



Upstate New York Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Synod Authorized Ministry (SAM) Program Manual

June 2023 Edition

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Introduction

The Synod Authorized Ministry (SAM) Program of the Upstate New York Synod seeks to help identify the gifts God has given God's people and to help equip those people for the ministry of sharing the Good News among all people. The SAM Program of the Upstate New York Synod is an implementation of Synod-authorized Ministry as described in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*.

7.31.10.Synod-authorized Ministry. When need exists to render Word and Sacrament ministry for a congregation or ministry of this church where it is not feasible to provide rostered ministers of Word and Sacrament, the synod bishop—acting with the consent of the congregation or ministry, in consultation with the Synod Council, and in accord with standards and qualifications developed by the appropriate churchwide unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and approved by the Church Council—may authorize a person who is a member of a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to offer this ministry. Such an individual shall be supervised by a minister of Word and Sacrament appointed by the synod bishop; such service shall be rendered during its duration under the sacramental authority of the bishop as the synod's pastor. Such an individual will be trained to fulfill this ministry for a specified period of time and in a given location only. Authorization, remuneration, direct supervision, and accountability are to be determined by the appropriate synod leadership according to churchwide standards and qualifications for this type of ministry. Authorization for such service shall be reviewed annually and renewed only when a demonstrated need remains for its continuation

- ❖ The SAM Program will identify and equip persons for service in congregations.
- ❖ When willing, SAMs may be assigned by the Upstate New York Synod bishop and authorized for certain leadership functions in specific synod-related locations for a specified length of time where they will work with an ordained pastor as supervisor.
- ❖ SAMs always serve in partnership with ordained pastors, not independent of ordained pastors.
- ❖ The SAM Program is administered by the Upstate New York Synod of the ELCA.
- ❖ The SAM Steering Committee is involved in determining the process of application and program of preparation, in harmony with the guidelines established by the ELCA and its Conference of Bishops, which oversee synod-authorized ministries. The SAM Steering Committee also has general oversight of the program, with accountability to the bishop of the Upstate New York Synod. The SAM Steering Committee will provide the bishop with recommendations concerning authorization, suitability, and accountability for service within the synod. The committee is composed of SAMs and pastors approved by the bishop. One SAM Student also serves on the committee.

Definitions

- ❖ *Synod Authorized Minister (SAM)*: a person raised up as a leader in the Church who has been vetted, trained, and authorized to serve as a lay minister in organizations of the Upstate New York Synod. We distinguish between Certified SAMs, those primarily serving as worship leaders and lay preachers in pastoral absences, and Assigned SAMs, those serving a single congregation or ministry setting in an ongoing way in place of a rostered minister of Word and Sacrament serving in that setting.
- ❖ *SAM Student*: an enrolled student who has not completed his/ her studies.
- ❖ *Certified SAM*: a SAM who has completed her/his/their studies and is certified for ministry. These SAMs are also available to supply preach and/or preside with permission from the bishop.
- ❖ *Assigned SAM*: a SAM who has completed studies, is certified for ministry, and assigned by the bishop to serve a congregation or ministry setting.
- ❖ *Congregational Authorized Lay Minister (CALM)*: lay leader serving in their home congregation under the direction of their pastor. These folks are under the care of their congregation with no supervision from the synod supported SAM program. If they are presiding at eucharist the pastor must seek authorization from the office of the Bishop.
- ❖ *Mentor*: an ordained ELCA pastor working with SAM Student(s) or a certified SAM(s)
- ❖ *SAM Supervisor*: an ordained ELCA pastor supervising an assigned SAM or SAM on your congregation staff.

Recruitment of Candidates

Pastors, deacons, and congregations should identify and encourage people to consider this opportunity for service to Christ's church. Individuals may also indicate their interest to their pastor, deacon, or congregation council. Great care must be exercised by the pastor, deacon, and congregation council to evaluate a potential student's sense of call, spiritual maturity, leadership skills, commitment to the ELCA, and willingness to learn and serve.

SAM Student Handbook

SAM course work “is designed to challenge and take students into deeper and more adequate theological understanding and articulation. This may seem unsettling as you are asked to examine your conventional theology and consider new perspectives. Finally, this process is not about deconstructing faith but arriving at a more adequate theology that can measure up to the profound questions you will face in ministry situations....” (Dr. Craig Nesson; address to Wartburg Theological Seminary, September 2018).

