RESOURCES FOR CANDIDACY COMMITTEES IN SUPPORTING LGBTQIA+ LEADERS



ReconcilingWorks
LUTHERANS FOR FULL PARTICIPATION

CONTENT



THE HOPE FOR THIS RESOURCE

This resource is meant to provide information and insight for Candidacy Committees to support LGBTQIA+ Candidates seeking ordination.

HOSPITALITY IN ACTION

How institutions create welcome has an impact on engagement. ReconcilingWorks has some recommendations that will help to create a safer and more hospitable process.

TRAINING & EDUCATION FOR CANDIDACY COMMITTEES

There is always something new to learn in how to best see, name, and care for LGBTQIA+ people. These suggestions are here to support you in continuing education.

DOCUMENTS & FORMS TO REVIEW AND UPDATE

It is critical candidacy committees recognize our documents, policies, processes, and forms are an extension of hospitality. Reviewing and updating them helps to ensure safer and clearer support and welcome.

HOPES FOR THE RESOURCE



"The ELCA candidacy process is meant to be a welcoming and joyful opportunity for people to discern how to serve in and through the church." – ELCA Candidacy Manual pg. 8

This resource is meant to provide information and insight for candidacy committees to support LGBTQIA+ Candidates seeking ordination. It will be divided into three sections: Hospitality in Action, Documents and Forms to Review, and Training and Educational Opportunities. Paying attention to those three dimensions of the work will help a synod and a candidacy committee create and maintain a more welcoming and inclusive process for candidates.

ReconcilingWorks understands the complexities of beauty and wonders within the diversity of the LGBTQIA+ community. This resource is an introduction on how to practice hospitality in our wondering and remember the importance of being committed to learning how to continue accompanying LGBTQIA+ people who are candidates in their journey to discern a call to rostered ministry.

As our church strives to grow more diverse, it is important to be aware of the biases we as people bring to the process and are aware of the dangers of assimilation. This journey of accompaniment and leadership will require all the people involved to pause, breathe, and ground themselves in the gifts the church receives when people can bring their full selves to their call and service.



HOSPITALITY IN ACTION

"Characteristics of synodical candidacy committee members should include a sense of hospitality and the ability to build nurturing relationships, patience, and willingness to receive training." – ELCA Candidacy Manual pg. 13

How we create welcome has a tremendous impact on engagement. Learn some recommendations to create a safe and inviting process.

As LGBTQIA+ leaders strive to navigate the candidacy process faithfully, they far too often encounter a system created in a way that allows exclusion, othering, and continued marginalization. The suggestions shared are meant to help create a safer and more welcoming experience for LGBTQIA+ candidates and increase awareness for committee members as they strive to build nurturing relationships, practice patience, and increase their awareness in how to best see, name, and care for LGBTQIA+ leaders.

HOSPITALITY IN ACTION

ASKING FOR & USING PRONOUNS

Understanding there is a difference between a person's sex assigned at birth, gender identity, and gender expression makes pronouns important. Pronouns are the words taking the place of the noun used to describe a person, in the way a person wants others to use when talking to or about them. Asking someone a question like “What pronouns do you use?” is a great way to hospitably see, name, and care for LGBTQIA+ people. Pronouns can be used in email signatures, in names on Zoom/video calls, and on nametags.



MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE MOST VULNERABLE/MARGINALIZED PEOPLE

What adaptations can be made to address the needs of vulnerable and/or marginalized people and still meet the goal and purpose of the space and meeting? For people in marginalized communities, there are many ways to be unintentionally excluded from gathering safely. As a committee, be mindful of how physical, financial, emotional, and spiritual barriers can have an impact on a person's ability to gather.

ADAPTING TO DIVERSE NEEDS & IDENTITIES

When a candidate is the first from an underrepresented community, they may find themselves educating the committee about their identity and experiences. This can place an additional burden on LGBTQIA+ and other marginalized candidates. Committee members should express gratitude for this emotional labor, remain open to learning, and avoid becoming defensive about gaps in their understanding.

Examples of how a committee can express gratitude are:

- Thank you for sharing _____ with the committee. If you are comfortable, would you please teach us a better way for the committee to ensure you are seen, named, and cared for in a way that is honoring and respectful?
- Thank you for sharing _____ with the committee. We have some learning to do with this. We are committed to finding resources and expanding my/our awareness and learning.
- It takes vulnerability and courage to name your needs in this space. Thank you for doing that. Would you be okay if all of us hold space to take a deep breath? We are committed to creating an environment where we are offering the best hospitality we can for you.
- I heard you say _____. Can you tell us more about that so we can have a better understanding of what you are sharing?

