



Alaska Synod of the ELCA
Congregational Resources

Mentoring Guidelines

For the

Alaska Synod ELCA
Synodically Authorized
Minister (SAM) Program

Thank you for agreeing to be a mentor for a Synodically Authorized Minister (SAM) candidate! We are thankful for your commitment and we hope you share our excitement about the wonderful ministry SAMs are doing in the Alaska Synod.

The Alaska Synod SAM Handbook states:

“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.” (Pg. 4) AND

Mentoring includes supervision in

- Planning and leading Bible study
- Preparation for preaching
- Visitation, prayer & care of souls
- Teaching the catechism (Pg.5)

The following are general guidelines and responsibilities expected in the mentoring process. Please note that these are guidelines and may have to be adapted to meet contextual needs of each SAM candidate and congregation.

General Guidelines

1) Selecting a mentor

Normally the mentor will be the pastor of the candidate’s congregation. In extenuating circumstances the candidate may consult the dean of the cluster or the synod office for an alternative mentor.

2) Regular (at least monthly) meetings with mentor

This is the opportunity to address questions that come up in the everyday context of serving a congregation, e.g.:

- Worship planning for regular Sunday services and special services (including funerals)
- Sermon preparation and resources
- Theological questions
- Ministry of sacrament questions
- Working with the church council
- Visitation and care of souls
- Challenges in congregational life
- Personal, spiritual practice that nourishes and sustains you
- Personal boundaries with others in pastoring

3) Sharing resources

The mentoring pastor can be tremendously helpful by sharing resources from his or her own library or their church’s library, or by recommending resources that would benefit the SAM in his/her studies.

4) Worship planning meetings, classes, etc.

Invite the SAM candidate to attend various meetings and classes at mentor's church in order to learn and get exposure to various ideas and ways of teaching, planning, carrying out the work of the church.

5) Introducing SAM to clergy in the area

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

6) Inviting and encouraging SAM to participate in clergy activities

a) This would include cluster meetings, classes and workshops offered by the AK Synod, other workshops and training retreats, installations and ordinations, pastor's retreat, etc.

b) Facilitating the introduction of the SAM to ordained clergy is helpful because many are not familiar with the SAM program.

Guidelines in More Detail

1. The handbook for SAM candidates states that mentors need to provide for learning in four specific areas:

- a) Planning and leading Bible study
- b) Preparation for preaching
- c) Visitation/prayer and care of the souls
- d) Teaching the catechism

2. Ways in which you might integrate these four foci into your congregation's week-in, week-out activity

- Going on vacation? Ask her/him to preach.
- Need some variety in your Sunday morning adult education program? Ask him/her to lead a six-week Bible Study either by developing his/her own or by using an approved curriculum.
- When doing hospital or nursing home visits, invite candidates to go along with you a few times, and then turn them loose to do a few on their own.
- What about teaching confirmation?

- Don't forget to offer feedback –the candidate 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.

3) Other suggestions

a) It is important and helpful to have regular meetings to discuss how the program is going for the candidate.

- You will want to meet at least once every month. A one-hour meeting ought to 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 a leadership role in the congregation can be a dynamic process. The candidate may have doubts about her/his ability.
- She/he may not be sure about how to handle the authority and power that comes along with the tasks SAMs are certified to carry-out. So, this regular time of checking-in will be helpful to get a read on how the candidate is handling the process both inwardly and outwardly.

b) Discuss how the learning is going

- Many students will be coming into contact with new forms of biblical criticism, and often learning is done by reading or videotape where there is no opportunity to ask a professor questions.
- You will want to see the texts and other resources the SAM is using to familiarize yourself with their coursework.
- You may want to go through the materials with the candidate. And though you are not required to do the course, you will be needed to answer questions, help make sense of the various forms of criticism, help the candidate 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,” respecting the integrity of the candidate’s growth and learning process.

c) Most importantly, just try things!

The mentor-candidate relationship can develop in a variety of ways. The only way it shouldn't develop is as no relationship at all. Other than that, do whatever works to nurture the growth and experience of the candidate.