



**Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**
God's work. Our hands.

Synodically Authorized Ministry Policy Feb 2019

The policy of this synod will be to authorize lay persons to preach and preside at Holy Communion under special circumstances. The bishop, synod council, local pastor, and local congregational council will work together to authorize local lay leaders taking into consideration the following:

AUTHORIZATION TO PREACH AND LEAD SERVICE OF THE WORD

Authorizing someone other than the called pastor of a congregation to preach is the prerogative of the called pastor, who bears responsibility for the preaching. In the absence of a called pastor, this responsibility is taken up by the bishop.² The called pastor of a congregation may entrust the pulpit to whomever she or he deems appropriate.

AUTHORIZATION TO PRESIDE AT HOLY COMMUNION

Authorizing someone who is not an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament in the ELCA or a full communion partner to preside at Holy Communion is the responsibility of the synod bishop “under the sacramental authority of the bishop as the synod’s pastor.” Synodically authorized ministers serve as an extension of the bishop’s own ministry. The bishop may authorize an individual to administer the sacrament of Holy Communion to fulfill the bishop’s “authority to provide for ‘appropriate pastoral leadership’” (7.31.09.). The bishop may only do this “in circumstances when neither an ELCA nor a full communion ordained minister is available.”

²The Use of the Means of Grace directs, While other persons may sometimes preach, the called pastor of a congregation has responsibility for this preaching, ordinarily preparing and delivering the sermon and overseeing all public ministry of the Word in the congregation. In congregations without a called pastor, the synodical bishop assumes this responsibility, often by providing an interim pastor.

PROCESS FOR REQUESTING AUTHORIZATION TO PRESIDE AT HOLY COMMUNION

Congregations needing synodically authorized ministry will send a request to the synod office. The request should come from an officer of the Congregation Council rather than the pastor to indicate the involvement of lay leadership in making this request. Requests should NOT come from a synodically authorized minister.

Please acknowledge the following before making this request:

1. The congregation made a good faith effort to secure the services of ELCA pastors and none are available.³
2. The congregation made a good faith effort to secure the services of a pastor, active or retired, from one of our full communion partner denominations—Episcopal Church, United Methodist Church, Reformed Church of America, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, Moravian Church—and none is available.
3. The congregation honestly considered adjusting the worship time or communion schedule to make it possible for a neighboring pastor to preside.
4. The congregation honestly considered a service without Holy Communion.⁴

EXPECTATIONS OF CONGREGATIONS, PASTORS, AND SYNODICALLY AUTHORIZED MINISTERS

- 1) Synodically authorized ministers must be active members of ELCA congregations in this synod and show
 - a. evidence of mature Christian faith and commitment to Christ
 - b. acceptance of the Confession of Faith of this church
 - c. personal conduct as described in Visions and Expectations
- 2) Synodically authorized ministers will complete approved course of study
 - a. the NWSWI's two year Lay School Program⁵
 - b. additional course in preaching and pastoral care
 - c. participate in appropriate continuing education at our Lay School or other approved by bishop
 - d. boundaries training every three years
- 3) Synodically authorized minister be supervised by ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament appointed by the bishop.
- 4) Synodically authorized ministers will be reviewed annually by the bishop or his or her designee.
- 5) Synodically authorized ministers are available to serve locally and not beyond the NWSWI.

³ Refer to the pulpit supply list on synod website nswi.org

⁴ It is important to celebrate and participate in Holy Communion as often as possible, a service without Holy Communion, especially in cases of one-time, absence, including when a pastor is on vacation or otherwise away for a particular Sunday, provides opportunities for lay leadership in worship and renewed appreciation for Holy Communion.

⁵ Lay school link to website <http://nswi.org/lay-school-of-ministry>

- 6) Synodically authorized ministers will accept payment and mileage according to synod compensation guidelines.
- 7) Synodically authorized ministers conduct themselves in ways that honor the God-given office of Word and Sacrament
 - a. The alb may be worn by synodically authorized ministers. Synodically authorized ministers do not wear clerical stoles or clerical collars.
 - b. The appropriate title for synodically authorized ministers is “synodically authorized minister.” The title “Pastor” is reserved for ministers of Word and Sacrament and is not to be used by synodically authorized ministers or by the congregation(s) they serve.
- 8) Synodically authorized ministers do not preside at Holy Communion without a letter of authorization from the bishop that includes specific date(s) and location.
- 9) Synodically authorized ministers may provide appropriate pastoral care.
- 10) Synodically authorized ministers will participate in boundary training every three years. Anti-racism training is also encouraged.
- 11) In keeping with Luther’s explanation of the Eighth Commandment in the Small Catechism⁶, synodically authorized ministers “speak well of and put the best construction on” the ELCA, the NWSWI Synod, the bishop, synod staff, and the congregation(s) they serve while carrying out this ministry.
- 12) Synodically authorized ministers may baptize and perform weddings.⁷

⁶ **You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.** *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him or give him a bad name, but defend him, speak well of him, and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way.

⁷ Much of this material was adapted from the policy of the NW Michigan Synod of the ELCA, Bishop Craig Satterlee.