



Accompaniment Guide: The Internship Process

Interviewing and Placement

Are you thinking about internship and getting ready to start interviewing and seeking a placement? Great! Then this nifty guide is for you. Brought to you by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries' Accompaniment Team. Some of these tips will be applicable to all folks. Others are more intentionally geared for LGBTQ interns. Have experiences we should add? Let us know! Contact information at the end.

Introduction:

Internship is a part of the preparation process for rostered ministry that has a long history in the Lutheran Church. As you prepare for internship you are following in the footsteps of many others who have gone before you, including a host of Proclaim members and colleagues.

In preparing this brief guide to accompany you as you prepare for internship, ELM's Candidacy Accompaniment Team asked those who have successfully completed internship to share some of their reflections--what worked for them and what they might have done differently. Their comments provide a rich resource for you as you anticipate this next stage on your way to rostered ministry. We begin this guide, therefore, with the comments of those who have gone before you. You will find in these comments practical wisdom that will be good to consider and ponder.

The second part of this guide is an attempt to distill those reflections into a brief narrative that can guide you through the process itself as you work with the internship director responsible for your placement.

ELM has a companion piece written for supervisors and committees working with LGBTQ interns. It is available on the ELM website, or by contacting ELM.

Part 1: Tips and Advice From Your Proclaim Colleagues

“Of all the places in seminary to come out, this is probably most important. Internship is the time and place where you attempt to put together everything you have been learning so far. You have enough to do without needing to stay in the closet (unless you want to) or managing other people's reactions to your sexuality.”

What would you like to tell LGBTQ candidates preparing for internship interviews?

“Take a deep breath. Relax. Be your authentic self.”

“Be prepared to ask about how your LGBTQ identity would be understood at your internship site and how that congregation (and pastor) have handled conversations about LGBTQ clergy. Pay attention to what you hear from the supervisor, what may be going unsaid and what may be being glossed over.”

“Think carefully about use of the descriptor “queer.” While this is my preferred (while imperfect) label for my sexual orientation, it was not received well by the internship sites where I interviewed. In more conservative or rural regions, this is a misunderstood term. I felt completely comfortable using this term in my home Synod and in my seminary context, but that did not translate well for other geographic regions or more conservative supervisors.”

“The more calmly you can talk about your sexuality, the more calm they will remain. Perhaps you should practice answering personal questions about your love life with a trusted friend who can tell you if you're getting defensive. Interviews should not get personal, but people are still stumbling through this stuff.”

“In my interviews, my sexual orientation came up in every one. Be prepared to talk about yours!”

“Interview the supervisors themselves. If you and your supervisor trust each other, you'll work as a unified team and have a great experience. If not... internship can be a challenging and crazy journey.”

“In the interview process I had an interview with a supervisor who was open to a gay intern but wasn't sure if her congregation was ready. She asked me whether or not I wanted to serve my internship in a site that was already 100% welcoming or if I felt called to be an intern who helped a congregation along its journey toward being more welcoming and open. I hadn't really thought about this before but I think it is a great question for any LGBTQ intern to ask themselves before going into interviews with potential supervisors.”

What advice do you have for interacting with the contextual or field education office prior to internship?

“Go early. Go often. Offer whatever help you can offer—you may be a little harder to place than other candidates.”

“Pray for them.”

“Be out to them and ask for their guidance in looking at congregations. They should know who would be good options, but also remember to be bold and try some others. If nothing else, you get openness to LGBTQ interns on their radar, even if they're not a good fit or not ready yet.”

“It is important to be upfront with your Contextual Education Director about your orientation and identity. If it is important for you to be near your support network, then you should say that. If you have concerns at any time during the process, then tell someone. If you feel judged, violated, or put down during any part of the process, tell someone.”

“Do your best to trust them and trust the process, but also keep on top of things. Don't be afraid to check in with them from time to time so they know you are paying attention. Be open with them about questions and concerns you have.”

What might be some helpful questions to ask a potential internship supervisor?