Requirements of SAM Students

- ❖ Applicants must be active members of an ELCA congregation for at least one year and remain active ELCA members to maintain SAM Student status.
- ❖ The application packet is found on the UNYS website and is to be filled out by the applicant, by their congregation council, and all required references. All completed application materials and the non-refundable application fee are sent to the Upstate New York Synod. Admission to the Program is decided by the SAM Steering Committee along with the bishop of this synod.
- ❖ The participant is expected to demonstrate spiritual maturity and a willingness to learn, serve, and grow.
- ❖ Per ELCA Church Council guidelines, as a candidate for ministry, all SAM Students are expected to abide by Definition and Guidelines for Discipline of Rostered Ministers. The document is available at www.elca.org.
- ❖ SAM certification is an educational program of part-time studies over two to five years, with the pace determined by the student.
- ❖ Participants must successfully complete the required courses and training specified.
- ❖ Each SAM Student must select an ordained ELCA pastor as their mentor--usually their home pastor--for guidance, wisdom, and support who will “walk through” the program with him/her/ them. The name and contact information for your mentor must be reported to the UNYS Synod Office and kept up to date.
- ❖ Before being able to do pulpit supply as a recognized SAM Student, the following courses must be successfully completed: How Lutherans Interpret the Bible; Old Testament; New Testament; Systematic Theology; Lutheran Theology/Confessional Writings; Preaching.
- ❖ Upon completion of the program requirements, participants will be interviewed by members of the SAM Steering Committee. The Synod Council may then certify the student who has satisfactorily completed the program and has been recommended by the SAM Steering Committee.
- ❖ SAMs and SAM Students retain their membership in their home congregation.

Evaluations and Expectations During Preparation

Persons who are considered for ministry through the Synod Authorized Ministry Program must meet the criteria for public ministry with a congregation or other ministry of this church:

1. Evidence of mature Christian faith and commitment to Christ.
2. Satisfactory completion of the synod program of preparation including demonstration of appropriate ministry skills, payment of all fees, and all required paperwork.
3. Knowledge and acceptance of the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
4. A willingness to meet the ELCA's expectations concerning personal conduct and behavior of persons serving in public ministry. (See *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*, linked in the [References and Resources](#) section).

Assessment of each participant's progress will include:

1. The Facilitator's Course Report regarding course work and attendance sent by each facilitator to the SAM Office for each course completed by class participants.
2. Online courses are evaluated by Select Learning's facilitators, and all fees for online courses are paid directly to Select Learning by the student. All Select Learning courses require an evaluation by a Select Learning representative, of a ten-page reflection paper showing acceptable course completion. See the Select Learning website for details. Select Learning certificates of successful completion of a course must be forwarded to the UNYS Synod Office for credit to be granted.
3. The course of study requires core courses to be eligible for certification as a SAM. The first course any student takes must be the required prerequisite, How Lutherans Interpret the Bible. The mentor submits a short evaluation of the students processing of the material. The student is NOT required to write a paper, and no credit is granted.
4. All required courses use material from Select Learning, distance education service of the ELCA. See Select Learning for fees <https://www.selectlearning.org>
5. Courses may be taken online or in a facilitator-led group. When this is not possible, courses may be taken as independent study with the advance approval of the UNYS synod office. When ten-page final papers are required for a course, they must be sent to Select Learning by the SAM Student within two weeks of completing the course. Students are strongly encouraged to have their mentor go over their paper before submitting the paper or evaluation.
6. The following are the only approved core courses. Except for "Spiritual Practice" and "Essential Boundaries," all are available through Select Learning:
 - a. How Lutherans Interpret the Bible (prerequisite)
 - b. Introduction to the Old Testament
 - c. Introduction to the New Testament
 - d. Getting Down to Basics: Augsburg Confession & Small Catechism
 - e. Systematic Theology: Fundamentals of Christian Theology

- f. Foundations of Biblical Preaching
- g. Lutheran Heritage
- h. Ethics in Lutheran Perspective
- i. Spiritual Practices and Faith Development
- j. Essential Boundaries for Wise Leaders—101

“Essential Boundaries for Wise Leaders, 101” must be completed prior to the certification interview with SAM Steering Committee. Students are strongly encouraged to take this training early in their studies. Credit toward SAM Program requirements is not granted for boundary training while a SAM Student.

