



APPROVAL ESSAY

MAY 2024



Dear candidate for rostered ministry,

We welcome you to Approval; the next threshold in your lifelong commitment to discernment and formation for rostered ministry. The Approval process gathers together many of the partners who have accompanied you through your preparation for ministry. Each of these partners work together with you to confirm the call that has led you, review and inquire thoroughly into your readiness for ministry, and acknowledge on behalf of the ELCA that you are qualified and suited to serve under call as a rostered minister.

The Approval process culminates in the Approval interview with your candidacy committee. This is the final official meeting with a candidacy committee in the process of candidacy in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). As with the steps of Entrance and Endorsement, each candidate is required to prepare an essay following specific guidelines. The guidelines for the Approval Essay are shared in this document.

On behalf of the Christian Community and Leadership home area, we send blessings and appreciation to you for your faithful participation in the candidacy process. We hope that your preparation and formation have been challenging and fulfilling. May God's spirit be strong in your heart and mind as you prepare this essay, participate in the interview and offer yourself in the service of this church for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Martha Hampton, Director, Candidacy and First Call

Ms. Cynthia Zamora, Program Manager, First Call Process and Candidacy

Ms. Sandra Mejia-Vega, Program Manager, Candidacy Data and Resource Development

and your partners in the Christian Community and Leadership home area

Approval Essay

The Approval essay asks candidates to demonstrate that they are equipped and ready to carry out the foundational ministries of the ELCA. The candidacy committee asks candidates to demonstrate in this essay the ministerial competencies named in the Candidacy Manual, including the ability to name and utilize the distinctive gifts Lutheranism brings to the world.

Most importantly, the committee desires to see candidates integrate their academic, theological learning with their practical ministry experiences. They want to hear candidates articulate Lutheran principles in contemporary language, and they want to see examples of how candidates have embodied these principles in ministry.

In short, candidacy committees want to experience through the essay and the sermon the kind of minister candidates would be for this church and for God's world.

Candidates for each roster will answer every question. Please follow all directions carefully:

1. Keep your audience in mind as you prepare your essay. It will be read by laity, rostered leaders and faculty representatives on candidacy committees. While it is important to provide evidence of academic study, it is also important that the essay be clear and interesting.
2. Use concrete examples from your academic studies and practical experience. Candidacy committees want to learn not just what you do but why, theologically, you do it.
3. Prepare the essay for legible copying by using double-spaced, 12-point type on white paper.
4. The total length of the paper should not exceed 14 pages plus the sermon.
5. Type your name at the top-right corner of each page and number each page sequentially.
6. For each section, type the question that you are answering.
7. Send a copy of the completed essay to your candidacy committee no later than the date requested. Candidates who attend or are affiliated with an ELCA seminary should send a copy to the seminary of affiliation.
8. Please bring a copy of the essay to the Approval interview.
9. The contents of the essay must be your own. Include a bibliography and footnotes as appropriate.

APPROVAL ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. What language and imagery of the Triune God resonates with you? What spiritual practices help you focus on the Triune God present in your life? (approximately one page)
2. How has your relationship with Jesus changed, deepened or been challenged during internship? (approximately one page)
3. Describe two of the gifts God has given you for a life in public ministry and the ways you have developed those gifts. Describe one area in which you will need to grow as you begin a life of public ministry and how you plan to develop it. (approximately one page)
4. Describe an experience when things didn't go so well, or when you were disappointed in your own efforts, that motivates you to do things differently next time. What insights from this situation do you hope to carry forward into public ministry? (approximately one page)
5. In your experience of ministry identify one area where there was a need for a significant change of culture. How did you and other leaders in the context go about effecting that change? What worked and what didn't? (approximately one page)

6. Candidates for ministry of Word and Sacrament: Describe your core theological convictions around Baptism and Holy Communion. What specific teachings (or truths) found in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions inform your answer. (approximately two pages)
Candidates for ministry of Word and Service: Describe your core theological convictions around the call to service in Baptism and the call to service as a rostered deacon. What specific teaching found in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions inform your answer. (approximately two pages)
7. The ELCA needs to think critically and theologically about controversial issues that face the world today. Identify one such issue facing the Lutheran church today. What specific teachings from Scripture and the Lutheran confessions inform your answer? (approximately one page)
8. What do you find distinctive about the Lutheran understanding of God's mission in the world, and why is that distinctiveness valuable? (approximately one page)
9. Drawing from all your answers to the previous questions, describe how serving on the roster of Word and Sacrament or Word and Service will help you live into whom you believe God has called you to be. (approximately one page)

PROCLAMATION AND CONTEXT (three pages, plus the sermon)

Submit a written sermon you preached during this past year; if possible, also attach or link to a video/audio of the sermon.

1. In a paragraph, describe the context in which the sermon was preached and how this directly affected your crafting of the sermon.
2. In your study of the text, what did you learn about the Bible passage that your own first reading did not give you?
3. Identify something in the structure, language, biblical context or historical background that sheds light on the way you interpreted this passage.
4. Summarize in one sentence the good news you proclaimed in the sermon. What about this passage led you to articulate the gospel in this way?
5. Discuss the role and relationship of law and gospel in the sermon.
6. What did you hope would happen to your listeners as a result of having heard this sermon? In what ways did the feedback you received match your hopes? In retrospect, how might you change the sermon, and why?