

LOWER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN THE CANDIDACY PROCESS

The Christian Spiritual Life

In Baptism we are claimed forever as children of God, marked with the cross of Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit. As Luther suggests, the Christian life is sustained by our daily return to our baptism in awareness that we are people of God. We are at once made in the image of God and yet we remain marked by sin. We live always in the tension of being both saint and sinner. (Luther's Commentary on Romans) It is in that awareness that we seek to grow in faith, love and servanthood.

Spiritual Formation

“Therefore you should not imagine that it is enough if you have commenced to believe; but you must diligently watch that your faith continue firm, or it will vanish; you are to see how you may retain this treasure you have embraced; for Satan concentrates all his skill and strength on how to tear it out of your heart. Therefore the growth of your faith is truly as necessary as its beginning, and indeed more so; but all is the work of God.” (Sermons of Martin Luther, ed. J.N. Lenker, vol V.254-256)

Being a candidate for rostered ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America requires that a person be open to the ways in which God shapes, challenges and redirects his or her life. It requires courage, honesty and integrity to allow our lives to be conformed to God's call. As Saint Paul writes, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

The candidacy process is intended to nurture and facilitate spiritual growth and formation for an individual living within the Christian community. Among the ways this growth can take place are corporate worship, daily prayer, reading and engaging scripture, intentional servanthood, personal stewardship, vocational discernment, and other disciplined faith practices such as spiritual direction, group discipleship experiences, retreats, and personal devotions.

Spiritual Direction

“Spiritual direction is help given by one Christian to another, which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship.” (The Practice of Spiritual Direction, William A. Barry, SJ and William J. Connolly, SJ.) The guidance and help of a spiritual director may be one way in which candidates may feel called to grow in relationship with God and others. Thus the focus of spiritual direction is on the individual's experience of God in the context of life in the Christian community and beyond.

A spiritual director serves on behalf of the Christian community as “one who is called to accompany fellow-believers on the way of discipleship as a witness and speaker of the work of Christ.” (“Spirituality & Spiritual Formation,” Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, 1998) The relationship between the director and directee should not be coercive but may sometimes challenge the directee in order to nurture the directee's growth.

Candidates for rostered ministry should be strongly encouraged, but not required, to consider spiritual direction and to be made aware of the ways in which this particular ministry may assist them in their vocational discernment and their ongoing growth as disciples of Christ.

Procedure for Connecting Candidates with Spiritual Directors

The candidacy committee will provide information on how to find a spiritual director, and give each candidate the names of at least three spiritual directors who have expressed an interest in and willingness to explore the potential relationship of director/directee. Listings will include names, phone numbers, and brief biographical statements of each of the directors. The following statement will be included with this information: “The attached information does not imply certification of the names of spiritual directors or professional affiliation between them and the candidacy committee. This contact information is provided upon request, and the individual making the request remains responsible for choosing his/her own director.”

The Lower Susquehanna Synod’s candidacy committee may confirm with a particular director only that a candidate has been engaged in spiritual direction. Candidates will be asked to sign a release allowing only this confirmation to be shared with the committee. (See SDI Guidelines for Ethical Conduct: II.3.b. III.1.c.)

Protocol for Spiritual Directors Listing

1. Persons who wish to be on the synod’s candidacy committee listing must have completed specialized training in spiritual direction from a college, seminary, or spiritual formation program.
2. Spiritual Directors must provide a resume with the specifics of their training and continuing education experience, professional affiliations, religious/denominational affiliation, and a biographical statement to be used to “introduce” the director to potential directees.
3. The candidacy committee will not place current seminary students on the list, and will not place graduates on the list until at least one year after the individual has finished his or her seminary education, and has fulfilled the requirements listed above.
4. The candidacy committee may request periodic updates of directors’ resumes or biographical information. Directors on the candidacy committee’s list are requested to update the candidacy committee annually regarding their availability, in order to avoid connecting individuals with directors who are unavailable. (SDI Guidelines for Ethical Conduct: I.2.a.; III.2.a, c.)
5. Inclusion on the candidacy committee’s list does not imply any professional affiliation with the Lower Susquehanna Synod or the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Directors are expected to use due discretion in avoiding misrepresentation in this regard. (SDI Guidelines for Ethical Conduct: III.3.a.)
6. Spiritual directors shall maintain responsible relationships to communities of faith by remaining open to processes of corporate discernment, accountability, and support; appropriately drawing on the teachings and practices of communities of faith; respecting the candidate’s relationship to his or her community of faith. (SDI Guidelines for Ethical Conduct III. 2.a,b,c.)
7. The “Guidelines for Ethical Conduct” produced by Spiritual Directors International is attached to these policies as a model for directors regarding general standards of conduct understood by the candidacy committee as appropriate for spiritual directors. This attachment is not to suggest an affiliation between the two organizations.
8. Upon being added to the candidacy committee’s list, each director will be asked to sign the following statement which will be kept on file at the synod office: “I have received the policies of the candidacy committee regarding its spiritual directors list. I have read the policies and agree to abide by them.”
9. It is recommended that, to avoid conflict of interest, members of the synod’s candidacy committee should generally not serve as spiritual directors for candidates. If they do, they should not participate in voting on that particular candidate. (SDI Ethical Guidelines: I.4.b,c.)
10. Spiritual directors who charge a fee or seek a donation for their services must maintain professional liability insurance which includes coverage for sexual misconduct.

