**Lay Ministry Institute of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA**

**A HANDBOOK**

*Amended November 19, 2022 (SC)*

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# Lay Ministry Institute (LMI)

The mission of the Lay Ministry Institute (LMI) is to educate and equip lay people for theologically sound ministry. Programs of the Lay Ministry Institute are administered by a Board of Directors (membership recommended by the LMI Board of Directors and appointed by the Synod Council) and a coordinator (appointed by the Synod Council). The Lay Ministry Institute is under the office of the bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod (U.S.S.) which provides oversight and accountability to its programs, and which authorizes lay leaders for ministry in U.S.S. congregations.

## A Brief History

In the 1980s, the Central Pennsylvania Synod (Lutheran Church in America) developed a training program—the “Lay Assistant Program”—to teach lay persons to preach and lead worship to assist their own congregations. The congregations and territory of the Central Penn Synod were divided into three different synods—one being the Upper Susquehanna Synod—with the birth of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1988.

In 1995, the ELCA Church Council produced a document that allowed for the development of Synodically Authorized or Licensed Ministries (CC95.04.47t). This new document renewed conversations within the Upper Susquehanna Synod about the growing need to train more lay persons in leading congregational worship. U.S.S. Bishop A. Donald Main asked Pastor Glenn Heasley, assistant to the bishop, to form a committee to explore what this could look like on the territory of the synod.

Around this same time, the Upper Susquehanna Synod was encouraging all congregations to move toward weekly communion. This effort influenced the training program’s focus to include both preaching and presiding at the sacrament when authorized by the bishop. The Authorized Lay Worship Leader training program was created to cover the appropriate issues of homiletics, worship, theology, Church history, and some practical hands-on experiences. The training was extensive and addressed some people’s concerns about lay persons being adequately prepared for this service. While many lay persons had been trained by their pastors over the years to lead worship during the pastor’s vacations, the Lay Worship Leader training program was an effort to standardize the training and bring the use of those so trained under the office of the bishop. In 1999, six U.S.S. members who were trained in the former Central Pennsylvania Synod’s “Lay Assistant Program” were inducted as the Upper Susquehanna Synod’s first Authorized Lay Worship Leaders.

The initial U.S.S. worship leader’s training program consisted of two years of sessions. The Authorized Lay Worship Committee then evaluated and revised the program and process based on comments from seminary professors, mentor pastors, and the students themselves. In 2000, having completed the first training program, twenty-three more U.S.S. members were inducted as Authorized Lay Worship Leaders. Concerns were addressed, admission and continuance standards described and applied, and the joys of persons serving in this role were celebrated!

In 2004, the Authorized Lay Worship Committee expanded into areas of ministry other than worship. The Lay Ministry Institute was formed, allowing for the future development of lay catechists, evangelists, steward leaders, youth workers, and others. The initial programs of the Lay Ministry Institute in 2007-2009 featured training for Lay Catechists, Lay Evangelists, and Lay Worship Leaders.

In March 2005, the ELCA Conference of Bishops adopted “A Statement of Understanding Concerning Synodically Authorized Ministry of Word and Sacrament” [CB05.03.01] (**Appendix**). In April of both 2005 and 2006 the ELCA Church Council adopted amendments to the 1995 “Guidelines Related to Synodically Authorized or Licensed Ministries” (CC95.04.47t) (**Appendix**). In 2007, the Board of the Lay Ministry Institute discerned the need to create a handbook to better interpret their program for the synod, to provide guidance for participants in the program, to revise and update the program for current synodical needs, and to bring it into compliance with the revised standards of the ELCA.

In 2008, U.S.S. Bishop Robert L. Driesen developed a theological foundation regarding the church’s use of authorized lay persons to preside at the Eucharist. This foundation (**Appendix**) was used by the Board to further refine the synod’s protocol for using authorized lay worship leaders. The new protocols will take effect in 2009. Having been approved by the LMI Board and the Synod Council, this newly developed Handbook is being shared across the Upper Susquehanna Synod in late 2008.

# Commissioned Lay Leaders

The term “commisssioned” in regard to the LMI lay leader programs carries a distinct meaning, and does not automatically apply to all LMI program participants. Most participants in LMI programs do so for the purpose of making their skills and gifts available as resources to the congregations of the Upper Susquehanna Synod. At program’s end, these participants may receive the authorization of the bishop in addition to a certificate of completion. Authorization by the bishop assures congregations that such resource people have been adequately prepared, continue to develop their skills, and are accountable to the larger church.

