



ENTRANCE ESSAY

MAY 2025

ELCA Candidacy – Entrance Essay

Entrance Introduction

“The Entrance process in candidacy is the first formal discernment by a candidacy committee and applicants of their readiness for candidacy. A decision to grant Entrance officially accepts an applicant into candidacy.”¹

The Entrance essay is an autobiographical reflection that should contain insights and understanding gained during the period of discernment that led you to apply for candidacy in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Your process of discernment need not be completed; we ask only that you provide an honest assessment of your journey thus far as you understand it, and your hope for the future. This will provide the committee with background information to guide your interview.

To prepare and write your essay:

- Read:
 - The following chapters of “Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA” (www.elca.org/constitution): Chapter 2, “Confession of Faith”; Chapter 4, “Statement of Purpose”; and Chapter 7, “Ministry.”
 - “About the ELCA” on the church’s website (www.elca.org/about).
- Review:
 - “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline: Rostered Ministers, Congregations, and Members of Congregations” (resources.elca.org/office-of-the-secretary/definitions-and-guidelines-for-discipline-2021/).
 - The Wholeness Wheel from Portico Benefit Services (porticobenefits.org/the-wholeness-wheel/).

Entrance Components

Contact your synod’s candidacy committee for details about the components for Entrance:

- Active membership in an ELCA worshipping community or campus ministry for at least one year. A community leader will submit the Congregational Registration Form (Communal Discernment).
- Candidacy Application form.
- Entrance essay.
- Personal financial worksheet.
- Personal health assessment.
- Letters of reference.
- Transcripts, licenses and certificates of completion for continuing education.

¹ ELCA Candidacy Manual, Adopted by the Church Council November 2016, revised January 2023, 35.

- Application fees, if applicable.
- Initial interviews, if applicable.
- Psychological evaluation.
- Background checks (criminal, financial and motor vehicle).
- Consent form to release student information under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- Any other materials requested for review by the candidacy committee.

The Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The ELCA Electronic Communications Procedures provide guidance for using artificial intelligence (AI) within the ELCA churchwide organization. This is adapted for our use in considering AI in candidacy materials.

“The ELCA recognizes the benefits of artificial intelligence (AI) in enhancing its mission, ministry and operations. However, it acknowledges the risks and ethical, environmental and theological considerations associated with AI, including issues related to bias, privacy, security and transparency. In all potential uses of AI, the organization and individuals must keep human dignity in mind and support the ELCA’s social teachings. As such, the ELCA is committed to ensuring the responsible, human-centered and ethical use of AI.” Later we read, “Using AI for ‘creative’ purposes likely involves AI incorporating copyrighted material and presenting it as its own ‘creation’”²

In ministry settings, and as an issue of personal character, theological honesty and integrity of formation artifacts, using AI programs requires intentionality and transparency. AI may be used appropriately as a proofing aid (i.e., to check only spelling and basic grammar). If AI-generated content appears in an essay or artifact, it must be cited as if it were any other resource, e.g., with attribution and a link to the conversation. AI-generated content that is not cited will be treated as plagiarized.³

Entrance Essay Instructions

For each of the five parts, write two to three pages, double-spaced (500-750 words). Each page should include a header or footer with your name and the page number.

Answer each of the numbered questions. Questions that begin with bullet points are sub-questions that should be addressed in your response. All essays should include the question number and/or prompt to which they respond.

Submit a copy of the essay to your candidacy committee through your synod office.

Keep a copy of the essay for yourself and bring it with you to your Entrance Interview.

² ELCA Electronic Communications Procedures, January 2025.

³ Wartburg Theological Seminary Student Handbook, 2024.

Entrance Essay Questions

1. Provide a brief autobiography that includes your early years, faith formation and current life situation.
2. Describe your relationship with Jesus Christ.
3. Describe your journey of discernment.
 - How did you first experience your call to rostered ministry?
 - What have you done to deepen this understanding?
 - Who have you discussed this with?
 - Through this intentional time of discernment, what have you learned about yourself, the church and the world?
4. What plans do you have for formation for rostered leadership, including theological education?
5. Consider all areas of the Wholeness Wheel (porticobenefits.org/the-wholeness-wheel/). What steps have you taken or do you still need to take to be a healthy leader? What types of support might you need as you pursue that health and wholeness?