“I would recommend talking with the supervisor about whether having an LGBTQ intern would be a total non-issue for the congregation or whether that intern would be taking on the challenge of helping to move a congregation toward being more accepting. Listen to the answer and think about what kind of internship experience you are looking for. It is totally wonderful to want to not worry about LGBTQ controversy during internship and it is also totally wonderful to feel called to be part of a congregation's journey toward being more open. However, it's helpful to do some advance introspection (and ask questions of potential supervisors) about what kind of role your sexuality might play in your relationship with the congregation.”

“What is the congregation's experience with LGBTQ folks in the congregation or in leadership? Where are visible LGBTQ friendly resources in the community? When was a time that LGBTQ inclusion created tension and what was done about it?”

“What was the congregation's reaction before, during, and since the 2009 vote to allow same-gender clergy to partner?”

“In what ways is your congregation prepared for an LGBTQ intern? In what ways is there still progress yet to be made? If I became the intern, how would you prepare the congregation in advance of my arrival?”

“I highly recommend being explicit with potential supervisors during the interview about who you are and asking direct questions about how they and the congregations might deal with having an LGBTQ intern. Pay attention to red flags or any responses that ring false with you. If your congregation is in a place where they may have to struggle a bit with LGBTQ issues, that could be a great experience of growth for you, but you want to have a supervisor who is forthright and self-aware about it.”

“I found it helpful to ask them about their personal care... try and get a feel for how good they are at taking their day off. Is their day off always their only day? (aka- do they consistently work 6 day, 70-80 hour work weeks?). I don't suggest this necessarily as a means of ruling them out (my supervisor was wonderful even though she had very messy boundaries herself). But it's good to get a sense of what they will expect from you. I think it's important to begin setting healthy boundaries for yourself DURING internship. Otherwise, it's that much easier to slip into unhealthy patterns during first call.”

What might be some concerns worth paying attention to during the interview and matching process?

"There are several people in this congregation who will leave if you come, but we're going to do it anyway."

"It's OK with me that you're gay, but do you have to talk about it all the time?"

"Oh, we have lots of gay people. I'm sure it will be fine." Is your potential supervisor able to speak to the particular challenges (and joys) of having an LGBTQ intern?"

"Interpersonal dynamics. You're going to spend a lot of time with this supervisor. Pay attention to your gut and whether or not you feel that the supervisor's personality, style, and attitudes fit reasonably well with yours."

"If they ask you to remain closeted."

Relationships....

"I'd recommend dating while on internship within your own pre-defined window. I told myself that if I met someone within the first 6 months of internship, then great. But if not, then for the last 6 months I wasn't going to especially put myself out there...because I didn't want to get caught in the awkward position of meeting someone wonderful just before leaving town forever. Each person will need to think through their own strategy for this, some will choose not to date, some will date in a specific way, others might date all the time. I just knew my own limitations and that was uber helpful in keeping all my temporary relationships during internship in perspective."

"Feel free not to share a new relationship status until you feel ready to."

"Be mindful of profiles in public places such as Facebook, Twitter, dating websites or apps, etc. A parishioner will see them eventually."

"When my significant other came to visit on internship, they just stayed in one of the extra bedrooms."

"Be intentional about actively calling your spouse/partner/husband/wife/boyfriend/girlfriend/fill-in-the-blank by the term you use for them. Committees often won't know what to call your significant other and so constantly saying "my wife" (or "boyfriend" or "partner" or whatever) will help clue them in and put them at ease. It will also keep you from getting annoyed because they keep calling your relationship something it is not. If they don't pick up on your cues, feel free to address the issue directly and tell them how you label your relationship."

Part 2: And Now...A Little Process

Working With the People Who are Working With You: **The Field Education or Contextual Education Office**

As you anticipate placement on internship, it is important to establish a strong working relationship with those persons in the contextual education or field education office who will be overseeing your internship placement. Processes vary by school, so some of what follows may/may not speak to your specific situation.

Checkpoints along the way include the following:

1. Application for internship

Even prior to submitting your formal application, it is useful to introduce yourself to the seminary's internship director in order to indicate your anticipation for internship and to be sure that you are clear about the process.

