

Expectations for Congregations Served by Synod Authorized Ministers (SAMs)

The Northeastern Iowa Synod recognizes that the Holy Spirit is at work raising up local people to share the Gospel and serve in ministry. Synod Authorized Ministers (SAMs) are people not called to ordained ministry but trained and equipped to lead worship, preach, and preside at the sacraments (baptism and holy communion) for a limited time in a specific location.

The following guidelines and expectations are meant to assist congregations, potential SAMs, and the Northeastern Iowa Synod staff and Synod Council determine the suitability of a congregation for Synod Authorized Ministry.

A Well-Suited Congregation will:

1. **Be unable to call a full-time ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament** (pastor) for one or more of the following reasons:
 - a. *Affordability*: The cost of compensation for full-time ordained leadership continues to rise. Combined with stagnant or diminishing giving, the ability of a congregation to pay for a full-time pastor is not possible.
 - b. *Lack of Partnership Opportunities*: Partnership opportunities with other nearby congregations and/or ministry sites (care facilities, chaplain opportunities etc...) have been explored and found to be unworkable.
 - c. *Pastoral Transition*: The discrepancy between the number of available calls and the numbers of pastors available for call in the ELCA is resulting in congregations going longer periods between pastors. The diminishing number of Interim and Supply pastors means that congregations are sometimes going up to three years or more without pastoral leadership. Congregations are expected to stay in the call process while being served by a SAM or explore other options like a Collaborative Learning (CL) or TEEM student attending seminary.
2. **Adjust their expectations for pastoral ministry**
 - a. *Worship Planning and Leadership*: The primary ministry of a SAM is worship planning and leadership, including preaching and presiding at the sacraments. This may also include funeral services. Weddings can be planned, arranged, and led by a SAM but the wedding license will need to be signed by a member of the ordained clergy who is present at the ceremony. SAMs are not allowed to obtain online ordinations.
 - b. *Recruit others to ministry tasks*: Home, care facility, hospital, and other pastoral care visits can and should be shared with other members of the congregation. Communion can be taken to people unable to attend worship in person in coordination with the SAM. Administration of church records, filing reports, and overseeing staff should be done by members other than the SAM.
 - c. *Spiritual Care*: SAMs will have rudimentary spiritual care training. Congregations that are served by SAMs should plan on contracting with local ordained clergy to provide spiritual care for their members.
 - d. *Reduced hours of availability*: SAMs will be bi-vocational or retired. They will not be available or on-call 24/7. Congregations and SAMs should establish firm boundaries of when the SAM is available to be contacted.
 - e. *Create a Phone List*: Provide a list of names and contact info of who to call for different needs and distribute to the congregation. For example, the SAM should not be the first person called to have the church unlocked for a meeting or to reserve a room for an event. Who is that person?

3. Commit to Fully Support a SAM

- a. *Pray for the SAM:* Worship leadership is a spiritual endeavor. The congregation should be praying for their SAM regularly.
- b. *Provide fair compensation:* The Northeastern Iowa Synod Compensation Committee will provide guidelines to fair compensation rates for SAMs. A Covenant (relational agreement) and a contract (legal agreement) will be required for all congregations and SAMs.
- c. *Hold the ministry of the Gospel we all share on par with the welfare of the congregation and the SAM:* We are gathered together for the sake of the Gospel which we receive as a gift of grace for the good of all. When one of these suffer, all suffer. Following the example of Matthew 18, disagreements and conflicts should be addressed and work towards a resolution should be shared by all.
- d. *Provide Compensation for a coach/mentor:* Every SAM will be given an ordained coach/mentor that will meet with them regularly to provide support, address concerns, and answer questions. Congregations are expected to provide compensation for that coach/mentor at a beginning rate of \$75/month. Coaches may mentor more than one SAM at a time and may work with them in groups.

4. Commit to create a Congregational Vitality Plan

- a. *Outlining vital ministries and goals:* Identify the vital ministries of the congregation including worship and care of the membership. Other ministries like Christian education, fellowship programs, and community outreach should have attainable goals listed as well as how the congregation will work towards attaining those goals.
- b. *Include a plan for completion of public ministry:* Create a plan for the completion of ministry and closing. Identify the necessary steps and who will be responsible for making sure they are taken to dispose of church property or provide for their perpetual care. Determine what factors will signal the initiation of the completion plan (average attendance, average age of members, certain threshold of giving to the congregation).
- c. *Partner with the Northeastern Iowa Synod:* The Synod office has resources to assist with completing such a plan. Failure to work on a plan may result in revocation of Synod Authorization.

5. Other Considerations

- a. *Large Congregation & Parishes:* SAMs may be appropriate when a large congregation or multiple point parish is in need of more than one ordained pastor. How and when a trained lay person is authorized may need to be amended in these cases to meet the needs of the specific ministry site and fall within other guidelines of the ELCA.
- b. *Assisting Ministers:* Congregations or parishes may want to have one or more people go through the training program to serve as assisting ministers in worship and/or provide preaching relief for pastors during busy seasons like Lent and Advent. An assisting minister may help to cover a pastor's absence while on vacation or sabbatical.
- c. *Priorities:* As this program gets started, the Northeastern Iowa Synod will prioritize congregations that have been without pastoral leadership the longest. Some well-suited congregations and applicants may be put on a waiting list to begin at a later time.