Some who apply for and complete a program of the Lay Ministry Institute may do so with the sole intent of assisting their own congregation~~s~~ or parish in ministry. Such participants are welcome in the program, receiving the same education and support as other program participants, and a certificate of completion at program’s end. Except for Lay Worship Leaders (for reasons stated below), such participants in lay leader programs do not need authorization from the bishop to serve in their own congregations.

The Board of the Lay Ministry Institute trains, examines, and recommends lay leaders to the bishop for commission. In consultation with the Synod Council, the bishop approves, ~~installs~~ commissions, and authorizes lay leaders for service in congregations. Commissioned lay leaders are mentored by an ordained minister in a covenantal relationship, and comply with the Code of Practice for Authorized Lay Worship Leaders. The bishop reviews all commissioned lay leaders annually and determines eligibility for continued service.

It is because of our Lutheran theological understanding of ministry and in compliance with the “Guidelines Related to Synod Authorized or Licensed Ministries” of the ELCA (**Appendix**) that the Upper Susquehanna Synod requires any lay person who would preside at the Eucharist be authorized by the bishop to do so.

# Lay Ministry Institute Board of Directors

The Lay Ministry Board is made up of the Bishop, a coordinator, and up to twelve members at least two, but not more than four ELCA rostered leaders, at least 3 commissioned lay leaders, at least 3 lay persons who are not commissioned. Except for the bishop and the coordinator board members are appointed by the synod council by the recommendation of the bishop for a term of 3 years. No board member may serve for more than 2 consecutive terms.

The programs of the Lay Ministry Institute are administered by the LMI Board of Directors and LMI Coordinator. The responsibilities of the Lay Ministry Institute Board of Directors include the following:

* **Application:** determining requirements for application to LMI programs in accordance with the guidelines established by the ELCA (**Appendix**); creating application forms; making application forms readily available to applicants; reviewing, cataloging and securing all applicant files; and determining which applicants may be admitted.
* **Curriculum:** determining educational requirements for each of the lay ministry programs including pre-classroom work; recruiting instructors; giving guidance to instructors for class expectations; creating class schedules; and providing for classroom needs.
* **Evaluation:** creating guidelines for reviewing students’ progress; creating and reviewing evaluations forms for mentors/supervisors both at the midpoint and end of the program.
* **Examination:** reviewing and evaluating students’ files; determining and enforcing standards for eligibility for authorization; and establishing standards for evaluating applicants whose training/preparation has occurred outside the Lay Ministry Institute programs.
* **Authorization:** recommending suitable students to the bishop for authorization; establishing requirements for continued authorization of such lay leaders over time; establishinga protocol for permittingAuthorized Lay Worship Leaders to preside at the Eucharist.
* **Installation:** providing for a rite of passage for those who will become authorized lay leaders.
* **Expectations:** creating a code of practice for authorized lay leaders and distributing it widely among leaders and congregations.

# LMI Lay Leader Programs

Students completing LMI programs may be commissioned by the bishop to assist congregations other than their own in the absence of a called pastor.

* **Lay Worship Leaders** are trained to lead worship, preach, and preside in congregations of the Upper Susquehanna Synod. With the bishop’s written permission an Authorized Lay Worship Leader may preside at the Eucharist of a particular congregation on a specific date. This is the only LMI program in which all applicants must seek the bishop’s authorization at program’s end.

# Application to The Lay Ministry Institute

Participants in the programs of the LMI are active, confirmed, communing, and contributing members of Upper Susquehanna Synod congregations. They are recognized as leaders by their congregations, uphold the highest standards of the Christian life, are faithful in their personal lives, and agree to live by the standards expressed in *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline Rostered Ministers, Congregations, and Members of Congregations* (**Appendix**)*.* They work closely with a mentoring ordained minister (usually the pastor of their home congregation) throughout the training process.