11. Because spiritual direction is not ultimately a matter of technical expertise, but gospel witness on the part of sinful, frail, tempted believers, spiritual directors shall themselves receive direction, as well as the support and accountability of peer supervision. (SDI Ethical Guidelines: I.1.a,b; 3.a,b.)

Rationale

This proposal attempts to address concerns related to the candidacy committee's encouragement of candidates to seek spiritual direction, as well as the problem of how to provide candidates with a resource listing of spiritual directors.

This proposal seeks to address the candidacy committee's potential as a valuable resource in this area. The growing understanding of the value of spiritual direction in a candidate's vocational and spiritual formation bespeaks the need for the candidacy committee to connect candidates with competent and experienced directors, known to the candidacy committee, and recognized by others as called to this ministry. The requirement of providing the names of a minimum of three directors including biographical statements (see #2) seeks to alleviate the candidacy committee's liability in the event of a complaint: the candidate, given a selection of names, will take the choice of a director upon him or herself based upon information provided by the candidacy committee and gained from personal conversation with the directors. It should be noted that the candidacy committee does not make an actual referral but is assisting the candidate in making contact with those directors who may be available to support his/her spiritual formation. The use of the term "referral" often implies a professional, prescriptive type of connection, such as between medical professionals.

The attached sample letter to candidates/directees suggests the candidacy committee's support of this ministry by commenting on its understanding of the nature of spiritual direction and of the direction relationship, as well as the candidacy committee's role in facilitating connections between directors and directees.

The policy regarding handling of complaints is based upon the understanding that the final responsibility for choosing a director lies with the candidate and such problems should be handled between the individuals involved and the appropriate ecclesiastical authority as needed. While it is not the candidacy committee's role to mediate disputes between directors and directees, the candidacy committee hopes to remain informed of developments in actual cases of serious misconduct so that such directors may be removed from the candidacy committee's list.

Sample letter

Dear [Candidate]:

This letter includes information on spiritual directors who may be suitable for you. Every director has a slightly different way of working with and relating to people, so you will want to prayerfully reflect on what you are seeking in a director and what you are seeking or hoping for in spiritual direction. We encourage you to call more than one of them, to meet with them and discern if you seem to be compatible in a direction relationship. We hope that we can put you in touch with competent spiritual directors who are thoughtful, supportive companions on your spiritual journey, but only you will be able to say if you are a “fit”.

Most spiritual directors have training and formation and are seasoned in the art of spiritual direction. It is appropriate for you to ask the director about his/her education and experience during your first call or meeting. Some spiritual directors ask for remuneration, some receive free-will donation, and others offer their time with no expectation of anything in return.

The ministry of spiritual direction is guided above all by the Holy Spirit. A director will be a spiritual companion in attending to the movement of the Divine in your life drawing you into greater intimacy with God through experiences both ordinary and extraordinary. One might discuss the same things with a spiritual director as one would with a therapist, but a spiritual director will attend to that material differently, seeking above all the presence of the Holy.

The enclosed information does not imply certification of the named spiritual directors or professional affiliation between them and the Lower Susquehanna Synod. This contact information is provided upon request as a service in facilitating connections between candidates and spiritual directors. The individual making the request remains responsible for choosing his/her own director. The candidacy committee's policies regarding spiritual direction contacts are available upon request.

LOWER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD CANDIDACY COMMITTEE
SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR'S RESUME

NAME

ADDRESS

PHONE(S)

EMAIL:

CHURCH DENOMINATION:

SYNOD/DISTRICT/CONFERENCE:

TRAINING/YEAR OF GRAUATION:

EXPERIENCE:

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION /INTERESTS: (what may be helpful to introduce yourself to a candidate)

AVAILABILITY: (day/evening)

I have received the policies of the candidacy committee regarding its spiritual directors list. I have read the policies and agree to abide by them.

Signed _____

Date _____