

Making **a** **D**IFFERENCE
NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD, EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

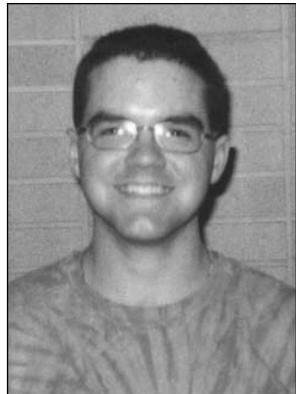
CANDIDACY

Candidates Discuss Their Calling

The Evangelical Lutheran Church makes its pastors. When our church talks about the call of God that comes to a believer to use his/her gifts and skills, we are serious theologians. We talk faith talk. We Lutherans believe that a pastor or lay rostered leader in our church has responded to the call of God to be set apart for church service. The call has two components:

1. The person senses that God wants him/her to serve.

Candidate Christopher Laughlin writes, “You could say that God worked mysteriously to raise me Lutheran. Or, you could say that God worked mysteriously once I was Lutheran. . . . Either way, at the age of six I told my parents I wanted to be a pastor. Again, you could say that at the age of six I heard God’s call. You could also say that I was a six year old wanting to be like the nice old man I saw at the altar every week. Either way, most of my life I have thought that the pastorate might be the way to go for me.”



LAUGHLIN

2. *The people of God, the church, the community of faith, engage that person in a mutual discernment of skills and gifts development so the person is ready to function as a servant leader.*

Katherine Bollenbach observed this, “Part of the reason why I feel I am called to ordained ministry is based on my history with the church. My childhood church was Salem Lutheran of Rockford, IL, and it had a strong Swedish/German background. It was nearly a hundred years old when I was born, and its link to the city that had started as a furniture town was clear in the high quality woodwork of the pews, altar, and pulpit. It was a rapidly aging church, and while the Sunday school program remained quite strong during my tenure there, the high school group was never very active. Thus every age group was represented except the late teens/early twenties group.



BOLLENBACH

Young newlyweds would show up with small children now and then to bridge the gap, and the loss of the children of the longtime members was rarely noticed.

These were not the age group I remembered most besides my own, however. That group remains the large elderly contingent, or as I frequently refer to them with a certain fondness: ‘the little old Swedish ladies’. I never got to know most of them very well; I just always seemed to be surrounded by them wherever I went. I suppose I got used to them eventually, though, because now whenever I enter a new church the people I tend to make friends with first are almost always the elderly long-time members.”

The whole process is called “candidacy.”

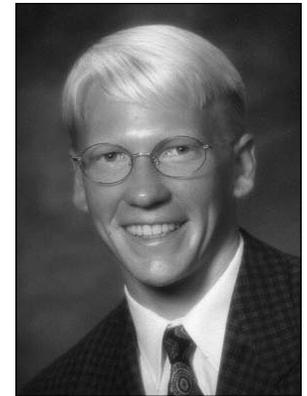
Candidacy in the ELCA has four partners and three steps. The partners are necessary to reach the goal of creating a pastor:

1. *A congregation has to sponsor one of its members who exhibits gifts for ministry.*

Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church of Elkader, registered a candidate with these words, “David has shown himself to be a young man deeply interested in matters of faith in the (nearly) 13 years that we have known him. He joined Bethany through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism when he was 11 years old. Several years later (October 27, 1996) he affirmed his faith in the Rite of Affirmation. As a student in the confirmation program, he demonstrated a wonderful and rare ability to discern and express issues of theology and life. He has consistently been a helper and worker at Bethany. We have appreciated deeply the many times when he has shared his musical gifts in worship.”

2. *A candidate has to step forward and offer himself/herself in faith as a possible servant leader in the church.*

Matthew Pooch describes his thoughts, “Because of [my] convictions and the call on my heart, I am eager to serve the Lord in ordained ministry. I have often been asked why I want to be a pastor. I used to describe my commitment to Christ and list some pastoral duties I enjoy. But after some personal Scripture study, especially the call stories of Jeremiah and Moses, I have begun to realize that if I am to be a pastor, it is simply who I am. God calls people to serve as pastors and that is who they are. Being a pastor is not about weighing the pros and cons of the job and just deciding to give it a try. It is about following



POOCK

the path God has laid out for one's life and is not the result of personal decision, but rather of God's decision and combined with discernment of God's will. I continue to seek out God's will in my life, and to walk in the direction that God leads."

3. A seminary (school of theology) has to invest the resources to train and equip this future leader.

Joy Stuber Alsop suggested, "Seminary is a place that has such a deep richness. I feel as if I am in a place where I am constantly learning something. It may be something simple, such as how to recycle my batteries, or learning something with much more depth, such as the Synoptic Gospels. I feel that this past year has been a time of great growth. My classmates, professors, and daily interactions with my surrounding community challenge me daily. The seminary community is also a place where I am able to worship with my brothers and sisters in Christ. Hearing the word of God and participating in the sacraments, communion or a renewal of my baptism, are important pieces of my life. All of the above has contributed greatly to my well-being and my faith."