Applications to participate in a lay leader program of the LMI include the following:

* Completed application form, including basic personal information, prior church leadership experience, and answers to questions about the applicant’s spiritual formation.
* Contact information for three personal references (other than the applicant’s pastor).
* An autobiographical essay reflecting the applicant’s process of discerning this call to service.
* A completed and signed statement from the applicant’s pastor, including a letter of reference.
* A letter of reference from the applicant’s Congregation Council.
* A personal interview with a member of the LMI Board.
* Original reports from required background checks (**Appendix**). No report shall be more than one year old at the time of application. Originals will be returned after a synod staff person makes copies for the applicant’s file.

Applications for authorization by the bishop at program’s end also include the following:

* Agreement and signature to a Statement of Commitment for authorized lay leaders (**Appendix**).
* Completion of and signature to an ELCA Standards Questionnaire for authorized lay leaders (**Appendix**).

Based on their complete application, the LMI Board determines whether an applicant may be admitted to a LMI program. Accepted applicants are expected to remit tuition in a timely manner, making arrangements with the coordinator if an installment plan is desired. Upon acceptance into the program, students are asked to complete *The Lutheran Course* and *Bible Tutor* (or other similar courses required by the LMI Board) prior to the Orientation session.

# Lay Ministry Institute Curriculum

All lay leader programs of the Lay Ministry Institute use the same core curriculum with additional sessions on material particular to each program’s area of ministry. All students attend an Orientation session and Final Gathering session. The core curriculum includes instruction in the following:

* Bible;
* Lutheran Theology, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Confession of Faith and polity of the ELCA;
* Worship;
* Spiritual discernment and faith development;
* Leadership expectations and identity;
* Contextual understanding; and
* Pastoral skills including preaching, catechetics, worship leadership, visitation, pastoral care, and outreach.

## Requirements for a Certificate of Completion

Participants in programs of the Lay Ministry Institute who have satisfied all requirements of their program receive a certificate of completion at program’s end. Those participants will have:

* Completed *The Lutheran Course* and *Bible Tutor* (or other similar courses required by the LMI Board) prior to the Orientation session.
* Attended all class sessions, or for sessions missed, arranged for makeup work (readings, recording, etc.)
* Completed all assignments as required by their program, both written and tasked in the congregation.
* Initiated regular meetings with their Mentor Pastor. Participants are expected to meet with their Mentor Pastor prior to each session to discuss resource materials and study preparations, and subsequent to each session to reflect on the participants’ learning experience.
* Completed midpoint and final evaluations as requested.

# Expectations for Mentor Pastors of Lay Leaders in Training

Mentoring pastors are a key partner in the training of lay leaders through programs of the Lay Ministry Institute, assisting the LMI Board and class instructors in a participant’s education and supervision. Mentor Pastors make a commitment of their time and expertise to support the equipping of lay leaders for ministry. Mentor Pastors provide individual attention and support to participants as they engage in theological education and ministry practice. They provide valuable feedback both to participants and the LMI Board about a participant’s development. Mentor Pastors invite and encourage participants to apply what they’ve learned in their own congregational setting through experiences of leadership in the participant’s area of study.

A Mentor Pastor shall:

* Be a Minister of Word and Sacrament on the roll of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA.
* Be approved as a Mentor Pastor by the bishop.
* Clearly understand and be committed without reservation to the programs of the Lay Ministry Institute.
* Be an effective model for and guide to the LMI participant in their area of study.
* Maintain the Mentor Pastor relationship with the participant unless the relationship is terminated in consultation with the bishop.

The responsibilities of the Mentor Pastor are as follows:

* Participate in Mentor Pastor training.
* Willingly be available to meet and share with the participant throughout his/her training process:
	+ Prior to each scheduled training session to offer resource materials and study suggestions.
	+ Soon after each scheduled training session to reflect on the participant’s learning experience and/or work.
	+ These two responsibilities may be combined in one meeting.
* Provide appropriate leadership opportunities within the congregational setting for the participant.
	+ Lay Worship Leaders in training are expected to lead worship quarterly beginning in their first year of training.
	+ Lay Worship Leaders are requiredto preach fourtimes in the second year but not before they have had a course in preaching/homiletics
	+ Lay Worship Leaders are asked to assist with Communionfrequently, including setting the table.
* Provide thorough evaluations as requested by the LMI Board and the bishop on or before dates due. Evaluations include the initial letter of reference for the applicant, midpoint evaluations, and final evaluations.