Some other things to note about course work and preparation expectations:

1. SAM students are required to attend one online UNYS SAM Convocation per year during their studies. This cost will vary. This may be something that your congregation is willing to assist you with financially. For “need- based” scholarships, contact the SAM Program staff for confidential assistance.
2. No credit will be given for the following: Synod Assembly; regular ministerial association or cluster meetings; pericope/text study groups; boundaries training.
3. Evidence of prior preparation that has achieved the goals and standards of the Upstate New York Synod SAM Program will be evaluated by the SAM Steering Committee for certification.

Scholarships and Costs

Congregations are encouraged to share the financial responsibilities with the SAM Student.

Need-based scholarships may be available from the SAM Program. Please inquire with the Lay Ministry Program Coordinator.

Other

The bishop along with the SAM Steering Committee has the right to terminate the student from the program at any time. SAM Students working toward their certification may function in approved ways as identified by the congregation, synod, and bishop if they have the bishop’s approval. The SAM Student may be asked to go through a psychological evaluation.

Certified and Assigned SAM Handbook

Certification

SAM Students who satisfactorily complete the SAM Student Program requirements may be certified for ministry by the Upstate New York Synod upon successful completion of the certification interview with the SAM Steering Committee and approval of the Synod Council.

A SAM Program participant may be asked to go through a psychological evaluation at any time.

All SAMs are expected to participate in boundary training once every three years.

Renewal of Certification

- A. The Application for Renewal of Certification must be submitted annually by any SAM wanting to renew their certification as a Synod Authorized Ministry in the Upstate New York Synod. Applications for renewal are due May 1. Certification is for July 1 through June 30 of the following year. Action on these requests will be taken by June 30, with certification valid through June 30 of the following year. Applications received after May 1 will not be considered and certification revoked. However, you may apply for reinstatement of certification the following year.
- B. Consideration for renewal of certification will be granted or denied based on fulfillment of the continuing education requirements, required references and abiding by SAM Program expectations. The SAM Steering Committee may request an interview as part of the recertification process.
- C. Per ELCA Church Council policy, all SAMs are expected to abide by *Definition and Guidelines for Discipline*, linked in [References and Resources](#).

Accountability and Revocation

- A. Because SAMs are accountable to the whole church through the office of the synodical bishop, authorization to provide ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the synodical bishop who need not specify the reason.
- B. The SAM Steering Committee provides the synodical bishop with recommendations concerning authorization of and accountability for authorized ministries within the synod.
- C. Certification will be revoked if and/or when a SAM leaves or is removed from Upstate New York Synod membership for any reason.

Titles and Clerical Attire

- A. SAMs will not wear clerical attire - e.g. clerical collars, clerical or diaconal stoles.

- B. SAMs are not to use the titles Pastor or Deacon because these are used only for ministers on the churchwide roster of the ELCA. Neither is the title Vicar to be used, as Vicar refers to interns for pastoral ministry.

Continuing Education

- A. A minimum of twelve hours of continuing education per year is required. One hour of learning time equals one contact hour of continuing education. Snack, break, and meal times do not count for learning time.
- B. You may use online and video learning resources from sources such as Select Learning, The Great Courses, and distance learning sites of seminaries, colleges, and universities. You may also attend in person learning opportunities.
- C. Continuing education credits can be earned for reports on books read for the enhancement of ministry. A summary report should focus on new insights gained and how the new learning will be applied in the SAM's ministry. Credits are awarded as follows:
 - Less than 200 pages in book = 3 hours
 - More than 200 pages in book = 5 hours
- D. To receive continuing education credit, SAMs must submit a Continuing Education Report to the synod office.

Annual Reports

All SAMs are required to send completed annual evaluation forms to the UNYS synod office by May 1. It is the SAM's responsibility to remind mentors, congregation councils, and supervisors of the annual evaluation requirement and deadlines.

Certified SAM Specific Guidance

Mentors

1. Certified SAMs are required to have an ordained ELCA pastor as their mentor.
2. Specific duties of mentors and supervisors are described in the SAM Mentor and Supervisor Handbook.
3. The name and contact information for your mentor must be reported to the UNYS Synod Office and kept up to date.