LGBTQIA+ REPRESENTATION

"In the ELCA Candidacy Manual [pg. 11], it states that the ELCA encourages a "a wide diversity of candidates" to be considered for service as rostered leaders. The ELCA in its candidacy materials and processes recognizes the need for "cross-cultural sensitivity and awareness" as critical. When a synod's candidacy committee does not already have people serving who are part of the same cultural backgrounds or are members of the came community as candidates in the discernment process, the ELCA "strongly recommends" that committees identify mentors or support people from candidates' communities during the candidacy process."

This same hospitality needs to be extended to candidates within the LGBTQIA+ community. It is important to have an open/OUT committee member or mentor/support person from the LGBTQIA+ community as a part of every candidacy process. If no mentors or support people from the LGBTQIA+ community are available, consult with the candidate to identify a safe ally who can serve in that role.

NOT FREEZING PEOPLE IN TIME

As candidates learn more about themselves in the discernment process of ordination, it will be important not to freeze them in time. However, any candidate who identifies who they were when they started this journey will not be the who they are at the end. It is important for the committee to remember to accompany people where they are in their journey today and help nurture and guide them into tomorrow.

HOSPITABLE CURIOSITY IN QUESTIONS

Practice hospitable curiosity by asking questions that will mutually build trust in the relationship. Often LGBTQIA+ people can be made to feel like the "exotic other" by the kinds of questions asked about their bodies and how their bodies are in relationships. It is important to not root questions from a place of bias, assumption, lurid curiosity, and outdated stereotypes.

Examples of how hospitably curious questions can be framed:

- Try to avoid asking "why" questions because they tend to leave people feeling defensive.
- When you have wonderings about someone's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression and how it might impact their lives and their call to rostered ministry, consider inviting the candidate to "Please tell us more about . . ." whatever they named in how they introduced themselves or describe their lives.
- Frame the question so a candidate understands that they only need to share what they feel comfortable sharing with the committee. As committee members and candidates spend more time with each other, more information will come as trust is built.
- Can you tell us who taught you about ____? Can you share more about where you learned that?
- Share with us more about the people you have that support you in discerning your call to rostered leadership?

COMMITTEE ACCOUNTABILITY

What happens if questions are asked that make a candidate uncomfortable? Or if a comment is made that is rooted in unconscious bias because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression? Holding committee members accountable for their words and actions when engaging with an LGBTQIA+ candidate AND when they are talking about candidates are both critical in this process. As a committee in partnership with your synod office, create a way for candidates to report potential inappropriate behavior, harassment, or discrimination by a committee member.

Things to have in place for accountability:

- Make sure it is clear to whom a candidate should report any incident. Ensure this person has been trained in LGBTQIA+ diversity and is prepared to listen and take the allegations seriously
- Determine how the incident will be handled promptly. Make sure to keep proper documentation of how it is being handled.
- Have a plan in place on how to remove a member of the committee if needed. Bias against LGBTQIA+ people should not be tolerated. .

When a candidate reports inappropriate behavior, harassment, or discrimination by a committee member, it is critical to listen, gather the facts, and take action. All too often, LGBTQIA+ people who experience inappropriate behavior, harassment, or discrimination in the church are met with comments like these:

- Oh, _____ is a good person, and I am sure they didn't mean it that way.
- Don' t be so sensitive _____ is still learning about gay people."
- If that was offensive to you, you need to grow some thicker skin to make it in this church.

When a victim of inappropriate behavior, harassment, or discrimination is not heard and action is not taken, the church perpetuates a gaslighting culture and abuse.

"Characteristics of synodical candidacy committee members should include a sense of hospitality and the ability to build nurturing relationships, patience, and willingness to receive training." – ELCA Candidacy Manual pg. 13



DOCUMENTS & FORMS TO REVIEW AND UPDATE

Print and media resources are often the first introductions someone has to an organization, institution, and processes/policies.

In the call process, candidates have many documents to read and interact with throughout their journey of discernment. This section is intended to help candidacy committees review how their documents and forms can be used as an extension of hospitality.

