

## Guidelines for Field Experience for Associates in Ministry

Experience and involvement in a context for ministry is essential to preparation for service as an associate in ministry. Experiential learning in the action-reflection model whereby one's practice of ministry is combined with supervised reflection and evaluation of that ministry is essential to formation for ministry. Supervised field experience seeks to facilitate the integration of academic study in the area of specialization and theological education with the practice of ministry. It is also designed to encourage the development of a ministerial identity of one who will serve in the public ministry of this church in an interdependent relationship with clergy and laity.

### 1. Objectives

- a. To provide actual experience in the candidate's area of specialization, thereby enabling the candidate to develop increasing competence as a leader in the public ministry of this church.
- b. To offer an opportunity for self-evaluation and spiritual nurture under the guidance of a mentor.
- c. To offer an opportunity for evaluation by others, including the mentor, the onsite field supervisor, and an advisory committee from the congregation or group being served.
- d. To provide a learning context that allows the candidate to experience many aspects of congregational, institutional, or agency life, including participation in the governing and programmatic structures such as council, board of directors, committees, and staff meetings.
- e. To provide opportunity for the candidate to participate in at least one project in an area of specialization or focus from beginning to completion, including planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- f. To assist the candidate in developing regular habits and patterns for theological reflection, spiritual formation, and healthy self-care.
- g. To provide to the synod Candidacy Committee an assessment regarding the candidate's growth, professional development, and skills in the area of ministry specialization.

### 2. Components of the Field Experience

#### A. Context

The context will be a setting that represents the anticipated focus of a candidate's future ministry: parish work, parish education, youth ministry, music, etc. If an administrative or teaching position, then a Lutheran elementary, high school or early childhood education center will be the context. If counseling or specialized pastoral care, it will be in an appropriate agency or institution and will include at least one unit of CPE. Highly specialized settings are only approved when a candidate demonstrates significant experience in a general ministry setting.

#### B. Supervising/Mentoring/Advising

A quality field experience for associate in ministry candidates requires over-all supervision on-site, mentoring, training specific to the area of specialty, support, and nurture.

Associates in ministry in the ELCA typically serve in multiple-staff ministries and normally work with a supervisor. Most often the person who supervises the over-all ministry is theologically trained, with responsibility for oversight in the local situation. It

is important, then, that the supervised field experience provide training and attention to team-ministry development as well as the development of individual leadership gifts and skills.

Three equally important roles and functions have been identified in order to facilitate the goals and objectives for supervised field experience. Normally this means the involvement of three parties in addition to the candidate. In some situations the role/function of field supervisor and that of mentor can be combined and carried out by one person.

**1. The On-Site Field Supervisor** will provide administrative structure to the over all experience including a written description of responsibilities, consultation for mutual reflection of supervisory issues, and periodic review and evaluation. The on-site field supervisor must be a rostered leader of the ELCA. When responsibility is given to an associate in ministry or diaconal minister, it is that person's responsibility to include the pastor in the process.

**2. The Mentor** is a person from the same area of specialization or focus as the candidate. The mentor shall have at least three years of experience in the candidate's area of specialization. If not available onsite, the mentor will be identified by the Candidacy Committee or academic institution in consultation with the candidate and must be available for at least monthly meetings with the candidate. The mentor is responsible for working with the candidate in identifying learning goals, objectives, and activities specific to the area of specialty. The mentor will reflect with the candidate on issues related to effective ministry as well as patterns for spiritual formation and healthy self-care. It is hoped that the mentor can model a relationship that would be sought out by the candidate once commissioned and in service.

**3. An Advisory Committee** shall be appointed in all settings. This committee should include persons who will have regular exposure to and familiarity with the candidate's work, including leaders and participants in programs. In situations where the candidate is already in service, this function may be provided by the Leadership Support or Mutual Ministry Committee.

### **C. Learning Agreement**

The field experience is a time when gifts, aptitudes, and skills for ministry can be developed and tested under supervision and within a helpful and supportive setting. Each field experience needs to have a focus and specific learning goals. An acknowledged focus and written learning agreement contribute to the value of the total experience and build a partnership among the candidate, the supervisors, the congregation, the college or seminary, and the synod. Candidates in academic programs are encouraged to work initially with the faculty advisors in developing learning goals. Those who are not in an academic program should consult with the Candidacy Committee. These goals are presented to the committee and supervisor for final development and approval.

Each area of ministry specialization requires goals and activities specific to the area of focus. It is also important that each associate in ministry sees the specialty area within the context of the overall mission and ministry of the congregation or agency.

Candidates should gain experience in working with individuals and with groups, with opportunities to develop the specific skills required, such as teaching, counseling, program development, leadership training, musical performance, visitation, administration or committee work. It is desirable and encouraged that as one preparing for public ministry, the associate in ministry gain experience in worship leadership by serving as an assisting minister in the liturgy, whatever the area of focus.

A critical area of development for all associates in ministry is developing team-ministry skills to work effectively with councils, committees, and staff teams. It is recommended that whenever possible the candidate participate in retreats with staff, council, or committees and take advantage of workshops offered in building team ministry. It is also desirable and recommended that the candidate have opportunities and receive financial assistance to participate in synodical and regional events such as leadership conferences and synod assemblies.

#### **D. Evaluation**

The candidate writes a self-evaluation and the supervision partners each write an evaluation of the candidate at the mid-way point and at the conclusion of the field experience. (The chairperson of the Advisory Committee represents the committee.) The evaluation provides information (which is used in assessing successful completion of the requirement) to the academic institution when the candidate is a student and to the Candidacy Committee. A record that describes all experience and involvements can be used in reflection and evaluation sessions with the supervisor/mentor.

**The Supervisor/Mentor/Advisory Committee** has the responsibility to:

1. participate in writing the learning agreement;
2. provide regularly scheduled opportunities to discuss and reflect on the candidate's growth and development in light of the learning goals established;
3. listen to the candidate's concerns as well as achievements and provide support as well as constructive suggestions for growth and learning; and
4. provide written evaluation reports to the candidate, the academic institution, and the Candidacy Committee.