

BISHOP'S LAY WORSHIP LEADERS
West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod, ELCA

With revisions approved by the
Thirteenth Annual Synod Assembly - June 3, 2000



I - PURPOSE

Bishop's lay worship leaders are to be established to provide the Bishop of the Synod with qualified, trained, non-ordained persons to give worship leadership to congregations without a full-time pastor and to other congregations at the request of their pastors and/or congregation councils to provide leadership during vacation, illness and other contingencies.

II - SELECTION

A. Since lay leaders are to serve at the discretion of the Bishop, preliminary nominations for lay leadership shall be made by pastors to the Bishop upon his general request for such nominations. The Bishop shall refer these nominations to the Bishop's Lay Worship Leaders Committee for evaluation and ex officio take part in the evaluation process. The Synod Council shall appoint as many lay worship leaders as are needed for service in the Synod.

B. No person nominated to the Bishop's Lay Worship Leaders Committee as a bishop's lay worship leader shall be designated for service until an acceptable level of worship leadership proficiency has been attained as witnessed by his/her pastor, then approved by the Bishop's Lay Worship Leaders Committee.

C. Formal recognition of service will be scheduled as part of the Synod Assembly.

III - QUALIFICATIONS

A. Satisfactory achievements, qualifications and abilities in the following areas are required:

1. Commitment to Christ and his Church.
2. Membership in a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and endorsement by its pastor.
3. Acceptance of and adherence to the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
4. Willingness and ability to serve in response to the needs of the West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod.

5. Intellectual, social and practical qualifications for the position (for example, ease before crowds, basic public speaking and writing skills, capacity to learn, etc.).
6. Willingness to study, read and struggle with (often difficult) ideas and books, attend training sessions and grow.
7. Lead a life consistent with the Gospel and personal qualifications including leadership abilities and competence in interpersonal relationships.
8. Secure in his or her own life.
9. Ability to perform the office in an acceptable and exemplary manner.
10. Willingness to submit a sermon in transcript or tape to the Bishop's Lay Worship Leaders Committee.
11. Positive Bishop's Lay Worship Leaders Committee evaluation.
12. Willingness to relate to a pastor as mentor for support and guidance.

B. Yearly review of the bishop's lay worship leaders shall be made by the Bishop's Lay Worship Leaders Committee. Deficiencies and irregularities noted shall be called to the attention of the Bishop to act upon as he desires.

IV - TRAINING

A. Training for a bishop's lay worship leader shall be a continuing process. Training shall be provided through the Bishop's Lay Worship Leaders Committee in consultation with the office of the Bishop.

B. All bishop's lay worship leaders shall be required to participate in at least one approved continuing education activity annually, such as

1. Using the resources of the Seminaries of the Church
 - a. On-Campus Lay School of Theology
 - b. In-Synod use of faculty personnel
2. Using resources of Thiel College personnel and facilities
3. Synod-sponsored schools/seminars/workshops
4. A program of required reading
5. Counseling and guidance by the candidate's Pastor

V - VESTMENTS

In accordance with the principle that local practice should be respected, bishop's lay worship leaders may wear vestments that are acceptable and used within the normal worship life of the congregation. If special vestments are required, they should be provided by the congregation, within the limits of appropriateness. A simple cross or crucifix with an alb is appropriate. The signs of ordination, i.e., the stole, worn as do pastors and bishops, and the chasuble, should not be used by bishop's lay worship leaders.

VI - BUDGET

Sufficient funds for training will be part of the budget and responsibility of the Synod.

VII - GUIDELINES

A. Relationship of Bishop's Lay Worship Leaders to the Synod:

1. Assignments for bishop's lay worship leaders may be made from the synod office according to the location of the congregation, requested information provided by the congregations and needs perceived by the Bishop.
2. All bishop's lay worship leaders will be encouraged to attend the annual Synodical Assembly in order that they may speak knowledgeably (but not representatively unless so authorized by the Bishop) of the Synod and its activities and policies. The Bishop will normally make use of the lay leaders at the Synodical Assembly by assigning duties as he sees fit.
3. Bishop's lay worship leaders assigned by the Bishop serving a long-term assignment are subject to the direction of the Bishop and annual review by the Bishop's Lay Worship Leaders Committee.

B. Relationship of the Bishop's Lay Worship Leaders to the Congregation

1. The bishop's lay worship leader shall assume responsibility to make contact with an assigned congregation to clarify the time of service, lessons for the assigned Sunday, special items regarding the service, names of those to be included in the prayers, directions to the congregation and any other information needed to support the worship service. A contact person in the congregation should be appointed to make this information available.
2. If there is an interim pastor, the bishop's lay worship leader shall communicate with him/her when further clarification or special needs are apparent.
3. If for any reason the bishop's lay worship leader cannot complete the assignment on schedule, notice should be given immediately to the Bishop (synod office), to the congregation and to the Pastor or interim Pastor.
4. The worship practice of the congregation should be respected. The bishop's lay worship leader should not attempt to introduce changes within the order unless specifically requested by the Congregation Council and approved by the interim Pastor or Bishop.
5. Bishop's lay worship leaders may be invited to share in teaching duties during the Sunday morning. However, this is not a normal part of the assignment. If the congregation wishes their involvement in the Sunday church school, catechetical class or other teaching situations, advance notice should be given to the bishop's lay worship leader with any special instructions.
6. Pastoral guidance should be left to the Pastor or interim Pastor assigned to the congregation. Matters of discipline are not the concern of the bishop's lay worship leader. Personal counseling should normally be avoided excepting those questions which rise on the moment and require a spontaneous response. However, good judgment must be exercised in this area at all times.

7. If a congregation requests the lay leader to meet with the Congregation Council, there should be a stated and acknowledged purpose in such meetings and this responsibility cleared in advance with the interim Pastor or the Bishop.
8. The celebration of Holy Communion is the prerogative of the ordained. The synod office attempts to supply a pastor whenever the vacant congregation has Holy Communion scheduled. The responsibility for home communions rests with the Bishop of the Synod who will interpret the position of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America within this Synod.
9. The rites of confirmation, burial of the dead, etc., should normally be the responsibility of the interim Pastor. Whenever a lay leader receives requests for such rites, the information should be forwarded to the interim Pastor.
10. At the request of the Congregation Council and direction of the Bishop, the bishop's lay worship leader may receive persons into congregational membership via letters of transfer, profession of faith, etc. The lay leader may also install members and officers of the Congregation Council, women's organization, Sunday school, etc.

VIII - REMUNERATION

All bishop's lay worship leaders should receive remuneration from the congregation served according to synod guidelines.