# Requirements for Authorization as Lay Leader

To receive a positive recommendation by the LMI Board for a lay leader to be authorized by the bishop, participants in a program of the Lay Ministry Institute must:

* Read, complete, sign and submit the “Statement of Commitment” for authorized lay leaders (**Appendix**)
* Read, complete, sign and submit the “ELCA Standards Questionnaire” for authorized lay leaders (**Appendix**)
* Submit original copies of required background checks to the synod office for their file (**Appendix**).
* Satisfy all requirements to receive a Certificate of Completion for an LMI program.
* Complete an interview with the LMI Board.
* Create a covenant with a Supervising Pastor appointed by the bishop on a plan for remaining accountable to the larger church as an authorized lay leader (**Appendix**). Copies of both the lay leader’s and supervisor’s covenants must be sent to the synod office for the lay leader’s file.

The bishop of the synod determines whether a lay leader who is recommended by the LMI Board is approved for authorization. Those so approved participate in a joint service of commisioning marking their authorized status.

# Requirements for Continued Authorization as a Lay Leader

The continued authorization of an authorized lay leader shall be reviewed annually by the office of the bishop. Authorized lay leaders shall be required annually to submit to the office of the bishop an updated covenant agreement, signed by the leader and their Supervisor Pastor, outlining their mutual expectations for the leader’s ministry for the coming year (**Appendix**). The covenant shall outline the leader’s plans for a continuing education experience, and the leader/mentor’s plans to meet periodically to review the leader’s ministry. A newly updated and signed “Statement of Commitment” must also be submitted annually for the leader’s authorization to be continued (**Appendix**).

A notice of their continued authorization will be sent to each authorized lay leader following the bishop’s review of their file. An updated roll of Authorized Lay Worship Leaders will be kept at the office of the bishop, and only those whose authorization has been continued may receive referrals for Sunday supply or permission to preside at the Eucharist.

“Authorization to provide ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the synod bishop, who need not specify the reason” (“Guidelines Related to Synodically Authorized or Licensed Ministries” of the ELCA--CC95.04.47t) (**Appendix**).

# Code Of Practice for Authorized Lay Leaders

## Supervisor Relationship

Authorized lay leaders are supervised by an Minister of Word and Sacrament of the U.S.S. with whom they have made a covenantal agreement outlining their mutual expectations. A model for such a covenant is provided in this handbook (**Appendix**). The Supervisorneed not be the same Mentor Pastor with whom the authorized lay leader completed their training, nor need they be the authorized lay leader’s own pastor. If a leader’ssupervisor is unable to keep their covenant, the leader is required to notify the bishop. The bishop will work with the leader to identify a new supervisor (see following section for “Expectations of Supervising Pastors for Authorized Lay Leaders”).

## Permission for Authorized Lay Worship Leaders

An Authorized Lay Worship Leader (ALWL) may lead worship and preach at a Service of the Word (non-communion service) without seeking the permission of the bishop.

An Authorized Lay Worship Leader may preside at the Eucharist provided they receive the permission of the bishop for each specific occasion (**Appendix**). A request for permission for an ALWL to preside may be made in one of the following ways:

* A pastor may contact an Authorized Lay Worship Leader to ask that person to lead worship, preach, and preside at their congregation on a particular date. The requesting pastor then asks the office of the bishop for a written letter of permission for the person to preside at the Eucharistat a specified place and time.
* The pastor of an Authorized Lay Worship Leader may request from the Bishop a single and enduring letter of permission for that Authorized Lay Worship Leader to preside at the Eucharist in their congregation(s) when called upon by the pastor, provided that the leader’s authorization is current with the Bishop’s office. This enduring letter is no longer in effect upon the resignation of the pastor.
* The Synod Supply Coordinator makes worship leadership assignments for congregations without a called pastor, and may assign an Authorized Lay Worship Leader to supply at one of these congregations. Such assignments are made in consultation with the office of the bishop which issues the required letter of permission.
* The bishop may give written permission for an Authorized Lay Worship Leader in special situations to lead worship, preach, and preside at a particular congregation for an extended period of time. A letter of permission, indicating their assignment, is sent from the office of the bishop to the Authorized Lay Worship Leader and is copied to the congregation to be served.

## Congregational Settings

Authorized lay leaders are not authorized to serve in congregations outside of the Upper Susquehanna Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. If asked to serve in a congregation of another denomination or synod, authorized lay leaders may only respond as individuals at their own discretion but are not authorized by the bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod to do so.