STUBER ALSOP

4. A synod Candidacy Committee has to walk with this future leader through the three steps of call discernment.

David Fleener reflected his development since beginning the candidacy process, "The candidacy process has brought new challenges as well as strengths and delights to my personal, vocational, and spiritual development. I have noticed that the process hasn't brought these things separately so much as together. One side of an issue may be a challenge to my development in this process, but when I am sitting or wrestling

with the challenge for a while, I find new strength and joy in my faith and call."

Candidacy partners walk through the three steps of discernment while they prepare for ministry.

Often the essays, interviews, retreats, classes, and internships can seem like a mountain of detailed effort, but each step enables the call to be clarified and claimed by the church and its future leaders.

Entrance allows the candidates to share their faith story and the nature of their call, as they prepare to enter seminary. David Fleener shared his call with the committee, "There have been a number of events, circumstances, and persons in my life that have fostered a sense of call in my life. However, foremost among these was my call to be a camp counselor at camp EWALU in Strawberry Point, IA—a call which came as a surprise. I was a sophomore in college, and wasn't sure what I should do for the summer. . . . I talked with several camp alumni, including Jesse Klosterboer, son of my pastor, Jim Klosterboer. Jesse had worked a camp for the past seven or eight summers, and had nothing but good things to say—the fellowship, worship, and friendships he described were nothing like the camp I had experienced. I realized that EWALU was a viable ministry opportunity. I knew that counseling at EWALU



FLEENER

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was what I was supposed to do that summer—there was no question that God had called me for that task.”

Endorsement prepares the candidates to do an internship or some practical, supervised church ministry in their chosen leadership roles. Emily Carson talks about one experience, “Over the Easter holiday, I returned to Iowa to spend time with my family. While home I assisted with worship at my home congregation. It was the first time I had ever assisted at my home congregation. Standing in front of the entire congregation, with all their eyes on me, led me to a new realization about who I am and who I am being called to become.”



CARSON

Seminary faculty, candidates, and Candidacy Committee members meet on the seminary campus for endorsement discussions.

Matt Poock reports several dynamics about the internship he is experiencing, “For the beginning of the internship I have preached once a month. This has been effective in allowing me time to learn and know the community for whom I am preaching. I anticipate preaching with greater frequency. I have been experimenting with new styles of preaching, such as sermon series rather than lectionary, and a more didactic approach rather than more traditional proclamation. I am growing in my use of media and visuals. I receive regular feedback from my supervisor and the congregation. . . . I have had opportunity to sit and listen to people share about various struggles and grief, whether in their occupation or family. Largely, these opportunities have surfaced organically, informally as we gather for worship or small group or an event, but some arise by arranged appointment, and some along with my supervisor. We naturally conclude these times in prayer and scripture.”

Candidates report on internships and share hopes and dreams for their first call to church service at their final meeting with their Candidacy Committee for **approval** for ordination/consecration/commissioning. This is a time of appreciation and thanksgiving for the gifts of God in church leadership.

Candidate Katherine Bollenbach has thought about church leadership in this manner, “The life a Christian is called to live is based on the will of God and not the will of the world. We are called to faith, hope, and love in everyday life; at work and at home, with friends and with family. We are servant-leaders; helping others and leading by example so that we may show others the Way. Our ideals are the fruits of the Spirit, though our lives often look more like the lives of the heroes of the Old Testament: trying to follow God but falling to the world’s temptations. Yet as baptized Christians we are called to be as stubborn as Daniel or the disciples, and to continue trying, because in confirmation we have acknowledged the vocation and accept it as our own.

I am in the process of discerning how accepting God’s call to ministry for me will manifest itself in my life. I do not see ministry as a secondary vocation, instead I understand it to be how God’s plan for my life as a Christian works in the world. I am no more intrinsically holy than the people I would serve as pastor. Pastors are called to live “above reproach” to maintain the trust of the congregation and the church, not to imply that they are better than their congregation or community.”

The ELCA candidacy process honors the confessions of the Lutheran church. Lutherans believe that the office of the pastor comes from the call of the church to servants of word and sacrament ministries. The roster of the church is the church’s blessing to the people of God. People who receive gifts are given permission to share their gifts with others.

Thank God for giving us pastors. May God’s people always hear the calls to rostered ministries.

Your gifts to the Northeastern Iowa Synod help support this candidacy process

Please consider financial support of candidates from your congregation,
and relay names of potential candidates to:



Rev. Darrel W. Gerriets
Northeastern Iowa Synod
201 20th St. SW
PO Box 804
Waverly, IA 50677-0804

Phone: 319/352-1414
FAX: 319/352-1416
gerrietsd@neiasynod.org

Candidacy Process

Four Partners

- » congregation
- » candidate
- » seminary
- » candidacy committee

Three Steps

- » entrance
- » endorsement
- » approval