Compensation for Supply Preaching

The following is the fee schedule adopted by Synod Council for regular minimum guidelines. All payment should be given directly to the SAM.

Supply Preaching Compensation (SC.12.04.04.) - in September 2019 the Synod Council approved synod wide regular supply preaching minimum compensation to become effective January 1, 2020:

- \$150 Supply for one service
- \$175. Supply for two services on the same day
- \$ 50 Add per service over two services on the same day
- \$125 Supply an extra day
- \$100 Add for Saturday in same weekend

Compensation for Other Ministry

Negotiated on a case by case basis. The office of the bishop can offer guidance and support in this process.

Authorization to Preside at Holy Communion

1. Requests for a certified SAM to preside must be made to the bishop at least one month prior to the requested service date by the pastor of the congregation.
2. When a SAM is frequently serving in the same place, the bishop may grant a request that extends to more than one service of Holy Communion. Requests must be made by the pastor of the congregation.

Preaching in Congregations

Certified SAMs may be called on to preach in a congregation. Copies of sermons must be shared with their mentor pastor.

Assigned SAM Specific Guidance

Supervision and Accountability of Assigned SAMs

- A. In all cases, an assigned SAM shall be under the direct supervision of an ordained ELCA pastor approved by the bishop. Exceptions require the specific approval of the bishop.
- B. Local accountability and supervision for an assigned SAM in a congregational setting is the direct responsibility of the congregation council. At least once per year the assigned SAM and council should set aside time to discuss: the professional and spiritual strengths of the SAM; the professional and spiritual growth areas of the SAM; how the ministry is going; where ministry could be improved.
- C. The responsibilities of the supervising pastor shall include:
 - a. Monthly consultation with the SAM.

- b. Review of the SAM Program guidelines described in this handbook and the Mentors and Supervisors Handbook with the council and for the supervisor's own awareness.
 - c. Support as needed and outlined in the handbook for mentors and supervisors.
 - d. Provide appropriate support when an SAM assignment ends
- D. Assigned SAMs are required to meet 4 times a year to provide mutual support to one another. This peer to peer group will be convened by the assistant to the bishop who is overseeing the SAM program.

Compensation

Office of the Bishop and steering committee will work with the congregation and SAM to negotiate a contract

Mentor & Supervisor Handbook

Mentoring a SAM Student

Application Process

- ❖ Discuss with the potential student his/her/their sense of call, spiritual maturity, leadership skills, commitment to the ELCA, and willingness to learn and serve. Include those reflections on the application packet's recommendation forms from the council and pastor.
- ❖ Work with the prospective student and the council to determine the level of financial support the congregation will provide for SAM studies.
- ❖ Need-based scholarships for courses are available so that cost does not stand in the way of SAM studies. Direct the applicant to contact the SAM Program Director or Administrator for confidential consideration.
- ❖ The mentoring pastor shall review and understand the SAM Student Handbook and Mentor and Supervisor Handbook.

During Studies

- ❖ Each SAM Student must have an ordained ELCA pastor as a mentor. Usually the mentor is their home pastor. The mentor provides guidance, wisdom, support, and walks beside the student during their studies.
- ❖ All SAM Students are required to watch and discuss, with their mentor, the course "How Lutherans Interpret the Bible." This is a prerequisite course and must be completed before taking any other SAM courses. Upon completion of the course, the mentor must send a brief summary of how the student grasped the content of the course and any concerns that arose.
- ❖ Be intentional in checking with the SAM Student about completing coursework in a timely manner, especially writing the paper.
- ❖ Read drafts of each paper that the student writes and offer constructive feedback to the student before they submit the paper for course credit.
- ❖ Upon beginning the preaching course, provide the student with opportunities to preach. Work with the student as she/he prepares the sermon and receives feedback.
- ❖ Remind the student that he/she is not eligible to provide pulpit supply as a SAM Student until the following courses have been completed: How Lutherans Interpret the Bible; Old Testament; New Testament; Systematic Theology; Lutheran Confessions; Foundations of Biblical Preaching.
- ❖ Work with the SAM Student to ensure that the required Mentor/Supervisor/Council Annual Evaluation is submitted to the SAM Office by **May 1**.