In filling out your application for internship be clear and concise about who you are and your goals for internship. For most intern candidates this application will be shared with prospective internship supervisors. Thus, prospective supervisors will "meet you" through this application before they meet you in person. Keep that in mind as you prepare your application. Eliminate all grammatical errors, etc. Be honest and transparent but don't go into excessive detail and don't share anything that isn't clear without additional explanation.

Once your application has been submitted plan to meet with the internship director to go over it. If such an interview is not a normal part of the process, take the initiative to schedule one. The purpose of such a conversation is to put a face to your written material and to make sure that what you have written is as clear to the internship director as it is to you. If it is not, ask to change the application accordingly. You can also reiterate your goals for internship during this conversation and indicate any special considerations that may be needed. You might also want to inquire about the kinds of sites, even the number of sites that are likely to be available which would seem to coincide with your learning goals. Find out if any anticipated sites are likely to be RIC congregations. Are there any sites that have previously worked with LGBTQ interns?

2. Maintain communication

After submitting your application and having your conversation with the internship director, let the internship director know if anything changes with respect to your personal situation or your goals or expectations for internship. If such changes are substantive, ask about the possibility/need to change your written application.

3. Considering potential sites

Make sure that you are clear about how the placement process works and what kinds of initiative it is acceptable for you to take.

It's a good idea to reflect some on what your own limitations are—What are you not able or willing to deal with? Ultimately much is going to depend upon your own sensibility and the type of ministry you feel called to.

After the interviews with supervisors at potential sites:

- Share your reactions with the internship director.
- Be aware of whether you feel called and equipped to go into a congregation where your LGBTQ identity is an “issue” or a “non-issue”.
- Ask yourself:
 - Is there anything that was unclear that needs to be clarified?
 - Could the site present realistic and healthy challenges for you?
 - Could it be a place where you can be yourself but also grow?
 - Is the supervisor's approach to ministry/ministry style one from which you can learn? Does the supervisor seem supportive of your identity?
 - What is your gut telling you?
- In choosing/accepting a placement - Trust your gut, but don't set your parameters too narrowly.

Interviewing with a Potential Supervisor or Congregation

If face-to-face, telephone, or Skype interviews with prospective supervisors are part of the process, do your homework before scheduling such interviews.

- Review the site application and note previous experience with internship, both the site and the supervisor's.
- Do your goals and expectations for internship seem compatible with the expectations and ministry of the site?
- Has the site or supervisor had any experience with LGBTQ interns? Do they seem genuinely and realistically welcoming of such an opportunity?
- Look at the site's website and Facebook page (if they have one). Do their activities and involvement in the community match with your goals?
- Prepare for such interviews by remembering that the first impression you make is important. Think about the impression you want to make.
- Identify the goals you have for the interview. What do you want to learn about the site and supervisor by the end of the interview? What do you want the supervisor or site to learn about you by the end of the interview?

The interview

- Be on time and present a neat appearance.
- As with the written application, be clear and concise in your conversation.
- Be prepared to talk about your sexual orientation and/or gender identity. If it is not brought up by the prospective supervisor you might want to bring it up in order to indicate that you are comfortable with who you are, and also to ascertain the supervisor's comfort level as well as any expectations they might have. Remember that you get to have control over your own story and that your identity isn't the only focus of the interview.
- Allow your sense of humor to show through; be as non-defensive and as non-anxious as possible.
- Articulate your learning goals for the year.
- Remember the interview is a two-way conversation. What do you need to find out to know if the supervisor and site will be a viable possibility for you?

Interview questions

Internship supervisors or interview committees want to hear what you want to learn in ministry with them - your learning goals. Even more, they want to hear about your gifts. If it is hard for you to talk about your gifts, or if you seem under-confident or over-confident when you try to talk about them, then take time to practice with people who will give you honest feedback about how you're coming off.

Keep your answers brief. Let the interviewers know that you're happy to say more about any question but that you want to be sure to make space for the whole variety of questions they've prepared. This is particularly important if you're interviewing with a group. Then, do keep your answers brief. Honest, open, but brief.

