

Report of the Synod Authorized Minister Committee

The SAM (Synod Authorized Minister) Committee has been working hard over the last year to put pieces in place for a reimagined SAM program in order to meet the current and continually changing ministry landscape.

Many of you may be wondering what a SAM is and how a SAM fits within, or more accurately alongside, our various rostered ministers.

To be clear, a SAM is NOT a rostered leader, nor are they a permanent solution for a gap in ordained leadership. But they are authorized by the synod to do some of the work that is typically done by pastors and deacons in a limited capacity (i.e. preaching, administering the sacraments, visitation, etc.).

We understand that there are many congregations in transition who might be waiting for a considerable time before they are able to call a pastor. Maybe you are discerning the need for a part time pastor or shared ministry, and a SAM could help during that interim. Maybe you are a multi-point parish and your pastor could use some additional help with visitation and preaching; a SAM could work alongside them.

There is much flexibility to the ways a SAM could be utilized, which is why the committee is committed to meet with congregations who are exploring the possibility in order to clarify, answer questions, and hopefully avoid confusion and misunderstandings. We have not yet added the compensation guidelines or the contract that we have developed for SAMs to the website because we thought it might be more confusing than helpful if you have not yet had a chance to meet with someone from the committee. We are currently discussing when to make those public on the website.

SAM candidates must be recommended to the Synod by a letter of recommendation from the church council, with the agreement of the potential SAM. After the letter is received, the committee requests previous education experience and starts the SAM on the path to candidacy. Each SAM found in a church will have been entranced into candidacy. This process allows the synod to insure the integrity and preparedness of the SAM for the work to which they will be involved, and it also sets the candidate up to continue on a course to full time ministry in the future if they discern a call to it. The church will be asked to assist in the costs associated with a psychological evaluation and background check, as well as contributing to expenses related to any remaining required education.

The ELCA has a list of course topics that they have determined a SAM needs to engage in their work with a congregation. The Lay School in our synod is able to address most of those courses, and we are working with Wartburg and the Education Exchange to provide the courses that we do not offer. Because the Lay School board is committed to ensuring that our emphasis is on classes for all people, the instructors will be adding in some additional assessments of competency for SAM candidates only. I am part of the Education Exchange group that will be working across synods to talk about/develop standards or competencies so there is basic consistency across synods and courses. This is in its infancy stages.

We have a FAQ page along with other information about SAM listed on the ECSW website with a lot of common questions and answers regarding SAM. I encourage you to visit www.ecsw.org/sam for more information.

This year, we have officially entranced three candidates as SAMs: Roxie Kenitzer at Mount Calvary, and Jim Hartleben and Leigh Welander at TULIP.

Please keep them in your prayers!

As a committee we continue to ask for grace as we adjust and respond to questions/concerns/unforeseen situations that require us to adjust course or clarify.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Jen Hoffman