Authorized Lay Worship Leaders may lead worship in union congregations with the permission of the office of the bishop under the supervision of the Lutheran pastor of the federated or union congregations. When a federated or union congregation is served by a non-Lutheran pastor, special arrangements are made through the office of the bishop.

## Expectations for Authorized Lay Leaders

All authorized lay leaders shall:

* Represent the Lord and his Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Upper Susquehanna Synod with the grace, dignity, respect, and responsibility required of their position.
* Report any difficulties and/or irregularities to the office of the bishop within 48 hours of their designated visit to a congregation.
* Use only this title (Lay Worship Leader) to identify themselves in person or in print only when presiding at an assigned setting. They shall never use the title Reverend, Pastor, Deacon, etc. in person or in print.
* Never wear a clerical collar or other attire which specifically identifies those individuals called to and ordained for the Office of Word and Sacrament.

Authorized Lay Worship Leaders shall also:

* Follow the normal worship practices of the congregations in which they are serving.
* Be diligent in preparing to lead worship.
* Carry written authorization from the bishop when presiding at the Eucharist.
* Be entitled to compensation for their services at the supply rate set by the U.S.S., including reimbursement for mileage at the current IRS reimbursement rate.
* Normally wear a white alb when leading worship. Stoles of any kind and chasubles are inappropriate and shall not be worn.
* NOT baptize someone during a regular service of worship or in private.
* NOT officiate at a wedding, since they are not authorized to do so by the Upper Susquehanna Synod or the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
* Normally NOT conduct a funeral service. Unless authorized by the [interim] pastor of the congregation and, if communion is offered, the bishop.

# Expectations for Supervising Pastors of Authorized Lay Leaders

Supervising pastors are a key partner in the continued authorization of lay leaders by the bishop. It is a local, supervising Minister of Word and Sacrament who provides for the ongoing supervision and accountability of an authorized lay leader through a mutually-established, annually-renewed covenant.

The authorized lay leader is responsible for initiating a supervisor relationship with a Minister of Word and Sacrament of the Upper Susquehanna Synod. Ideally, but not necessarily, the supervisor may be the lay leader’s own pastor. Together, the authorized lay leader and their supervisor complete a covenant which outlines their mutual expectations (**Appendix**). The authorized lay leader provides a copy of the covenant, signed by both partners, to the synod office when applying for initial or continued authorization. Both partners are responsible for fulfilling the expectations of the covenant.

A supervising pastor is expected (as are all rostered leaders) to uphold the standards of *Definitions and Guidelines For Discipline* (**Appendix**) at all times, and the “Normative Ethical Practices for Ordained Ministers of the Upper Susquehanna Synod” (**Appendix**). A supervisor who violates these standards and practices may be terminated by the bishop in his/her role as a supervisor, and be subjected to further discipline according to the practices of the ELCA.

If a supervisor is unable to keep a covenant, they are to alert bishop and the authorized lay leader as soon as possible to allow them time to find a new supervising partner—a requirement for the leader’s continued authorization.

# Continuing Education for Authorized Lay Leaders

Authorized lay leaders need opportunities for continued growth in competence and understanding as they utilize their gifts in ministry. Continuing education is how leaders enhance ministry abilities, acquire new skills, and experience personal growth for more effective ministry. It is the expectation of the Upper Susquehanna Synod that each authorized lay leader participates in at least one continuing education experience annually, for a total of no less than six contact hours. Such experiences may include: formal classes or workshops, independent study, participation in pericope study groups, and the like. The leader’s plan for their continuing education experience shall be included in their annual covenant with their mentor.

# Discipline

Authorized lay leaders hold a unique and important public position and responsibility in the Upper Susquehanna Synod and the church at large. This position should never be taken lightly. Failure to function appropriately as an authorized lay leader shall result in immediate discipline through the office of the bishop and may include termination of authorization and removal from the roll of authorized lay leaders of this synod. Questionable or inappropriate behavior on the part of an authorized lay leader shall be reported to the office of the bishop immediately.

*Adopted by the Upper Susquehanna Synod Assembly, 1996.*

*Amended by Synod Council, November 19, 2022*

# APPENDICES

### *Appendices are being revised and will be added as revisions are completed*