Mentoring A Certified SAM

Policies and Reports

- ❖ The mentoring pastor shall review and understand the [Certified and Assigned SAM Handbook](#), the [Certified SAM Specific Guidance](#), and the [Mentor & Supervisor Handbook](#).
- ❖ Complete the annual Mentor/Supervisor/Council Annual Evaluation by **May 1**. This is a required part of the recertification process.
- ❖ Like rostered ministers of the ELCA, SAMs are accountable to the bishop and subject to discipline by the bishop.

Learning

- ❖ Encourage the SAM to meet the requirement of 12 hours of continuing education per year. Let them know about continuing education events you are aware of. See [Continuing Education](#) for information on the types of activities to encourage.

Serving

- ❖ Should the need arise, remind the SAM that “SAMs always serve in partnership with ordained pastors, not independent of ordained pastors.”
- ❖ Encourage a SAM to participate in text study groups.
- ❖ SAMs are not to offer any counseling as part of their ministries unless they hold the appropriate credentials.
- ❖ SAMs will not wear clerical attire (i.e. clerical collars, clergy or diaconal stoles) and will not use the title Pastor, Deacon, or Vicar.

Supervising an Assigned SAM

Policies and Reports

- ❖ The mentoring pastor shall review and understand the [Certified and Assigned SAM Handbook](#), the [Assigned SAM Specific Guidance](#), and the [Mentor & Supervisor Handbook](#).
- ❖ The Application for Renewal of Certification must be submitted annually by any SAM wanting to renew their certification as a Synod Authorized Ministry in the Upstate New York Synod. Applications for renewal are due May 1. Certification is for July 1 through June 30 of the following year. Action on these requests will be taken by June 30, with certification valid through June 30 of the following year. Applications received after June 1 will not be considered and certification revoked. However, you may apply for reinstatement of certification; applications are due May 1.

- ❖ The supervising pastor shall have a monthly conversation/consultation with the assigned SAM.
- ❖ Annually meet with the council of the church to which the SAM is assigned to review how ministry is unfolding with the SAM, answer questions, and offer guidance as needed.
- ❖ Review the SAM Program guidelines described in the Certified SAM Handbook and the Mentors and Supervisors Handbook with the council.
- ❖ Receive concerns of the congregation the SAM is assigned to and share them with the bishop's office.
- ❖ Like rostered leaders of the ELCA, SAMs are accountable to and subject to discipline by the bishop. • Complete the Mentor/Supervisor/Council Annual Evaluation by May 1

Learning

- ❖ Encourage the SAM to meet the requirement of 12 hours of continuing education per year. Let them know about continuing education events you are aware of. See [Continuing Education](#) for information on the types of activities to encourage.

Serving

- ❖ Teach the assigned SAM how to keep congregational records, record pastoral acts, complete the ELCA parochial report and other annual forms for our ELCA and synod.
- ❖ As necessary, coach the SAM for their role and participation in council meetings.
- ❖ If the Assigned SAM has difficulty accessing people who are in hospitals, care or correctional facilities, the Assigned SAM may request from the SAM Office an ID card signed by the bishop identifying the SAM as authorized for ministry.
- ❖ Assigned SAMs will not wear clerical attire (i.e. clerical collars, clergy or diaconal stoles) and will not use the title Pastor, Deacon, or Vicar.
- ❖ Assigned SAMs are certified for sacraments only at the church/parish to which they have been assigned. This authorization allows them to preside at sacraments off the church property as long as it is a ministry function of that congregation/parish.

Transition Time

- ❖ When it becomes known that the SAM's assignment is ending, work with the SAM on their transition back to serving in partnership with the pastor instead of functioning in the place of an ordained pastor. This can be a time of grief and discernment in a SAM's life.
- ❖ Remind the SAM to select a mentor before their assignment ends since she/he will no longer have a supervisor. The SAM must report their new mentor to the SAM Steering Committee as soon as the relationship is confirmed.

Appendix

References and Resources

- We are indebted to our siblings in the Nebraska Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, whose handbooks for their [Parish Ministry Associate](#) program served as a starting point and guide in developing this manual.
- [*Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the ELCA \(Roster Manual\)*](#)
- [*ELCA Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*](#)