



# ENDORSEMENT ESSAY

MAY 2026

Dear candidate for rostered ministry:

The positive Entrance decision you received some time ago recognizes you as a baptized person with gifts and potential for rostered ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The candidacy committee of your synod has expressed confidence in your ability to begin preparation and formation for public ministry through theological study and personal growth and development. You are now ready to be considered for Endorsement, the next step in the ELCA candidacy process.

Endorsement provides the church with an opportunity to assess your progress, review your development in preparing for ministry, and engage with you in your ongoing discernment of your call. The areas of development to be addressed are your:

- Personal and interpersonal skills for ministry.
- Educational and theological ability.
- Spiritual formation and faith
- Understanding of your call to ministry.

As you declare the particular office of ministry to which you feel called (Word and Sacrament, Word and Service), we ask you to reflect on your identity in light of that call. A positive Endorsement decision by your candidacy committee will reflect the committee's confidence in your formation and growth.

We welcome you to this next step in candidacy and pray that God's Spirit will guide you in this time of reflection and assessment.

Sincerely,

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

## Endorsement Introduction

“Endorsement is the official action of a candidacy committee recognizing and affirming a candidate’s readiness to complete the candidacy process, and a candidate’s demonstration of appropriate gifts and characteristics for a specific roster.”<sup>1</sup>

To prepare and write your essay:

- Read:
  - The following chapters of “Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA” ([www.elca.org/constitution](http://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](http://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/](http://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/](http://porticobenefits.org/the-wholeness-wheel/)).
  - Your Entrance decision, incorporating your learning and any formative experiences since Entrance.

## Endorsement Components

- Entrance decision form with areas for growth noted.
- Endorsement essay.
- Clinical pastoral education report.
- Academic transcripts.
- Information on a candidate’s participation in seminary community life, including Boundary/Safe Church workshops.
- Updated 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,

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<sup>1</sup> ELCA Candidacy Manual, Adopted by the Church Council November 2016, revised January 2023, 56.

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."<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

## Artifacts

For the Endorsement essay, you will combine responses to essay questions with submitted artifacts. The following questions invite you to share examples of your learning and formation in areas of competency for rostered ministry. For some questions, you will have the option to write an essay in response to a prompt or submit an artifact of your learning. An artifact is a *recent* piece of your work from courses, contextual education, clinical pastoral education or other formation experiences that demonstrate your competence. It must be less than 10 pages or 5000 words in length. Any comments from the course instructor can be removed for privacy.

Artifacts could include a:

- Paper.
- Project.
- Presentation.
- Video.
- Verbatim.
- Piece of artwork with description.

## Endorsement Essay Instructions

For the Endorsement essay, you will combine responses to essay questions with submitted artifacts (see above).

- Essay questions should be approximately 500 words per essay.
- Include the artifact and up to 250 words describing its context and/or assignment parameters and what you learned from the experience. Include any written faculty, supervisor or contextual education feedback you received on the artifact.

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<sup>2</sup> ELCA Electronic Communications Procedures, January 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Wartburg Theological Seminary Student Handbook, 2024.

The length of the essay may vary depending on the artifacts submitted. Responses should be double-spaced, with your name and the page number on each page.

Answer each of the numbered questions. The questions that begin with bullet points are sub-questions that should be addressed in your responses. For questions 4, 5 and 7, respond to *either* option a or option b. Each essay should include the question number and/or prompt to which it responds.

The content of the essay and artifacts must be your own. This is a professional document and should include a bibliography and footnotes.

Submit your essay to your candidacy committee through your synod office, and to your seminary academic advisor.

Keep a copy of the essay and bring it with you to your Endorsement Interview.

If you have questions about the essay prompts, please contact your candidacy committee.

## Endorsement Essay Questions

**All your work should be recent (from the time of Entrance until now). Draw on your clinical pastoral education experience and recent coursework to answer the questions. If you choose to submit artifacts, use a different artifact for each question.**

1. Why do you feel called to be a rostered minister in the ELCA instead of in a different denomination?
2. In your own words, describe the two rosters of the ELCA (Ministers of Word and Service and Ministers of Word and Sacrament). To which roster do you feel called, and why? How has that evolved since your Entrance?
3. Consider the Wholeness Wheel ([porticobenefits.org/the-wholeness-wheel/](http://porticobenefits.org/the-wholeness-wheel/)). How are you supported and sustained in:
  - Discerning your sense of call.
  - Forming pastoral or diaconal identity.
  - Practicing healthy boundaries.
  - Pursuing social wellness.
  - Engaging in spiritual practices.
4. Choose one of the following:
  - a. Submit an artifact (other than a sermon) that shows your biblical exegetical work at a seminary level. Write a brief explanation of the parameters of the assignment and include any feedback you received from the instructor.
  - b. Choose a passage of Scripture that you have been challenged by or wrestled with in your study. Share about the process of wrestling with this text, explain the

interpretive skills learned in seminary that you implemented in your study, and explain your current understanding of the passage.

5. Choose *one* of the following:
  - a. Submit a paper on a Lutheran theological concept, taken from your seminary coursework. See Endorsement instructions for directions that include required supporting documents. The paper should address one or more of the following: Law and Gospel, Theology of the Cross, Freedom of a Christian, Two Kingdoms, Lutheran understanding of the sacraments, and/or a theology of service/grace.
  - b. In your own words, explain one or more of the following Lutheran theological concepts, expand on what it is, and write about why it matters for ministry today: Law and Gospel, Theology of the Cross, Freedom of a Christian, Two Kingdoms, Lutheran understanding of the sacraments, and/or a theology of service/grace.
6. Keep in mind *all* your formative experiences, which may include clinical pastoral education, coursework, spiritual practices, mentor relationships, self-work with the Wholeness Wheel, deacon formation event(s) and/or field education experience.
  - Give examples of two ministry and leadership skills you possess. How have these gifts grown in you since Entrance?
  - Give examples of two ministry and leadership skills you would like to develop. How do you hope to develop these in yourself?
7. Choose one of the following:
  - a. Submit a verbatim as an artifact from your clinical pastoral education that demonstrates your understanding of cultural competency. Use initials or pseudonyms to protect your confidentiality toward others.
  - b. Write an essay about your understanding of cultural competency, describing a context you have been in within the past year. Write about:
    - Who was there, and who was missing? Whose voices dominated in that context, and what voices were missing, undervalued or silenced?
    - What do you notice about your own ability to speak or keep silent in this space?
    - How do you assess what you know and what you still need to learn about the people and context?
    - How is God present in this context? How do you see the Holy Spirit at work (or not at work) in this space?
    - What does it mean to be church for the sake of the world?