Synodically Authorized Minister you will not be ordained, nor will you have any kind of degree. When you complete this course of study, you will be recognized by the Synod as a lay person who is able to offer pulpit supply to your congregation or other congregations that need pastoral services such as: preaching, teaching, doing the sacraments of baptism and communion, and funerals. You will NOT have authorization to offer pastoral counseling (unless certified in the counseling field). You may be given authorization by the Bishop to conduct weddings.

Please note:

Some candidates take the classes for spiritual enrichment. You are not required to provide pulpit supply when you complete the SAM course of study.