Have questions ready for the interviewer/s. There will likely be time. As you've explored their website, profile, etc., what are you curious to learn more about? Show interest and excitement. If you have critiques (or questions that will come off as critiques), be thoughtful about the way you raise them. Some contexts will love a critical voice/presence, but many will not. Ask yourself, even if this factor never changed, could I be a good ministry presence here?

If it seems that the supervisor is uncomfortable with you being LGBTQ, you might want to ask them about that more directly. If the supervisor seems comfortable and supportive but evasive with regards to where the congregation is at, that might be something to ask more direct questions about as well.

Be yourself. This trumps any of these "tips" above. You'll need to be yourself in this new ministry context so you want to present the person you'll be there.

Through it all, advocate for yourself without being pushy or defensive.

Some questions you might want to ask:

- How did the congregation respond to the 2009 ELCA assembly statement on human sexuality and changes in ordination policies?
- What has been the stance of the congregation since then?
- Are there any open LGBTQ persons in the congregation?
 - Might they be willing to serve on the internship committee?
- If you are partnered - Will the congregation have any expectations regarding your partner?
- What is the status of Marriage Equality in the state in which the congregation is located? How has the congregation engaged with this conversation?

If you're discouraged...

Your candidacy interviews have taken place with a team that is highly invested in your growth as a candidate. For the most part, unless they have reservations from the start, they want to see you succeed (after all, the reason they are on the Candidacy Committee is likely that they are very interested in and invested in potential church leaders).

When interviewing for internship or a call, the process shows by nature a bit more “self-interest.” Here, the interviewing individual or group is trying to discern which of a variety of great candidates would be the best fit for their setting. You likely have little to no idea who you are being put “up against” as they discern the right fit for them for the coming year. So, be merciful and graceful (to yourself and to them) through the process. If you are not chosen, it is not necessarily because you did anything “wrong.” The Holy Spirit, we trust, is involved *and* there are many other forces involved. In spite of any challenges along the way, remain convinced that there is a good site ready to welcome you... it's just a matter of patience, endurance, and discerning that together.

One of your Proclaim colleagues, reported this about the process:

“I completely goobered-up all of my interviews. At the last moment, when I thought I might not have an internship, I landed in the best setting possible. I hate the phrase “let go and let God”, but I need to hear it sometimes.”

There may be some unexpected turns in this journey. They aren't always the result of God's will. But God will most certainly be with you.

Internship and Relationships

Being Direct and Transparent

We know it seems strange. In most professional environments, no one would even dream of asking you about your relationship. But it's all fair game in candidacy. And internship is one of the places where your relationship becomes an important part of the discussion. During this

process it makes sense to be open and direct about your relationship status. After all, your significant other might be moving across the country with you for the year!

Be clear with your contextual education office if you are planning on having your significant other on internship with you. Be clear about the nature of that relationship - are you married, publicly accountable in another way, etc. If you are not legally married or clearly publicly accountable in some other way, you may run into additional challenges. The church is still fumbling through the ever-changing context for LGBTQ relationships - both in the civil and ecclesial world. You are a pioneer...and a guinea pig. Reach out to your colleagues in Proclaim or ELM staff if you are running into barriers or challenges about your relationship.

In your interviews with potential supervisors and congregations, make sure you are open and transparent about your relationship so there are no surprises. You may have to do some education along the way as well. Sometimes people get awkward about language and may stumble about what to call your “special friend.” Use the language you prefer (“this is my spouse” or “this is my husband”) and most folks will catch on. If that doesn’t work, you can have a direct conversation about the language you prefer.

Living Arrangements, Visiting Arrangements

Have a direct conversation about living arrangements with potential supervisors. Will you be living together? Are you still in the dating phase and not living together? If you are in a long distance relationship, where will they stay when they visit? (We know, it seems archaic, but this stuff really does come up.)

Conclusion

Pray. Do your homework. Reflect on your journey, your gifts, and your experiences. Consider what your learning goals are for internship.

Take the advice of your Proclaim colleague who wrote: **“Take a deep breath. Relax. Be your authentic self.” And, “Remember: being LGBTQ is a gift for ministry!”**

Know that we’re praying for you. Always feel free to reach out to one of your Proclaim chaplains or the Accompaniment Team. See the contact information below.

Contact Information

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