

South Dakota Synod Entrance Panel Information Sheet:

Source: ELCA Candidacy Manual, April 2010

Entrance is a process that identifies an individual's potential for rostered ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The Entrance Decision is the first official action of a Candidacy Committee.

I. Application Components:

1. Minimum one-year active membership in an ELCA congregation
2. Application, including Autobiographical Essay and Authorization of Release Form
3. Application Fee
4. Congregational Registration
5. Initial Interview
6. Candidate screening reports completed and received by synod (Psychological Evaluation, required Background Checks, and Entrance Information Form)
7. Official transcripts and certificates of StudyFamiliarity with and stated intention to live in accord with *Vision and Expectations*
8. Entrance Interview

The Entrance Interview may not be held until all components of the application process are complete. The gathered material may reflect concerns or issues critical to the conversation in the interview. Growth and development issues outlined in the various entrance components should be utilized by the candidate, Candidacy Committee, and seminary when assisting the candidate in formation and growth in specific areas.

Active Membership and Congregational Registration

An applicant must be an active member of an ELCA congregation for a minimum of one year prior to entrance into candidacy. The pastor, any other staff, and lay leaders of the applicant's home congregation provide a description of the person's involvement in the life of the congregation as well as reflection on the person's sense of call and gifts for ministry. The congregational registration can also point out concerns and areas for growth. Congregations are also expected to provide support to all candidates who are members, through prayer, communication, and financial assistance, if possible.

Initial Interview

The primary purpose of the Initial Interview is to provide the Candidacy Committee with a reliable, thorough, and consistent base of information about the applicant. In addition, this interview provides the applicant with an opportunity to engage in further discernment and self-reflection. The interview also assists the applicant in understanding the process for entering into candidacy in the ELCA.

Candidate Screening – Psychological Evaluation, Background Check, Entrance Information Form

The Candidacy Process of this church seeks to maintain a good balance and complementarity between hospitality and relationship building on the one hand and the tasks of discernment, formation, evaluation and screening on the other. Gathering information to assure thorough and careful judgment of an applicant's character and past behavior is a necessary part of the assessment of a person's readiness to begin preparation for public ministry.

Psychological Evaluation

The purpose of the Psychological Evaluation is to provide a professional assessment of an applicant's psychological readiness to engage in the process of candidacy in the ELCA. The evaluation will assist an individual in gaining self-understanding of abilities and potential for public ministry.

Background Check and Entrance Information Form

Investigations of a person's past as well as an assessment of his or her suitability and potential fitness for public church leadership are tasks of ELCA Candidacy Committees. Background Checks are a component of this process, as this church does everything possible to screen out people who might use their position as a pastor or lay rostered leader in damaging or illegal ways. A Background Check is to be conducted on all applicants for candidacy in the ELCA.

In addition, all applicants for candidacy in the ECLA are required to submit, on a form available with the Application Form, written answers to specific questions about personal history and conduct (Entrance Information Form).

The areas that are to be covered by a background check include:

1. Criminal history database search;
2. County record criminal check;
3. Credit report check;
4. Social security trace; and
5. Motor vehicle check.

II. Entrance Interview Panel:

Upon submission of all components of the application process, an Entrance Panel is convened. The Entrance Interview Guide assumes that Interview Panel members will have read and become familiar with the candidate's file.

The interview should include questions and conversations on:

1. Discernment
2. Health and Readiness for Ministry
3. Required Entrance Information Form Questions – noting and discussing any responses requiring further explanation.
4. Spiritual Journey
5. Other questions as deemed appropriate by the candidacy committee.

III. Entrance Decision:

The Entrance Decision is made by the full synod Candidacy Committee using all information available.

The committee will make one of three decisions:

Positive Entrance A positive Entrance Decision indicates the committee's confidence in the applicant's potential and readiness for theological study and formation. This decision means that the applicant demonstrates gifts and abilities that indicate potential for rostered ministry either as a pastor, an associate in ministry, a diaconal minister, or deaconess.

Entrance Denied This decision states that there are specific reasons why the applicant is not an appropriate candidate for rostered ministry in this church. This may include issues related to discernment, health, readiness, or some situational factors. If, in addition to readiness factors that may be situational and able to be improved or changed, the applicant clearly lacks the gifts and abilities needed for service in a leadership role in the church, then a decision to deny must be considered.

Entrance Postponed If the applicant demonstrates gifts and abilities but lacks sufficient spiritual, discernment, health, or situational readiness, the committee recommends postponement. A postponement indicates that there are developmental or situational issues that must be addressed or conditions that must be met before the applicant would be reconsidered.

As the Candidacy Committee prayerfully considers all application components in their evaluation of an applicant at the time of Entrance, the following characteristics of readiness are carefully considered:

1. Faith in Jesus Christ, spiritual maturity, passion for justice and compassion for God's people;
2. Demonstration of healthy lifestyle and leadership characteristics;

3. Understanding of the nature of Christian ministry from both theological and practical perspectives, an understanding of the variety of forms of ministry in the ELCA, and an understanding of "call";
4. Familiarity with Lutheran congregational life with a minimum of one year's active membership in a congregation of the ELCA;
5. Academic readiness, including:
 - a. Appropriate undergraduate preparation
 - b. Language skills—oral and written
 - c. Basic acquaintance with the Scriptures and Luther's *Small Catechism*;
6. A realistic assessment of one's potential for service; awareness of gifts and abilities as well as situational factors.