DOCUMENTS & FORMS TO REVIEW AND UPDATE

MODIFICATION OF FORMS & DOCUMENTS

As a candidacy committee, it will be important to create a list of all the documents and forms a candidate is asked to read and complete.

Items to be mindful of updating in documents and forms:

- Are non-binary pronouns used in the text? Modify from she/he to **she/he/they/other:_____**
- Are candidates allowed to share their **pronouns and gender identity**? Asking for someone's gender identity rather than gender or sex is a more hospitable way to learn more about whom someone knows themselves to be.
- Using the language of "**siblings**" rather than "brothers and sisters" is more inclusive of the diversity of the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Is the title "**Mx**" (pronounced "mix") included in options for candidates who do not use a binary title?


EVENT REGISTRATION FORM

If you would like a one-page resource to support updating your forms and documents you can find it at www.reconcilingworks.org/resources/churchwide/

UPDATES IN COMMUNICATION

Incorporating pronouns in communication is an indicator of your awareness and helps build trust.

Here are a few helpful ways to use pronouns:

- Add them to the signature of your emails.
- Add pronouns to your social media accounts.
- If you make a mistake and someone corrects you, thank them for teaching you their pronouns.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Section 1.8 of the ELCA Candidacy Manual, “Guidelines for People in Same-Gender Relationships” (pp. 17ff), singles out LGBTQIA+ candidates in ways that can reinforce their treatment as exceptions rather than equal participants. Although the section calls for equitable treatment, its additional guidelines may unintentionally create barriers to inclusion and belonging.

Candidacy committees should also recognize the historical and ongoing discrimination LGBTQIA+ people face in employment, housing, and marriage rights. These experiences can create financial hardships, employment instability, and other challenges that may affect a candidate’s journey toward rostered ministry.



TRAINING & EDUCATION FOR CANDIDACY COMMITTEES

Synod candidacy committee responsibilities include providing appropriate pastoral care for candidates and participating in training and ongoing education (Section 1.4.3.1 in the ELCA Candidacy Manual, p. 12).

The following are resources offered by ReconcilingWorks that can provide continuing learning for each committee member to attend and have access to their accompaniment and leadership in candidates' ordination journeys. It is recommended that your committee consider how to have all members trained within the first three months of their term.

TRAINING & EDUCATION FOR CANDIDACY COMMITTEES

ONLINE TRAININGS

LET'S TALK ABOUT SOGIE

As we seek to deepen and expand the holy work of welcome, inclusion, and celebration of LGBTQIA+ people in the church and society, we can find ourselves asking, "What does LGBTQIA+ mean?" Together we will co-create a safe space to learn helpful skills and tools to support you and your ministry.

BIAS AND ITS IMPACT ON WELCOME

Bias is a part of our lives and ministries. This training will invite attendees into exploring how bias impacts welcome, creativity, and innovation for our lives and ministries. Together we will co-create a space to increase our awareness about how shifting our thinking can create new paths forward that were not possible before.

BOOKLETS

RECONCILING SCRIPTURE FOR LUTHERANS - ON SEXUALITY AND GENDER IDENTITY

A short commentary that takes into account biblical integrity and knowledge, key Lutheran interpretative lenses, and the diverse experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community, deepening the understanding of God's inclusive and expansive welcome.

LUTHERAN INTRODUCTION SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY & GENDER EXPRESSION

A basic introduction to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

MEDIA RESOURCES

CLUNKY QUESTIONS VIDEO SERIES

In our work, we often hear people with good intentions feel they aren't able to ask questions about what it means to be LGBTQIA+ because they are afraid of offending someone or they don't have the right words with which to ask. If this sounds familiar, or if your faith community is interested in how to better support LGBTQIA+ Lutherans, then the "Clunky Questions" series is for you.

Some we would highlight are:

- "LGBTQIA" Why do you need a label for everything?
- You're LGBTQ and a pastor! How does that work?
- I didn't know you were a gay/trans pastor! You seem so normal.

All suggested resources can be found at www.ReconcilingWorks.org



You are not alone in the holy work of deepening and expanding your welcome, inclusion, and celebration of LGBTQIA+ candidates for ministry. ReconcilingWorks is here to support you.

ReconcilingWorks
P.O. Box 8070
St. Paul, MN 55108
(651) 665-0861
Email: info@reconcilingworks.org

www.ReconcilingWorks.org