



THE ASSIGNMENT PROCESS

The Assignment Process for all Rostered Leaders of our ELCA takes place two times each year.

Most candidates for ministry are assigned in early March. Another group of candidates is assigned in October.

Each Region sends their Regional Coordinator and a bishop to represent the region. Each seminary sends a representative to speak on behalf of the students from the seminary perspective. I have served as the Region 5 (Iowa, Wisconsin, Upper Michigan and Illinois) representative for our bishops for ten years.

Although some still tease that this process is much like a 'draft' it is a process that blends the needs of our church and our candidates with prayer, fairness and common sense.

Lay Roster candidates are normally assigned to their synods of origin as many have a ministry setting worked out accordingly. The rest are part of a network that is publically accessible by all our congregations across the ELCA. If Lay Roster candidates are mobile they are not restricted in the process in any way. It is difficult, I will admit, for those wishing to be mobile to find suitable positions across our church.

Pastoral candidates are first assigned to a Region and then to a particular synod. This is based on a simple formula. Regions report the number of 'First Call' openings they actually can place someone in within six months. We take the number of openings (This year a one-to-one ratio; 200 candidates and 200 openings) and compare that with the number of candidates so that each Region gets a fair share according to their needs.

(Note: When I first started it was common for a synod to receive about 33% of their needs in each assignment process. So if we had 10 openings here in the East Central Synod, we might receive 3-4 candidates to fill them for the sake of fairness across the church. This year's 100% ratio is the first time this has occurred in our ELCA. The downturned economy, limited mobility and delayed retirements are the three keys to this reality.)

The process hinges on 'best matches' for candidates and congregations. While geographical preferences are considered where possible, by in large, we look to be sure to place candidates in synods where there is a Call that matches their gifts and skills as well as their family situation. (EX: If Sue's husband needs to finish a degree in a university setting she will most often be assigned to a synod where there is a Call that is good for her and our church and where her husband has a chance to continue his education process.)

We pause for prayer regularly throughout this process. Seminaries are free to advocate for the needs of their students and do so with integrity, candor and thoughtfulness. It is not a perfect process to be sure. (EX: Each year there may be 20-25 students hoping to be assigned to Region 9. Region 9 may have 10 'First Call' openings. There will be between 10-15 candidates who will be assigned to regions other than their first choice.) It is a process that is guided by God's Holy Spirit and the good will of all concerned.