



# Northwestern Minnesota Synod

## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

### ***Final Steps for Congregation, SAM, Mentor and Synod***

*He himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers<sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,<sup>13</sup> until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13*

Dear Congregation Leaders,

As you invite a lay person authorized by the bishop of this synod to serve as an authorized word and sacrament minister in your congregation, know that you are part of an ancient practice of the Christian Church. In the New Testament small house-church-sized gatherings of Christians were served by every-day Christians who presided at the Lord's table, baptized and preached the Gospel. These lay ministers were overseen by "episcopos" (which in Greek means "overseers") who ensured the doctrinal integrity of the ministers' teachings so that the church could remain faithful to the way that Jesus taught.

Here in the Northwestern Minnesota Synod, *Synod Authorized Ministers* serve in a role that is much like those local every-day Christians in the New Testament who presided at the Lord's table and preached. Similarly, *Mentor Pastors* are much like those overseers or "episcopos." Both roles are essential for all of us as siblings in Christ of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod so that we can all be faithful to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The intent of this letter is two-fold: first - to answer the question, "What is different about having a Synod Authorized Minister instead of a pastor;" and second - to identify the next steps for the congregation, SAM, Mentor Pastor and Synod now that you have decided to proceed with this form of ministry.

### **What is different about having a Synod Authorized Minister (SAM) rather than a Pastor?**

1. Pastors are called to serve the whole church, but SAMs are authorized to serve only a specific congregation or parish, at a specific location, for a specific time (SAM covenants are for 1 year, and may be renewed, after a formal review involving the SAM, the congregation council, and the Mentor Pastor).
2. Pastors receive a "Call" from a congregation meeting in a duly called meeting, assembled for that purpose. A SAM and a congregation enter a Covenant approved by the congregation's council and the synod's bishop.
3. Pastors have received extensive education, training and formation for teaching, preaching and leading in the church, whereas most SAMs have not. Therefore, the

congregation should recognize that the SAM is still in formation, still taking courses and receiving ongoing mentorship from their Mentor Pastor. Their competencies will vary and will also grow over time.

4. Often, though not always, a SAM's role in a congregation may be focused solely on worship leadership and preaching, while the leadership of the other non-sacramental areas of the congregation's ministry may be entrusted to other lay leaders. The Covenant of Licensure outlines and describes what the SAM's work will be in each context.
5. While there may be considerable financial savings in utilizing the work of a SAM, the congregation should be aware that they are also responsible for costs related to the SAM's education and mentorship. The extent of those costs will depend on the SAM's prior education and experience and the scope of what the SAM is being asked to do for the congregation.
6. At the end of each year the SAM, the council and the mentor pastor conduct a [formal review of the SAM's ministry](#). The bishop will then speak with the SAM about their discernment of call to ministry. At that point, if all parties agree, the SAM and the congregation may enter a renewed covenant for another year.

**OK, so the Bishop or other Synod staff have lifted up a SAM for us to consider, and we would like to proceed – what do we do next?**

1. A [comprehensive background check](#) is initiated for first time SAM's. This fee is typically reimbursed by the congregation where the SAM is appointed. After a second congregation placement a standard 604.20 background check is completed.
2. A rough draft of a [Covenant of licensure](#) is prepared by the church council and SAM, in consultation with the Bishop or other synod staff, as needed. This rough draft may then be used to tailor the SAM-Mentor agreement to the specific work that the SAM is covenanting to do for the congregation.
3. A [SAM-Mentor Agreement](#) is completed with the SAM, mentor and a synod staff member.
4. A **final draft** of the Covenant of Licensure is completed by adding the information provide through the SAM-Mentor agreement. The SAM and church council, sign and submit to the Bishop for final approval and signature.
5. SAM candidate may now begin their service in the congregation.
6. A Letter of Appointment is signed by the Bishop and given to the SAM.

Additionally...

1. A formal commissioning worship service will be held for all new SAMs each year at the Synod Assembly. The SAM and members of the congregation are encouraged to participate.
2. If the congregation wishes to conduct a formal service celebrating the start of the SAM's ministry, they may make use of [this service which is provided on our website.](#)

Finally, be encouraged by these words from the Apostle Paul found in the book of Galatians:

*<sup>9</sup>So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup>So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all and especially for those of the family of faith. Galatians 6:9-10*

If you have questions, please reach out to the synod Bishop or other synod staff.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Tesch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pastor Bill Tesch  
Bishop of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA