



The Mysteries of the Ages:

A handy guide for LGBTQ people exploring or preparing for rostered ministry in the ELCA

“...the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to God’s saints.” Colossians 1:26

updated February 2016

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Introduction

I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you...

Isaiah 42:6

This resource is brought to you by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM). It is intended for LGBTQ individuals in discernment and/or LGBTQ candidates for rostered ministry. Consider this a friendly companion piece to the candidacy documents from the Lutheran church body you are pursuing candidacy in. This is not a replacement for those documents. It has largely been put together by ELM's Accompaniment Team (accompanying LGBTQ individuals in Lutheran candidacy and first call) and members of Proclaim. Proclaim, a program of ELM, is the professional community for publicly identified LGBTQ Lutheran rostered leaders and those preparing for rostered leadership. Words in smaller font are quotes from Proclaim members offered via online survey. Multiple voices and perspectives contributed to this resource.

ELM is committed to supporting LGBTQ seminarians and rostered leaders, and part of that support is to help LGBTQ persons discerning their call to understand the landscape of ministry as accurately as possible. While this resource can be helpful to any candidate, our particular community is focused on public identity and celebration of our LGBTQ identity as a gift to share.

This resource is a collection of tips, stories, prayers, scriptures, and ideas from folks who've been there. It includes things we've learned from our successes and our "Oops, that was a terrible idea! No one else should do it this way!" moments. Maybe we can spare you at least a few of those. There are no hard and fast rules or magic "best practices." But we've collected some thoughts and experiences and hope it will be helpful as you navigate this mysterious, at times frustrating, and hopefully mostly faithful (and even inspiring!) process. Settle in with your favorite beverage and imagine you are chatting with a trusted friend or colleague. Hopefully some of these words will speak to you. And then speak back - share with us what works or doesn't work for you. Add your stories and experiences to this ever-evolving resource. Contact information is at the end.

Being Out

Much like other aspects of life, coming out during discernment and candidacy is an ongoing thing. We're putting this section up front knowing that it may come at a different point in the process for you. Public identity as an LGBTQ person is a value of ELM and this resource is written from the perspective that being out as people of faith and leaders in the church is an extraordinary witness to our church and the world.

The Gift of Being LGBTQ

We think LGBTQ people have extraordinary gifts for ministry. These gifts are an asset to the church and the world. One of the ways our community talks about this is to say we're "faithful and fabulous." We have unique experiences as LGBTQ people that make us uniquely gifted for ministry. Some of these gifts might include:

Faithful – following a call to ministry, despite challenges

Fabulous – unique gifts to bring, our own flair, sparkle

Transformed by the gospel – many of us have had to wrestle with our faith and sexuality and/or gender identity, and have arrived in a place of good news for all people

Creative - many LGBTQ folks help bridge the gaps by creating church in the world, on the street, in the bar, coffee shop, cyberspace

Justice-seeking - because we have been marginalized, we pay particular attention to others who have been marginalized or oppressed

Innovative - looking for new ways to find and imagine God

Entrepreneurial - as queer people of faith we are often in very non-churchy worlds and can find new ways to create ministry

Evangelical - we have had to examine and learn to talk in public about how grace shapes our deepest selves and beliefs

It might be a helpful brainstorming exercise to think and write about the ways that your gender identity and/or sexual orientation have been a gift to you and to others: What have you learned that you wouldn't have otherwise? What experiences might you have of exclusion or of acceptance, of fear or of love, of alienation or of community that God could draw on as useful resources in ministry?

When to come out?

Maybe by now you are a pro at coming out, or maybe you are newly out and haven't had much practice. When should you come out in the candidacy process? Well, it depends. In general we think the earlier, the better. Present the information as another important thing people should know about you. If you are non-anxious and non-defensive, others usually follow. If you are proud of who you are, they won't expect you to be ashamed. Make it a thread in the tapestry that is you, but not the whole cloth.

In terms of entering candidacy, one member has this to share:

In my experience, coming out early and often paved the way for a much easier candidacy process. Knowing that I wasn't keeping any secrets freed me to model vulnerability and transparency, and helped the congregations I served during seminary to trust me more quickly.

For many LGBTQ candidates, our coming out stories and call stories are related or even intimately connected. If this is the case for you, one good way to come out might be to include how these stories overlap within your Entrance Essay and Entrance Interview with your candidacy committee. When you're asked to share your call story, don't edit out your coming out story. This is a way that we can help others understand that our sexual orientations and gender identities are part of how God has called and gifted us for ministry. Explain how your identity and experiences as an LGBTQ person have given you appreciation for what God's gathering, acceptance, and grace in baptism means.

One of the wonderful things about the process of discernment is that you're likely to make some self-discoveries along the way. As one Proclaimer offers:

Theological Education is simultaneously external knowledge about religious things and internal discovery and articulation. You're going to emerge from the process as a different person. Some elements you'll retain, some you'll change, some you'll pick up. Fashion yourself, and allow yourself to be fashioned, into who God is calling you to be.

So perhaps for you one of these self-discoveries turns out to be that you identify as LGBTQ. Or maybe you didn't feel the timing was right earlier in the process. If you're already engaged in candidacy and thinking about coming out, fear not! It's not too late. Here are some experiences Proclaim members share about coming out later in the process:

I waited until Approval to come out to my committee, because I wanted to come out to my parents first, and that took a while. It was met with disappointment that I probably wouldn't be serving in my home synod. Not sure if that was the right time or way to do it, but I still got approved.

I came out to my candidacy committee between my endorsement and my approval interviews. The advice I was given by my candidacy mentor was, "Don't provide anything new in the approval interview." If there is something that you wish to share with the candidacy committee, call them in advance or write a letter. Otherwise, you might spend your approval interview talking about your coming out, when it should be about your ministry and your call.

There is great variance synod to synod. When my girlfriend came out at the beginning of internship her contact person and assistant to the bishop were supportive and the assistant even asked for my name so he could hold us in prayer. They both assured her it was not a concern in any way but that self-discovery was a natural part of the discernment process. My committee still has members who are upset I did not tell them at entrance (I told them between entrance and endorsement). Everyone's experience within a

synod is different. Take in lots of advice from others but recognize you are on your own journey which happens to be in the same direction as a lot of other people.

Resources for Coming Out

Other LGBTQ leaders can be a great resource and well of wisdom for all things related to coming out. Most of us have a lot of practice! Feel free to reach out to ELM's Accompaniment team at any point along the way (candidacy@elm.org). We can help connect you to LGBTQ rostered leaders and seminarians to serve as conversation partners.

Another resource is the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) "Resource Guide to Coming Out". You can find it here: <http://www.hrc.org/resources/resource-guide-to-coming-out>. They also have a great resource that's especially designed for LGBTQ people within communities of faith called, "Coming Home: To Faith, To Spirit, To Self". You can find it here: <http://www.hrc.org/resources/coming-home-to-faith-to-spirit-to-self>.

If you're looking for resources that might be helpful for your loved ones, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is a great place to start. Find out more about these resources here: <http://community.pflag.org/page.aspx?pid=539>.

Transgender Visibility and Gender Transition During Candidacy

If you're questioning your gender identity, considering how to disclose your gender, or think that gender transition might be part of your candidacy process, there are a number of folks you could connect with to talk about it. There's an affinity group within Proclaim called Sparkle* for people who are trans* identified to provide confidential support and enable people who are questioning, in vulnerable situations, who are publicly low, or non-disclosing to have their issues raised without compromising their privacy. (The "*" helps to remind people of the diversity of the trans* community and is an intentional invitation for those who are a part of the diverse transgender umbrella or who are questioning.) If you'd like, please reach out to ELM and we can connect you (programdirector@elm.org).

When it comes time for field education and internship placements it would be helpful to have a conversation with your Director of Contextual Education prior to placement. This gives your director a chance to think through and look for possible placements that might be a good fit and to help you get set up in a placement where you can thrive. Likewise, if you're already in the middle of a field education or internship placement, it might be helpful to have a conversation with your Director of Contextual Education before disclosing to your congregation or supervisor. This will help give your director a heads up and put them in a position to help

advocate for you in case any difficulties arise. It can also help you navigate unhealthy work dynamics to have someone from your Contextual Education department as an outside advisor to give you feedback and intervene if necessary.

If you're questioning or thinking about gender transition, a great place to start is by reaching out to the nearest LGBTQ Center (<http://www.lgbtcenters.org/Centers/find-a-center.aspx>). Often times they will have a list of trans* friendly therapists and doctors in the area. They are also an excellent resource for networking: they'll be able to put you in touch with trans* support groups, social gatherings, or events.

A good resource if you're thinking about disclosing your gender (sharing with others how you identify) is the Human Rights Campaign's "Transgender Visibility Guide". You can find it here: <http://www.hrc.org/resources/transgender-visibility-guide>. Another resource that might be helpful for you in dealing with your loved ones is called "Our Trans Loved Ones: Questions and Answers for Parents, Family, and Friends of People Who Are Transgender and Gender Expansive" put together by PFLAG. You can find it here: <http://community.pflag.org/document.doc?id=921>.

If you're interested in resources to help you work with your congregation or leaders within it to help them understand transgender issues and become advocates for transgender rights, the Human Rights Campaign has an excellent resource called "Gender Identity and Our Faith Communities: A Congregational Guide for Transgender Advocacy". You can find that resource here: <http://www.hrc.org/resources/gender-identity-and-our-faith-communities-a-congregational-guide-for-transg>.

Some good reads to check out recommended by people from Sparkle* are: *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community* edited by Laura Erickson-Schroth (2014); *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love, And So Much More* by Janet Mock (2014); *Letters for My Brothers: Transitional Wisdom in Retrospect*, 4th edition (2014) edited by Megan M. Rohrer and Zander Keig; *Letters for My Sisters: Transitional Wisdom in Retrospect* edited by Andrea James and Deanne Thornton (2014), *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* by Julia Serano (2007), *Just Add Hormones: An Insider's Guide to the Transsexual Experience* by Matt Kailey (2005).

Relationships

This is one of the places where people have the most questions. And it is rapidly changing in the legal and church context. If you're in discernment and have a significant other, it's a good idea to include them in the process. After all, your call will affect them!

Whether you are single, dating, partnered, married, etc, in the candidacy process it can be awkward/strange/frustrating to talk about your relationship with a group of mostly strangers. Some of the church documents around candidates and rostered leaders in relationships are outdated (i.e. marriage is between a man and a woman), in the process of changing, or just downright confusing. You should check in with your synod to get more specifics, but you should know that generally couples are not "allowed" to live together before they are married. Although marriage is a new option for most LGBTQ couples, mostly it's treated as a universal standard in candidacy for straight and LGBTQ couples. Seminary housing policies vary and it may be that you and your significant other can live together without being married under the policies of the seminary. But keep in mind that this may be different from what your candidacy committee expects.

Although it's no guarantee that a committee will ask you about your relationship, know in advance that one of the places it's bound to come up is internship. If you expect that a significant other will join you on internship, you will need to discuss that with your seminary and committee and well as the internship congregation.

Here are some tips other Proclaim members offer in navigating their identity and relationships within the candidacy process:

Unless you are in a same-gender relationship, the paperwork makes it next to impossible to come out. When you are single, you have to be more creative about how you wish to come out. If your sexuality is part of your call story, say that. If you have a less than stellar experience with the church because of your sexuality, say that too.

Some candidacy committees take your disclosure of your orientation as an opportunity to ask you questions about your personal life that you may not want to answer or address just yet (i.e. are you partnered, are you living with a significant other, do you hope to be, etc.) - this does not always happen for our straight brothers and sisters - I would suggest that you take some time to determine what you are comfortable disclosing before entering the conversation.

If you would mention your spouse if you were straight, then I think you should boldly talk about your spouse if you are gay. Once you're assigned a liaison for the committee, absolutely come out to that person, who can help you navigate the process. If they aren't supportive of LGBTQ inclusion, then ask for

a different liaison. You don't need someone who will just be your "cheerleader" but you need to know that if you are met with criticism or ambiguity, it isn't because of your sexual orientation.

And unfortunately, sometimes there are some pretty unpleasant interactions on this topic:

My Entrance committee was very clear that I would have to move away from my partner for my Lutheran year, or she'd have to quit her job and come along. My partner was angry - suspected it was anti-gay bias. It was not. My straight friends were also told their spouses would have to suffer.

My (now ex-) partner and I were advised to seek spiritual direction to help us decide to get married before I reached the step of approval for internship. "You realize you have to get married before you can go on internship" is an almost-direct quote from one of my committee members. (Almost-direct in that she trailed off before she finished the sentence/question.) I realize this is what V&E [Vision & Expectations] requires, but it was pretty crass.

If you wish to talk with someone in ELM about your particular relationship situation, please contact us. We recognize that we don't all fit in neat little boxes - nor do we often want to!

Initial Discernment

To be or not to be? If it were only that simple! If you're reading this then chances are that you're thinking about being a pastor or rostered church leader. It's not a simple decision to make and if you indeed feel called to ministry, there's still no automatic guarantee that everything will work out the way you hope.

Lutherans understand vocational call to be an aspect of every person's life, not just ministers and rostered leaders. People might be called to be nurses, photographers, or parents, etc. Discernment can be an illuminating process that should help you think about your life and discover where God is calling you. Generally, there are two ways we talk about this: "internal" and "external." Internal call develops through personal reflection, while external call is the feedback you receive through others (not just limited to the formal evaluation of the candidacy process). What follows is our best advice to help you discern God's call in your life.

Internal Call - discernment and taking a deeper look at what's going on inside

Keep a discernment journal. Maybe map out options of all the things you could see yourself doing and what attracts you to those paths. When it was time to write some essays for candidacy, it was helpful to look back at my thoughts along the way.

Listening to ourselves is a skill we cultivate over our lifetimes. Some of us have a healthy internal dialogue going all the time, others are less reflective. Deciding to pursue rostered

ministry is a big decision and it warrants taking time to develop the most robust assessment possible. Set aside some time for spiritual discernment. Prayer, spiritual retreat, and/or a spiritual director can be helpful in reclaiming a space in which to begin to piece things together. Consider taking an inventory of some sort to help illuminate areas of strength and areas of weakness.

For example, if your discernment begins to show that you don't have much skill or interest in working with people...then ministry might not be a great choice, but church administration might be the perfect fit. However if you discern that you work best one-on-one but hate being in front of crowds, then maybe it would be best to explore chaplaincy. It's all a matter of figuring out your path and how it aligns with the opportunities God is showing in your life.

Job Shadow. Spend a whole typical day with a pastor. This will help you see what it is like and reflect on some of the stresses and rewards of a vocation in pastoral ministry. Take note of the parts that seemed interesting to you or the parts that you did not like. Being a pastor can be stressful, demanding, and reward isn't always immediate or adequate. If you'd like a job that you can leave when you come home, maybe God is leading you to a different type of ministry.

Everyone has their experiences of congregational ministry. Some LGBTQ people have endured abusive faith communities; others have found profoundly liberating communities. It's worth talking to your pastor, connecting with a congregation, and discussing your experiences with others. Take time to reflect on your life as an LGBTQ identified person. What have been your life-giving relationships? How do you typically choose to "come out" to new people? What are the gifts you bring as an LGBTQ person?

Consider spending some time with a therapist or a spiritual director reflecting upon your experiences as an LGBTQ person in the church and to explore any feelings of pain, defensiveness, anger, or resentment you might be carrying. Your feelings are totally valid, but it is vital for us as leaders to be aware of the ways that these feelings impact us. You don't have to have everything figured out before you start, but seminary is an introspective time that can prove to be both wonderful and dreadful, so the sooner you can gain some perspective on your own LGBTQ journey, the more resilience you will have for the road ahead.

Realistically consider the feasibility of seminary. It is EXPENSIVE. Many people get some financial assistance, but most leave with a hefty debt load. Candidacy committees are aware of this reality and are likely to direct people in precarious financial circumstances to return to discernment later. That doesn't mean you can't have any debt, but it means you need to be aware of your current finances and have a plan in case seminary doesn't result in full time

ministry work right away. Go ahead and ask seminaries all your financial questions about potential funding sources and average debt load.

External Call - external discernment and validation of your call

External Call is how others affirm the gifts they see in you. Maybe it's a nice note from the woman who sits behind you every Sunday. Maybe it's a coworker who notices that you are an especially attentive listener. Maybe you've excelled in academic pursuits and seem to get positive feedback when you lead discussions. External call sorts of information should be gathered abundantly. You shouldn't base your career/life on what one person told you once. You're queer, you get that.

I got the sweetest letter from my youth pastor telling me about the ways she saw me interact with other students and thought I should consider looking into ministry. That same week, my choir director made a joke about me being a pastor someday! I thought, well..this might be something worth looking into.

It is helpful to avail yourself of some external resources. The small book [What Shall I Say?](#) outlines a useful guide for discernment about pastoral ministry. Talk to some out LGBTQ clergy about their experiences. Connect with a member of Proclaim in your area. It can be very helpful to speak with someone who's been there. Reach out to ELM to find a Proclaim person near you. Survey close friends about what they think... just remember you're asking an open-ended question (What is my calling?); wanting a certain answer won't help your actual discernment process. *Let Your Life Speak* by Parker Palmer also offers some helpful advice.

Ask your pastor for a leadership opportunity, like leading a bible study or planning worship. This will give you a more realistic view of what being a pastor or rostered lay leader might entail. "Trying it on" is a good way to see if it fits. Then ask them for feedback. You'll want to get good at this type of request because it offers the chance for growth and allows others to see you mature.

Gather multiple views. If you feel like a voice is missing, like "Why should I NOT do this?" then ask someone you trust to give you that specific perspective. If no one seems to be enthusiastically cheering you on, recruit a cheerleader! If no one seems to be offering you any broader feedback, ask someone to help you consider other options.

Discernment is a process of discovery, so don't focus on the negativity of haters. That's their own stuff; and their vitriol is about themselves, not about you. It wouldn't be helpful for a woman interested in ministry to seek out advice on her own vocational discernment from someone who doesn't think women should be ordained. Learning how to deal compassionately

with people who are uneasy about the general idea of ordaining LGBTQ folks might be good pastoral care practice for becoming a pastor, but at this point it's wise to move on to more supportive confidants when it comes to being vulnerable and seeking feedback on vocational discernment. That being said, not all resistance is necessarily homophobic. Don't disregard all feedback that isn't 100% positive; nothing will be as helpful as advice from people who know you well and push you to explore a range of options.

Familiarize yourself with the ELCA Candidacy Manual (new update due in 2016.) This document outlines the various stages and expectations of the discernment/candidacy process. You should know that there are several levels where you will be assessed according to various criteria. While this external tool is used to help the church discern your call, rejection can be personally painful. If you experience a "postpone" or "deny" decision, take time to grieve and regroup. Recognize that you have gifts to offer the church and world. Those gifts might or might not be a good fit for ordained ministry specifically. Those gifts might be a good match for a new creative emerging ministry idea. Those gifts might make you a great therapist or lawyer or community organizer or lay leader too.

As an LGBTQ person you may face unfortunate barriers to ministry like homophobic candidacy committee members, clueless pros, or congregations nervous about hiring a "gay pastor." It's very important that you understand the risks of pursuing professional ministry (debt, joblessness, spiritual difficulties). It will serve you well to imagine contingency plans and sketch out what sorts of support networks can sustain you through difficult times. Where do you find strength?

Ultimately, the "external" sense of call is what determines if you're going to be a rostered leader in the ELCA. You must receive the validation from your candidacy committee, seminary pros, and personal references...but you'll be writing and speaking a TON along the way about your "internal" discernment. Throughout life, folks will ask why you chose the paths you did; intentional discernment can help you tell your own story.

Entrance

Entrance is the process that identifies an individual's potential for rostered ministry in the ELCA. This is the first official action of the candidacy committee and the beginning of a relationship with the candidate. Key components of the Entrance process include beginning discernment of a call and readiness to begin working toward rostered ministry through seminary education and the candidacy process. There are several steps you need to complete before you meet with the

candidacy committee including a background check and psychological testing. All of this information can be obtained through your synod office. Heads up that there are fees for entering candidacy (background check and psychological testing, for example) and these fees vary widely from synod to synod (up to \$1,000 for some).

You'll need to go through a psychological screening before your Entrance Interview. Don't get too nervous; the purpose of the screening is to make sure that you're aware of your own issues. The psychologist who does the screening should be familiar with and have some knowledge of LGBTQ issues. Perhaps you can even ask your synod contact person if the psychologist they recommend has worked with LGBTQ candidates before. If it turns out that they aren't very LGBTQ competent, take this as an opportunity to discuss your identity and your journey in as non-defensive and self-affirming way as possible. And it might be helpful for you to share this feedback with the synod contact person. As intimidating as it may feel to go through psychological testing, it's highly unlikely that the results would cause your committee to deny you Entrance. More likely, they may make a recommendation based on the psychologist's assessment that you go through some therapy or do some spiritual direction. Seminary, candidacy, and rostered ministry can all be quite psychologically trying at times. Your committee just wants to make sure that you're in a healthy place to handle it all.

ELM has written another resource for candidacy committees and you may want to check that out with regards to psychological evaluations and background checks. It's on pages 5-7 of *Candidacy and LGBTQ Individuals: An Offered Resource for ELCA Candidacy Committees*, found on the ELM resource page, www.elm.org/resources.

Your Entrance panel is likely your first chance to meet with the committee. This typically takes place before you begin seminary and seminaries often require a positive Entrance decision in order to begin your studies. The Entrance Interview is designed to get to know you and to mutually discern your call and if the path to ministry is a good fit for you. They will be looking to assess your character and general gifts more than your theology. However, a few Proclaim members said they were surprised by the depth of some theological questions! Answer the best you can, and if you feel stumped, perhaps say: "I'm looking forward to exploring that more in seminary. Maybe we can come back to that when we meet next time."

First things first

You've decided to enter candidacy. Now what? The first step is to contact your synod office. In addition to details about the paperwork and materials required to begin candidacy, your synod may host vocation retreats or provide other avenues for continued discernment and learning about the candidacy process. This is a great way to start building relationships with

those who will be with you in this process and to get a sense of how the process will work. It's also a good way for people to get to know you and to build allies, as this Proclaim member describes:

I had a conversation with the assistant to the bishop who worked with candidacy in my synod before even entering the process officially, which I found helpful. He was then an advocate for me on the committee and helped have some conversations with the committee before I got in the room for an interview or they received my paperwork so that the conversation with me did not center on that one aspect of who I am, but rather stayed on the topic of discernment, call, and my gifts for ministry and growing edges.

Although in general the ELCA candidacy process is standardized, things can vary a lot by synod and it can be good to get to know the individual players who are serving on the candidacy committee. Some synods will have social meet-and-greets with candidacy committee members and candidates/prospective candidates. This is a great way to start building those connections and relationships outside of official panel interviews. A perspective from an LGBTQ person who has gone through candidacy in that synod might be especially helpful, too. You can ask them questions about the process. If you don't know any LGBTQ leaders in your area, contact ELM and we can connect you.

Writing the Essay

The advice I received was to be confessional -- as in "this I believe" and not "this I have done".

Your essay should not read like a resume. Your essay will be more interesting and personal if you include some concrete experiences you've had and how they have shaped you and your faith and sense of call. However, a running list of your accomplishments is not what the committee is looking for. Self-aware and confident, yet humble and open.

Is it better to come out in your essay or in person? Ultimately, it's up to you, of course. But in our community most folks have found that coming out sooner rather than later has worked best for them. Here's a few thoughts from Proclaim members:

I always found it easier to write about LGBT stuff in my essays because then the committee had a starting place for asking questions and talking about it. I felt like this way I had more control when they can see it with their eyes and think about it more calmly than they would hearing it in a large group. If they are going to ask questions about it (and they will) then I would hope that at least one person could help craft appropriate questions to ask.

I'm really glad I made the decision to come out at this point in the process [Entrance]. It gave me a certain peace of mind knowing that I was going into the process showing all my cards and had nothing to hide.

Candidacy committee members have often said that including information in the essay (like coming out) usually works well. This gives your Entrance panel an opportunity to reflect before the conversation and avoid the sense of unexpected surprise. If it feels more natural to come out to the committee in a person-to-person conversation, you might consider having a conversation with a staff person or chair of the candidacy committee before the panel meets.

The Interview

The Entrance Interview is a chance for the committee to get to know you. It's helpful if you can articulate where you are at in your discernment, even if you're not fully sure where you are being called.

Re-read your essay before your interview. They will ask you questions about it and it doesn't look great if you can't remember what you wrote. Maybe even practice some questions with a friend in advance of the interview so you can feel comfortable with your answers, especially as they relate to your sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It might be helpful ahead of time to decide what you are willing to share if asked and what you are not willing to share. Your non-anxious, non-defensive presence will go a long way and will show them some excellent ministry skills.

Even with all this good advice and preparation, there might be some surprises. Here are some surprises Proclaim members experienced:

I was a bit surprised that my committee told me that they support me 100% but that it may be a struggle for me to find a call as a gay woman. In retrospect, I'm grateful that they were honest about where the church is right now. On the other hand, it also gave me a sneak preview into the often fatalistic view that even the most supportive and open committees have about LGBTQ call prospects.

I was surprised that the panel was more focused on things other than my sexual orientation. They asked a lot about my faith tradition before becoming Lutheran and my amount of student debt. These were their primary concerns.

We spent 90% of it talking about my gender identity. It was like I needed to convince them that my identity was stable enough to be in candidacy. I knew that there would be some level questioning and conversation around this. But I was surprised by the proportion of my interview that it took up. And I was surprised to be asked if I was undergoing the requisite therapy for sex reassignment surgery.

I was pleasantly surprised we didn't talk more about my sexuality, as I was still working that piece out for myself. They did express concern about my not knowing myself, and we talked about that.

So, given all that, how can you best prepare? Brilliance again from Proclaim members:

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

Don't be nervous. Just be yourself and tell your story. It's not a test.

Meditate. Keep your cool. It's not as tough as you might think.

Remember that the candidacy committee really wants good people to serve the church. They will want to work with you and to support you.

Talk to Proclaim folk. They helped remind me that all of who I am is called to ministry and that sexuality and the many ways the dominant culture marginalizes us can, and usually are, gifts for ministry rather than obstacles to be overcome.

Pray. Also surrounding yourself with a supportive community and friends. It was important for me to know that I am loved and will have a meaningful life regardless of however candidacy did or didn't turn out for me.

Being in a non-anxious, calm, and enthusiastic space was really important for me. Remember that your candidacy committee and those interviewing you ARE on your side, and act that way. They are there to help you and support you and discern with you, and the more grateful and open you are to them, the more grateful and open they are to you.

Brush your teeth and have a good breakfast.

AND, once you've been officially Entranced, you can now join Proclaim. Lucky you! And lucky us! Proclaim (a program of Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries) is the professional community for publicly identified LGBTQ Lutheran rostered leaders and those preparing for rostered leadership. Check it out at www.elm.org/proclaim

CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education)

CPE, or Clinical Pastoral Education, is a required part of an ELCA seminary education that occurs in community settings. Although not always an academic requirement for your degree, it is a candidacy requirement for ordained ministry. CPE includes a set number of hours over a period of weeks called a "unit" - around 400 hours of combined clinical experience and individual and group supervision. One unit is required for ordained ministry in the ELCA, although some people will go on to do additional units of CPE if they feel a call to chaplaincy or to other ministries of pastoral care.

CPE is often completed during the summer between the first and second years of seminary, called an intensive unit, or while taking a reduced course load during the academic year, called an extended unit. Both offer advantages and disadvantages, and it is important to consider other commitments (family, school, etc.) when deciding to enroll in a particular CPE program. For some, doing CPE during the summer is best because doing CPE while also taking classes and/or working can be extremely challenging. For others the extended unit works better so they don't have an entire summer without income.

Be in touch with your seminary and candidacy committee before your first semester of classes about their expectations for when you will complete CPE. Most candidacy committees will not consider endorsement until after CPE is completed. If you are enrolled in an ELCA seminary, you might be encouraged to begin applying for CPE programs in the fall of your first semester. You need to APPLY EARLY. If you haven't applied to a summer unit by early fall the year before, you risk getting shut out of a program in a place where you want/need to be. If you are attending a non-ELCA divinity school, you might need to be a bit more proactive in keeping up with requirements and application deadlines. CPE occurs at a variety of community settings such as hospitals, nursing homes, hospices, and even prisons or other correctional facilities. You will be doing supervised pastoral care and reflecting upon your experience with a trained supervisor as well as a group of peers.

CPE programs generally interview in the winter months and attempt to put together a diverse cohort of students from a variety of religious traditions. LGBTQ seminarians face some unique challenges and opportunities in CPE. There will likely be at least one person in your group who is queerphobic or still wrestling with the reality of LGBTQ people as beloved children of God. Having members of your CPE group whose theological beliefs are different from your own is a big part of the CPE experience, and is good preparation for parish ministry.

You may choose to come out in your CPE application materials as some Proclaimers have done:

It was important to me to come out in my CPE essay and application so that I could get a feel for whether or not the supervisor would be an ally during the interview...I'm glad I did this because even though I had a couple group members that weren't accepting of my gender identity and sexual orientation, I was able to know throughout the unit that my supervisor had my back and was supportive.

With the variety of CPE sites available, it is hard to know where to begin applying. The Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, www.acpe.edu, has a listing of CPE sites by state. It is also a good idea to talk to your seminary's Contextual Education office. Most CPE sites require interns to pay tuition, which varies widely, and your seminary may also require you to pay tuition if you are taking CPE for credit. It is possible to find sites where you are paid for your

time. You should expect that CPE will be your primary focus during those weeks, as it is very difficult to manage the physical and emotional demands of a CPE program as well as working a part-time job. Proclaim members suggest talking to other LGBTQ candidates, like other Proclaimers!, or other students who are a year or two ahead of you in seminary, to find programs that might be a good fit. Finding a supervisor who supports you and your learning goals is crucial. It's a good idea to talk to people who have done CPE and try to find a supervisor and a site which will match your own style and needs. Once you start, push yourself to get as much as possible out of the experience.

CPE is a wonderfully formative part of seminary education, but it is also emotionally demanding. You can expect to work varied hours (including overnight shifts and weekends) and you will be challenged in your beliefs, practices, and assumptions. Here's some advice from Proclaim members:

Find an outside community or therapist or somebody to vent to, and talk through events with, and be the best pastor you can be in group. Find healthy outlets for the stress—I like the batting cages myself.

Have a life outside CPE—whether it be going home and reading good books or calling up friends most nights, it will pay off to have a space for yourself apart from CPE.

Also, it is important to take care of yourself by eating good food, sleeping well, and getting exercise. Staying physically and emotionally healthy during CPE will help you to get the most out of your experience.

While you are in the midst of CPE, it is important to remember that all of this will make you an even better pastor. You may not go on to work in a hospital or a nursing home, but you get to look at who you are while you care for others which is an important part of doing ministry in any context. You will examine your conflict and communication styles, you will reflect on how your upbringing and socialization shape the ways that you move about in the world, and you will learn a lot about differentiation from your work. CPE gives you an opportunity to practice self-care and self-reflection in advance of parish work. Going into CPE with a spirit of openness and a willingness to learn about yourself will help to make the experience an important part of your formation as a minister.

Endorsement

The Endorsement Interview is one of those pivotal moments that serve as a checkpoint during the approval process. Just as the Entrance decision becomes the point of entry into the approval process, Endorsement represents the moment when the candidate affirms an intention to follow through on the call to its fulfillment and the church (through the synodical candidacy committee) affirms its desire to see that happen. It is that moment when a positive Endorsement decision solidifies, strengthens, and deepens the partnership between candidate and church.

Given the importance of the decision to be made, it is natural to want to do well in the Endorsement Interview. There may also be some anxiety associated with it: that is also natural. And that is true for all candidates whether LGBTQ or not.

What is most important to remember is that your candidacy committee wants you to do well also. They are probably just trying to learn about how you've been progressing and hear what you believe and think. It is highly unlikely that they would try to trick you or catch you on not knowing something or having a controversial opinion. So don't be too nervous.

On the off chance that someone on your committee does ask you something that you are unable to answer, be honest about not knowing. It looks good that you can admit it. If they disagree with you about something, show them how great you are at respectful disagreement and hearing the perspective of others.

As you prepare for your interview, the experience of colleagues that have negotiated the Endorsement process before you may provide you with some helpful tips. Some of their suggestions are as follows.

Getting Ready:

Best advice I ever got was to go in to candidacy interviews like a CPE visit. Open, not-knowing, self-less, centered, pastoral. If you're already calm, you can take surprises and challenges. They will want to know how your CPE was. You should be able to talk about the good and the bad of it. What you learned. How you have grown. It's OK if it was hard—but don't spend a lot of time blaming others, even if they were jerks. Say they were difficult and how you managed that.

Be honest and stay in touch with the committee throughout the year so that they can follow your journey better. Don't expect them to reach out first, and make sure you know when what paperwork is due where. It varies from synod to synod and committee to committee how clear communication is.

It might be helpful to brainstorm or journal before the interview about what's emerged from CPE, contextual education, and class experiences so far in candidacy. Where are the "gaps" in terms of ministry experiences and how might you focus on gaining more experiences in those areas during internship and your remaining course work and contextual ed? When have you been taking care of yourself in healthy ways and when have you not? How will you continue to nurture healthy self-care on internship?

My endorsement interview was a turning point in my candidacy. I was still reeling from a less-than-friendly entrance and my endorsement was so kind, so encouraging, so supportive. Part of it was probably because I was no longer the hot mess I had been at entrance, part of it was because my endorsement committee wanted good things for me. While my committee was a straight pastor, a straight bishop's assistant and a gay rep from my seminary, it could have easily been all straight people. But these three were celebrating the fact that the church was welcoming LGBTQ pastors, and were happy to be part of it. By the time new candidates come into the process, the thrill may have worn off slightly, or your committee might be happy to finally join the parade. However, you may be in a synod that is still freaked out about that. Perhaps you can ask these questions – not taking it personally but where do members of the committee stand on LGBTQ candidacy? If they are freaked out, it would probably be helpful to have at least one supporter on the team.

The preceding comment has implications both for the committee make-up and how to approach it and what you might expect in the interview itself. No two interviews are alike and conversations about your sexuality and/or gender identity may take different forms or not even be mentioned at all.

My endorsement committee did not bring up my sexuality. I don't know if that was because they didn't see it as worth talking about or because they don't know. I chose not to bring it up – I let them guide the conversation.

While it is helpful counsel to let the committee guide the conversation, it is generally a good idea, however, to be as honest and transparent as you feel comfortable in being about your sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It is certainly better if that is in the open before you get to the Approval interview.

Be careful about the word "partner" or describing yourself as "partnered." – for my candidacy this was a red flag. They pushed me in the interview to define "partner" and "partnership" – it seemed they wanted to (a) make sure my relationship was as close to "marriage" as possible and (b) then push as to why we were not married.

They probed more deeply into my background before becoming Lutheran and how I reconcile those beliefs or not with my current Lutheran Theology. They also asked how comfortable I feel with the more cultural aspects of Lutheranism and about the style of worship in Lutheranism. Essentially can I participate naturally and effectively in a typical Lutheran congregation when I wasn't raised in one? They also asked me pointedly about whether my identity as a gay man was primary or secondary to my identity

as a pastor. I told them I had a sense of call to pastoral ministry long before I had discovered my sexual orientation. Again I responded with grace, patience, and honesty. Being offended or getting upset would not have helped.

As the above comments suggest, conversation about sexuality may or may not be a part of an exploration of other issues. The following comments indicate some of what else might be a part of the conversation.

My Endorsement Interview was less theologically intense than I thought it would be- for some reason I went in thinking I was going to be drilled on the Lutheran Confessions but it was much more along the lines of tying my theological learning to my own spiritual and ministerial growth. I'm sure that this will vary by committee, but this was my experience, and while going over some of my seminary class notes was helpful, it was even more helpful to have reflected on my ministerial identity.

Some of the questions in my Endorsement Interview concerned reflecting on my learning in seminary, self-care, and CPE experience. The other major focus of the interview was considering my readiness for internship, and what my hopes, goals, and fears were for internship. It seemed that one of the key things they were looking for in considering my readiness for internship was self-awareness.

One other aspect of the Endorsement Interview that deserves attention is the make-up of the interviewing committee. Typically, the synod will decide which of its members will serve the committee and individual members may hold various positions with regard to the 2009 ELCA Assembly decision. You have the opportunity to select a faculty member as an advisor from your seminary to sit on the committee as well. If you are considering switching your faculty advisor to a faculty member who knows you better, it is highly recommended that you make that switch before the interview. If the seminary doesn't require that you meet with your advisor before the interview, make an appointment to do so during the weeks preceding the interview to discuss any concerns. Make sure that they can advocate on your behalf and that whatever you plan on discussing during the interview is not brand new or surprising to them. Some of the following comments indicate why.

It was wonderful for me to have my advisor from the Lutheran Seminary where I affiliated at my interview even if it was just via Skype. I would recommend that any students who are at non-ELCA seminaries or divinity schools make sure that their ELCA seminary advisor participates in the interview. It's a great way for them to get to know you and they can advocate for you about things like Lutheran Year requirements. I know someone who had a really hard-nosed committee and her advisor served as a great buffer and voice with authority who was able to advocate for her in ways that many candidates cannot do for themselves for fear of seeming difficult or entitled.

It was helpful to have my faculty advisor in on the interview. Because the conversation in my Entrance interview was skewed to focus way too much on my gender identity and sexual orientation, I had a conversation with my faculty advisor prior to my Endorsement interview to discuss how I could handle it if the interview veered in that direction again. Even though it didn't and the interview wound up going very

well, it was comforting for me to know that at least one of the people “in the room” during the interview knew me reasonably well as a candidate and would help to advocate for me if the interview got off track.

There was one person in particular that I did not want from the candidacy committee. I had two seminary advisors at the time and although both were personally supportive, one made me more comfortable in his ability to be an advocate for me. I told him that it was really important to me and I wanted him to be the one there and we were able to make it happen.

I was concerned that the committee seemed to be composed of three people with “axes to grind.” One had a very painful experience with the tradition I grew up in, another was actively against the revisions made to include partnered LGBTQ clergy in 2009, and the third was a Lutheran liturgy professor. I didn’t understand that they had this baggage until I was sitting in the room with them. However, I had built adequate trust and respect with two of the three that on two occasions they challenged one another on the appropriateness of a particular question.

Your experience may not be anything like those described above. What seems to be clear, however, is that the more you can approach the interview as an opportunity for you to be honest and open with the committee about who you are and what your hopes for ministry are, the better the interview will go. Above all, seek to ensure that your faculty advisor or another faculty person who knows you well is a participant in the interview.

What if I get postponed or denied?

At each step of the candidacy process (Entrance, Endorsement, Approval), the panel of committee members you meet with can choose to recommend either a positive decision, a denial, or postponement. This panel brings their recommendation to the full candidacy committee, often at a later date. This is where the official decision is made, though the full committee usually affirms the recommendation from the panel.

If you are denied or postponed for some reason, the committee is required to communicate that with you clearly. If you are postponed, things might be a little more confusing. The committee might have an additional requirement for you, such as seeking Spiritual Direction, reducing your debt, or asking you to redo a contextual education component. It can feel like the wind is knocked out of your sails, especially if you have already invested in theological education. Prayerfully consider the committee’s requests. Even if they do not make sense to you, sometimes committees will have a perspective you don’t. Showing the committee that you are willing and committed to continue working with them, being formed in prayer and communal discernment, will demonstrate to them and to you the Holy Spirit’s work in your strength, in your growth and in your resolve. It is a wise idea to be in communication with the synod’s candidacy staff liaison and your own committee liaison to make sure you understand the postponement thoroughly.

Internship: Interviewing and Placement

Are you thinking about internship and getting ready to start interviewing and seeking a placement? Great! Then this nifty section is for you. 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!

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 section 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 section, 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 section on internship 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, www.elm.org/resources.

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 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 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 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?
- How has the congregation engaged with the conversation about marriage equality?

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.

Internship: Thriving and Flourishing on Internship

Things to Know Before You Go: Wisdom, Ideas, Experiences

You will get lots of information, paperwork, guidelines, and wisdom from your seminary internship director and school. And you will have friends and colleagues share about their experiences serving as an intern. Some of this will be helpful in navigating your internship experience and some things you will have to figure out on your own. Some of these shared experiences will resonate with your own and others won't. That's okay.

What follows is some collected wisdom from your Proclaim colleagues. Many of the tips have to do with the unique experience of being an LGBTQ intern, but others are more general in nature. We hope it is helpful as you begin preparing for your internship experience!

From Proclaim members:

Your job as an intern is not to figure out how to come out to the congregation. Your job is to be the intern for the congregation. Ask your supervisor before you get there how they are planning on letting the congregation know that you are LGBTQ. If you can share your call story in a way that includes coming out (in a newsletter article or something), that can be a great way to come out before you get there.

Do outreach at Pride for your congregation or local ReconcilingWorks Chapter. It's magical, it's fun AND it's evangelism. What a great idea for an internship project...

Find queer community (preferably outside your congregation). Proclaim pastors are great resources while on internship.

Sometimes people say offensive things. And sometimes they realize it afterwards and try to take them back. Be open to people's growth over the course of the year. Everybody is not going to love you. That is ok (good, in fact)!

Be aware that some congregants may like you just because you are LGBTQ, others may tend not to like you because you are LGBTQ, and others couldn't care less. Remember that it is a factor in relationships sometimes, but it is not the only factor.

After I had been assigned a placement that I was excited about, the intern supervisor shared that "it was getting out who you are, and I've had one person come up and tell me they don't think a lesbian should be a pastor." He said it rather flippantly and as a joke - but it hit me in the gut. The rest of the summer before internship started, I was scared, angry, frustrated, confused, and apathetic towards the internship experience. This continued for the first two months - I kept searching for the source of this concern: who was it? where were they? what were they thinking? And I wasn't engaging in the congregation at all. I

went to spiritual direction to talk about how I wasn't engaging and shared this story - it was in conversation with my director that I realized that actually everyone had been very kind to me and welcoming, that I hadn't experienced any real discrimination, and that I, me, was the one not engaging. I was walking into every room and event with fear, and my director encouraged me to shift that - what would it be like to enter every room with love. So, I did. I tried that on...and what a difference it made. Relationships formed - so much so, that at the end of my internship year I was amazed at how I could grow to love a community so significantly after only a year. I figured out, over time, who had made the comment to my supervisor, and my response was to love the heck out of her. We didn't become besties, but I became her pastor.

Engaging with the Internship Committee

ELM has a companion piece written for supervisors and committees working with LGBTQ interns. It is available on the ELM website, www.elm.org/resources.

ELCA Seminaries provide guidelines for the activity of Internship Committees and those suggestions and guidelines can serve as the foundation of your work together. In addition, you might want to give consideration to the following suggestions from Proclaim members:

Approach members of the committee as persons who are there to help you succeed. They want the year to be a good one as much as you do. Pray with and for them.

Never talk about anyone in a way that you wouldn't talk about your mother (assuming you like your mother). Even if you don't like someone on your committee or don't agree with them on something, keep it to yourself and if you have to talk about it then be humble and gracious. Be aware that it isn't just the content of your words, but your tone of voice and attitude communicates volumes about how you feel toward someone. Often people listen more to how you say it than to what you actually say.

If there are multiple LGBTQ people in your congregation and the process for choosing committee members permits it, consider inviting one of them to be on your committee.

Invite members to help you become familiar with and knowledgeable about both the congregation and the community in which it is located.

With as much transparency as you feel comfortable, share with your committee what your journey in the church has been like. The intention is neither to blame nor to elicit sympathy but simply to help the committee members have a good understanding of who you are, your call, and how you have arrived at this place in the process.

Think about the expectations that you have for your time and work with the committee and share those early on. Indicate your openness to receiving feedback -- and mean it -- on your

ministry skills but also on how your presence is being received in the congregation. Do your own reflection about how to integrate their feedback (or not).

They want to help and support you. Don't take their feedback personally. It is their job to help you learn and grow. It's natural that you will have some growth areas that they will notice and encourage you in. In my opinion, it's actually a great gift we have to go out and give this crazy work a whirl before we're done with school and called to be a church's pastor.

Sometimes, you develop a close relationship with your internship committee - they can become your biggest advocates and supports in the congregation. They can also be less clear about issues of confidentiality. Use your best judgement.

Don't schedule all of your evaluations for the same day or two.

Avoid triangles. The internship committee is not a good place to talk about conflict with your supervisor or any complaints they might have about your supervisor as a pastor.

Be gracious, patient, and honest. They aren't your friends, but be friendly. Get to know them and learn from them. Let them know their feedback matters to you.

Be thankful for them - they are all busy people who want to support you and see you grow in your ministry!

Your Relationship With Your Supervisor

ELM has a companion piece written for supervisors and committees working with LGBTQ interns. It is available on the ELM website, www.elm.org/resources.

Your relationship with your supervisor won't be the only factor that determines whether you have a good internship experience, but it will be a very important one. You are the expert on your own experience, and you are entering a community of differently experienced people. Every intern wants to put into practice what they've been learning and dreaming about, and God-willing, the supervisor and community are enthusiastic about you doing just that. However, it's good to realize going in that there's still so much to learn.

Supervisors will have different styles around mentoring. Some supervisors were brought up in the ministry to be very private. You may share far more personal information than they were trained to do or vice-versa. If this comes up, talk about what level of sharing each of you is comfortable with in this professional relationship.

Here's some additional wisdom that Proclaim members had to share about their relationships with supervisors:

Be clear from the beginning if the relationship will be collegial, mentor/mentee, hands-off, etc. Talk plainly about what you expect from one another as well as when and how to bring it up if those expectations aren't being met. Trust is key, but it takes time.

Make sure expectations are clear upfront - yours and your supervisor's.

Be open, yet remember that this is a professional relationship.

Triangulation is an ugly beast that easily sneaks up on you- ESPECIALLY if you're the first intern (as I was.) Suddenly you're a different outlet, a new set of ideas, for key folks toglom onto who for whatever reason, have "issues" with their actual pastor. Be prepared for this, and have a plan for how to appropriately handle it when it arises! Put another way - Have a chat about triangulation and how to avoid throwing each other under the bus.

Don't go to your intern committee or other congregation members to process conflict with your supervisor. I found it helpful to check-in with friends and mentors who don't have any relationship to the congregation or supervisor. This is my method of "peer-review." Outside perspective was totally vital to me while I was on internship. The contextual education office can be a good ally if you need to discuss your options or if conflict gets to a point where you need back-up or mediation.

In addition to the above tip about outside support, many interns (not just LGBTQ) have benefitted from having monthly spiritual direction or a professional counselor (specializing in clergy counseling) during internship. It's a great opportunity for a safe processing place: to develop your spiritual life "out in the field," dive into any family-of-origin or other issues that arise in the course of ministry, and sort out what dynamics with supervisor/congregation you can do something about and what you cannot.

Romance: Relationships and Dating

This one can be tricky and the specifics are necessarily different depending on your internship site, your supervisor, and your particular relationship. Your peers and trusted mentors who have experience navigating romance and internship are a great resource. Be true to yourself and your relationships. But also be smart.

Here's some of what your Proclaim colleagues had to share:

I was working with a spiritual director at this time and he provided some of the best advice I've ever gotten. It was a tumultuous time for me, mid-life career change, divorce, coming out... He suggested I be as transparent as possible. No need to over-disclose, but letting people see my struggle and walk with me strengthened my relationships.

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.

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

Be as open as you can, as non-anxious as you can. It's possible people will say things which will make you angry. Your anger is justified. Perhaps you should express that anger away from these people.

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.

Relationships are complex no matter if one is LGBTQ or H (heterosexual). I remember my internship supervisor explaining, during our interview, that the previous youth director (a relatively attractive, charismatic 20 something man) had invited a few female friends to spend the night at his place. They were just friends, not romantic interests at all. Yet someone in the congregation had driven past his place, noticed the extra cars in his driveway, and "reported" it to the pastor. Yucky, unhealthy and ridiculous... but it's a reality we have to work within. So, as stated previously, I think transparency with those who shepherd us (supervisors, candidacy committees, etc.) is helpful.

Have the obvious conversations with your significant other and have them regularly. Be intentional about talking over how things are going and if they feel their needs are or aren't being met adequately. Be sure not to dump or unload on your significant other at the end of the day. Make sure gender norms or roles for clergy spouses aren't being imposed upon them.

Dating websites and apps: It's all about how you use them. They can be great ways to meet people, date, and even find new friends. Pick which websites or apps you use carefully. You should expect that a parishioner could come across your profile and anything you put up (even if your name is not listed). So keep that in mind when you're creating a profile and posting messages.

Concluding Thoughts

I loved my internship, supervisor, and committee. I learned SO much, plenty of which was what NOT to do.

Love the people you are called to serve. Dream big and don't be afraid to fail. Make sure you experience as much as you can while there, but particularly focusing on your growing edges. I was in a place where I was afraid to be explicitly honest about who I was and I suffered for it, and I think my people didn't get the chance to know me - don't do that to yourself. It's not worth it to "just get through."

During my internship I got to try a little bit of everything! Take advantage of the opportunity to set down those things you have experience and expertise in. For example, I had a lot of previous experience in various forms of youth and family ministry. My internship supervisor was aware of this, and was upfront with the fact that she had no intention of having me spend any time doing youth and family ministry, as this was an existing proficiency of mine. She wanted me to spend the year learning new things. This was a huge blessing. Yes, it would have been natural to plug me into youth and family ministry from the get go- especially as the church was between youth directors when I arrived. But that would not have pushed my boundaries and helped me learn new things!

Finally, remember that internship is a time to learn, grow, and try your wings in a congregation and with a supervisor, all of whom want you to flourish. Make the most of your opportunity, be gentle with yourself, and stay in touch with your support community throughout the journey.

Approval and Assignment

Who's Who

Bishop- Ecclesial head of the synod. There are 65 of them, plus 1 presiding bishop.

Bishop's Assistant- Each bishop has at least one assistant or associate who helps with mobility. Each synod is organized differently.

Call Committee- This is the group of people (occasionally some churches use their council as the call committee) who have been carefully selected to interview candidates and make a recommendation for call.

Call Committee Chair- This is your primary liaison through the call process with a congregation.

Candidate - Fabulous you!

ELM Seminary Advocate – This is a staff or faculty person at a seminary or divinity school with whom ELM has connected to serve as a liaison between ELM and the seminary, and to be an advocate for LGBTQ students.

Regional Coordinator- As part of the Assignment Process (aka “The Draft”) they will contact you first, letting you know which broad area of the country (region) you’ll be assigned to. Then they work with the bishops for the synodical assignments.

Approval

O God, we've made it this far, don't let me fall into fear now. Guide my feet, my thoughts, my words, my heart, that I may be calm and pastoral in this conversation. Inspire our meeting, bless my committee, grant that our time together may be mutually encouraging and centered on your love for this world. Keep me in your care, keep my committee in your care, grant us your Spirit of creativity and vision as we discern together how your call might be lived out in my life. Amen.

Approval Essay

Who sees it: Candidacy committee and maybe home synod bishop

Writing your essay: This is usually an essay format that challenges you to relate your theological expertise and real world experience. It's important to demonstrate humility and receptivity to the Spirit in this essay. Most synods will only be reading for theological competence to the degree that they want to see that what you've been learning in seminary will prepare you to be a good pastor and that you are in tune with what's happening in the world. Candidacy committees are composed of pastors and lay people from the synod who have an interest in helping the church produce capable and faithful leaders. It's a good idea to have someone read your essay before you submit it.

Preparing for Assignment

A candidate is welcome to find out more information about any particular synod. You may contact the synod office in the interest of information gathering. It's even better if an ELM Seminary Advocate (if you don't know who this is for your school, contact ELM) or seminary staff/faculty member does this on your behalf because they can use the opportunity to share their personal experience of you with the synod staff member if they want. If you want to know more about a particular synod, ask. You can ask if they have first call opportunities, if they care about the ministry details that you'd like to see (social justice etc.), and how the synod has interacted with LGBTQ candidates in the past.

You cannot make deals with a synod representative before the assignment process. You cannot send your Rostered Leader Profile (RLP) to a synod representative prior to the assignment process, and may do so after the assignment process only with the permission of the synod to which you have been assigned. It is their job to get you interviews. If they cannot do that, you may need to explore other options. Also, we've heard from candidates that it's a good idea to connect with your regional coordinator *before* assignment (maybe a month or so). Your home synod bishop may or may not be part of assignment, so this regional coordinator can be a person in the room who knows you. If they don't reach out to you, seek them out! This is especially critical for students from non-ELCA seminaries that may not have a seminary liaison in the room.

Internet Scrub. Google thyself...even if you may have done so before. Try to get any semi-objectionable photos removed. If you have an old blog or e-journal or something, consider making those things private. Proceed as though everyone is going to be checking up on you, because they will. It is good to maintain some sort of web presence. So leave up all the positive sorts of things (like news articles that mention your feats of wonder) and understand the public version of your Facebook page, the stuff everyone can see even if you aren't connected to them. This is one way people will feel like they get to know you, and part of that now is putting your best cyber-foot forward.

Assignment Forms

Most forms tend to ask about relationships, but not identity. Especially if you are single, those reading your documents may not "read" that you are LGBTQ. You might need to be more explicit and creative about coming out.

It is no longer contrary to the rules of the ELCA to be LGBTQ and be in a partnered relationship. It is also not required for a congregation to abide by any denomination wide non-discrimination

agreement. Some churches don't want certain categories of leaders for whatever reason. More and more churches are declaring themselves to be open to calling an LGBTQ candidate for ministry, but navigating the rules, some said, some unsaid, is important for maximizing your visibility without offending potential advocates.

You've probably had some experience coming out. Maybe you're even getting to be a pro at it. You will do yourself a favor by incorporating your sexual orientation and/or gender identity self-disclosure into a positive statement about your call: "My first sense of call to ministry came from other lesbians who always asked about my thoughts on God." (This tells them that you identify as a lesbian AND that people find you spiritually insightful). Or, "Part of my calling is to reach people on the margins. As a gay man, I have often found myself on the margins of the church."

See later sections about ways to talk about your family, however you define that.

RLP – Rostered Leader Profile

Who sees it: bishop, bishop's assistant, and congregation (certain parts about ministry preferences are only seen by bishop and bishop's assistant)

Best place to self-disclose (this is where a bishop/congregation will look): You probably need at least two places because congregations see part, and bishops look at a few other places. Here are some options in Part 3: Reflections on Ministry: Competencies - like "As a publicly identified lesbian leader I have experience..."; *Calling* - like "publicly identifying as a transgender Lutheran has given me special insight into my calling..."; *Denominational Relationship* - could be like "After the ELCA's inclusion of LGBTQ partnered clergy in 2009 I felt..."; *Personal Ministry Statement* could also include a coming out component.

DON'T COME OUT IN ALL THESE PLACES, just pick a few... (unless you want them to think that being gay is your only superpower). You have lots to offer!

Don't self-disclose solely in the Part 4: Candidate Commentary section...This section will get skimmed on the first readings. It may not be a good idea to come out in the Disclosure section because this pertains to potential ministry hindrances and being LGBTQ is a gift.

Also it's a good idea to self-disclose the Part 5: Additional Information section which bishops and bishop's assistants usually read or the last page Other Information section.

Geographic Preferences: select the regions and synods that you'd like to end up in. Do not select all of them; that won't help you. (This corresponds to the Candidate Assignment Forms A, B, and R...see that section for more discerning advice.)

Ministry Preferences are very important. Don't select everything. Think "for my first call I'd like to be..." Fill in that, and give yourself a little wiggle room. There are more congregations that are smaller than ones that are larger available for first call candidates. The most important section will be the "ministry position" section. Do you want to serve on a staff or be on your own? Again, don't check them all. Be honest and discerning. Remember, if you want to be around other LGBTQ folks, you probably want to go to a medium city or larger...it's not that queer folks aren't in rural areas (we are everywhere!) but the likelihood of finding a stable and out/proud community increases in metropolitan areas.

It is a good idea to also self-disclose in your own words and discuss your willingness or unwillingness to go into not-explicitly-welcoming contexts in the "Other Information" section. Maybe something like "Because of my history of spiritual abuse from the church, I know that my thriving will depend on a setting that is explicit in its LGBTQ welcome." Or, "I recognize that Lutherans are not all in agreement about LGBTQ leaders in the church, but part of my personal call to ministry is to journey with individuals and congregations still in discernment. Sometimes that's difficult, but I have cultivated a strong support network."

Be Creative. When asked for your ministry gifts and strengths, be sure to list the things you actually excel at, even if it's not flashy. There is room to explain your choices, so feel free to write a little story about how your God-given gifts serve the Gospel well.

Option to add additional info to RLP: Sometimes call committees are confused when they don't see something written here. They might see it as you not really being committed or engaged - rather than the reality that you probably feel like you've been going on and on about yourself. There are lots of options for what to put there - a newsletter article, a statement about your great loves in ministry, an exposition on the bible verse that inspires you to this call. Just do something that shares your voice with a little more depth.

REMEMBER:

- 1) SPELL CHECK!
- 2) Make sure the document conveys who you are more than theological assertions. If you like to play dodgeball and frequent Barbie museums and you have seen all Planet of the Apes movies...that tells folks more about your personality than what your personal feelings are on substitutionary atonement.

- 3) Know where you want to go and what ministry setting you see for yourself. Be very honest. It might not happen, but it will help synod staff keep you in mind when those calls open up.
- 4) Have someone who knows you well read through your paperwork to see if you do a good job of introducing yourself through it. Keep in mind, this is the ONLY thing that congregations will see until they interview you.
- 5) Don't fill up all the space on every form. Be concise whenever possible. Answers should be more than a few words, but do not need to fill up every single box.
- 6) ELM has supporters who've offered to read your RLP and give you feedback as well. Contact us if you want to be put in touch with someone.

Candidate Assignment Forms (Form A-B-R):

Who sees it: bishops and bishop's assistants (but probably more assistants)

Best place to self-disclose:

Form A – Options for this form include single, married, and various forms of “Publicly Accountable Lifelong Monogamous Same Sex Relationship.” There is also room for you to list your spouse's name.

Form B - These forms are put into a spreadsheet for the “draft” which indicates Home Synods, Restrictions, and Preferences. Section #2 (“Describe the ministry situation(s) and setting(s) to which you have the clearest sense of call and describe the gifts you bring”) is a good place to mention how being LGBTQ is awesome for ministry. This is one of the first places bishops and bishops' staff will look when looking through candidate's paperwork. This is a key section to really put your best foot forward. Grab the reader's attention so they will then want to further explore your RLP.

Under the #3 Availability Section, you will get conflicting advice. Some synod bishops and staff members believe that choosing “open to all” is the best option and advocate for this. They do so out of the hope that more candidates will be “open to all” and that this shows a greater openness to God's call. However, often our experience has suggested otherwise. It's up to you. But it's probably best if you do not select “open for all” unless you are HONESTLY open to going absolutely anywhere. Let's get real, you probably aren't. If you select that, your paperwork essentially goes to the bottom of the pile along with other candidates who will be sorted after everyone else has been assigned. You are MUCH better off selecting preferences, including identifying three synods within each region. That puts your paperwork in front of 9 people immediately. Think through this and learn about potential synods and their ministry prospects and concerns. #3 gives you an opportunity to describe your sense of call. This is probably another good place to self-disclose. Since this form will probably be seen prior to one's RLP if

you're in the hands of an "unfriendly synod," self-disclosing here might get you traded to a friendlier team.

Check the list of Reconciling in Christ Synods online through the ReconcilingWorks website- www.reconcilingworks.org. Consider synods that know you through candidacy, internship, seminary, etc. If your seminary doesn't have a good first call advocacy program, then you may need to take the initiative and contact synods yourself to see if they have any potential first call placements and how they have benefited from LGBTQ clergy before. It's acceptable to solicit general information from particular synods. If something is unclear, then you might contact the bishop's assistant or a pastor in that synod for more info. (In general, it's always better to have someone advocate FOR you.) Ask around, your colleagues in Proclaim are a great source of knowledge and encouragement.

Form R

This form should NOT be the first time the bishop learns about this restriction request. If you are requesting a restriction, please contact the bishop's assistant for a meeting and talk to them about the reasons you are considering restricting. They will likely tell you that restriction means waiting a lot longer for a call. That's true, but it will move faster if you've demonstrated your ability to work within the system and communicate clearly. The "Candidate Commentary," like the similar section in the RLP, is often skimmed or skipped in the initial reading. It might be a good place to elaborate on how your sexual orientation has affected your call, but it's also a good idea to highlight the MANY gifts you bring to ministry.

After you are Assigned

Shepherding God, you guide your church through paths of right relationship for your name's sake. Even when we sheep run off on our own plans and expectations, you draw us back and send us on your way. As we wait for guidance, for communication, for paperwork and clearer direction, grant us calm and patience, peace and endurance, that this liminal time be fruitful, grounding, and not too long. Bless the parish to which you have called me, those who will guide and midwife the process of birthing our new ministry together, and the administration within both the bishop's office and the call committee, which seek to follow your leading. Remind me of my gifts for ministry and the training and support I have received, that I may be encouraged in the waiting time, and help me know your creative Spirit at work even in the middle space between Assignment and Interviewing. Amen.

“How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news, who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’ ”

Isaiah 52:7

ELM Accompaniment Coaches

After you are assigned, you can be matched up with an ELM Accompaniment Coach. These folks are Proclaim members who have recently been through the candidacy and first call process. They can accompany you as you navigate this part of the process by sharing resources, listening, practicing interviewing, and more.

Interacting with the Bishop/Synod Staff

It’s a good idea to think about how you’d like to self-disclose your sexual orientation when speaking with a bishop’s assistant. It’s good to be prepared for the “well, we don’t have any calls for you” response...but there is still hope. Invite them to get to know you. If you are able, attend a synod assembly or arrange at another time to meet with the bishop’s assistant in person. This might help them know you as a candidate they are eager to help find a call.

If a bishop’s assistant or bishop doesn’t ask about your sexual orientation, you might consider taking the initiative to speak about your experience as an LGBTQ person in seminary, internship, candidacy, etc. It will put them at ease to see that you can “handle” potentially awkward conversations. It will also give them some ideas about how they might introduce you to potential call committees. “While at seminary she met her wife Amy.” “He transitioned genders 20 years ago and accepted God’s call to the ministry after finding a welcoming congregation 10 years ago.” “They told me that identifying as gender queer has really helped them see more of the spectrum of Christian experience; you’ll want to be sure to hear more about that when you interview them!”

Once a month, reach out to the bishop or bishop’s assistant and ask about any new churches in interim, new calls, etc. This demonstrates your continued interest and also helps you get to know the synod staff over time.

This time can be maddening. I kept a document called “When Things Change” - a place where I could just write down all the ways I would make things better. That seemed to help me feel proactive and not stew in my own frustrations.

“Yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.” Luke 18:5

What if they aren’t responsive? Different synod staff members serve as point people - sometimes the bishop, or the bishop’s assistant. Try connecting with someone different if you aren’t getting responses. Make phone calls in addition to emails - they’ve gotta be in their office at some point!

*Tip – make sure your synod and synod staff have seen ELM’s resource, *Enrich & Transform: Welcoming LGBTQ Candidates into the Call Process* (www.elm.org/resources). It’s a great resource for them to share with congregations in the call process.

Connect with Proclaim members in this synod

After you are assigned, connect with other Proclaim members in that area. They can help give you the inside scoop and it’s never too early to start building deeper collegial relationships. Check in with ELM staff if you’re not sure who’s in your synod.

One Proclaim member developed an excel spreadsheet system for keeping track of the various open calls, contacts with synod, etc. Make one that works for you. Here are some columns to get you started:

Congregation Name	
Role - i.e. solo, associate, etc	
Full Time, Part Time	
City, Synod	
Notes (i.e., looked through their website on 5/1/14, emailed bishop’s assistant on 5/2/14, 5/7/14 - rec’d response, “this congregation is just starting an interim, check back in 2 months,” etc)	
Last contact with synod office	
Next contact with synod office (reminds you to check back in at a certain time!)	
Status (i.e. pre-Ministry Site Profile, writing Ministry Site Profile, etc)	
Contacts in congregation	
To-Do’s (i.e. ask John to submit my name to call committee)	

Home Synod. If you are assigned to your home synod that may be because they know and love you the best and that's terrific. It may also be because no other synod felt they had a good match for you at this time. You may ask your synodical mobility representative or the bishop about why they took you and what your prospects look like. (They should tell you this anyway.)

Visit. If you don't live in the synod (or near the synod office) where you are assigned, go visit (ELM can help with homestays!) so you can meet with synod staff in person. See if you can get invited to synod assembly as first call candidate (and ask them if they might pay for your registration and/or travel – it's worked before!)

Waiting Time

Ok, here we g--- no? Um, hey God, remember me? Remember that whole 'call' thing we talked about? Any time now! Show me the giftedness of this time, that it not be wasted in fear or self-doubt. Show me the blessedness of wanting, the strength of desiring, the beauty of longing, that I may remember, when my future ministry threatens to weigh me down, how much I am called and sent, how deeply I am blessed to serve, and how central your love is to the whole of my life. May my waiting and wanting be a blessing to those around me as they serve in ways I need to serve, may my zeal to answer your call be fed by your Spirit in my day-to-day living, may my colleagues who wait with me also be encouraged, for we are not solitary in our wishing and hoping to follow. Thank you for this time, even when it sucks, and show me what you're up to, even if only the slightest shadow of it. Amen.

Spiritual practices while you wait - Centering prayer. Find a clergy lunch group or text study group. Explore your neighborhood for places to pray or places that need prayers. Connect with a local parish or community ministry you want to support. Don't put your spiritual and ministerial life on hold while you're waiting. Get to it, encouraging and empowering the folks you meet along the way to be disciples so when you leave for your first call you'll have even more good experience to take with you and you will have been doing ministry all along.

Patience is a virtue; a nasty nasty virtue. Because of a lot of reasons (economy, shifting landscape for church, church staff downsizing, etc), first calls are not always available in a timely manner after graduating from seminary. So, as you submit your paperwork, also submit some résumés for alternative employment while you wait. Lots of people (gay and straight) wait for a whole year...so it's helpful to have a game plan for the in between time.

Do Ministry. Somewhere. Pulpit Supply, local clergy gatherings and text study. These connections can be very life giving while you wait, and adds to your own experience. Sometimes our partner denominations have pulpit supply opportunities too. Let area clergy, of

any denomination we've got shared pulpit with, know that you're trained and available. See if retired clergy will pair up with you – you preach and they preside. And some small parishes are using pre-consecrated elements to allow their deacons to lead worship where churches are shorthanded (a bit 'hocus-pocus,' but if the opportunity is there!). Contact to get listed on the Proclaim Pulpit Supply page on ELM's website - www.elm.org/proclaim-pulpit-supply.

Network. Some folks find a call through external processes (e.g. At a synod event they happened to meet someone from a church call committee that wasn't considering a first call pastor, but then decided to ask the bishop for their paperwork.) Checking in with the Proclaim community might also unearth some alternative call possibilities.

Don't be afraid to give the bishop's assistant a call every couple weeks if you haven't heard anything from them. This will alleviate some of the building anxiety and remind them that you are committed to the process.

*God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
1 Corinthians 1:9*

Plan B

Have a Backup Plan. Your Plan B should keep you housed and fed for 6 months to a year while you wait. All of these processes take time. Your seminary and synod will NOT be diligent about helping you during this time. So you've gotta have a plan. As a church interview process unfolds you can always inform them of your current working situation and agree on an appropriate start date should they decide to call you. In the meantime, take care of yourself and take the opportunity to learn some new avenues for self-care...you'll need them now and in the future.

Putting together your Plan B. Some folks in the process seem to get ordained before they've even graduated, others wait for years until they have to renew their candidacy again. Stay connected with your candidacy committee, let them know where you are and what you're thinking and what's up in your prayer life. Health insurance can be anxiety producing, but breathe deeply and often and look into options while you still have seminary insurance and the seminary financial aid folks at hand. Seek out local health clinics with sliding scales. Searching out and navigating these systems will serve you well in your ministry!

Plan B's that have worked for folks. Retail, part-time jobs, living with parents, living on spouse's income, moving into a co-op, summer camp, etc. This seems to be becoming a tougher time for everyone waiting for call. Parishes are smaller and unable to support full time

ministers, but they still have vital ministry to do. The church is experiencing a great deal of change right now, so a lot of people are anxious about the future, with or without the conversations about LGBTQ folks in leadership. Consider your position to be one of extreme giftedness for this time, because we're all going to have to get used to being witnesses from the outside, doing ministry in new ways.

Jumping Back In/The Pentecost Site. You may re-enter the assignment process if you would like to try to be assigned elsewhere, though there are no guarantees.

After a period of time without interviews or movement, you can talk with the bishop of the synod where you were assigned about a possible contingency arrangement to extend your paperwork to nearby synods or other synods that might have potential calls. Ask them about the Pentecost site – a bishop-access-only site where they can share candidate files for first call.

If they know they don't have a place for you to interview, they may agree to share your paperwork with colleagues in other synods. You can request to be "released" after 6 months if you think there is nothing happening. This might work out or it might backfire. If you have a good feeling about the synod and feel like the bishop's assistant is getting to know you, it's probably best to stay put. Then the pressure on THEM to get you an interview increases. This will hopefully work in your favor as you seek a first call!

First Call

Interviewing for First Call

"... for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." Isaiah 56:1-8

Congratulations! Your name has been given to a congregation and they have decided to interview you! It's not a done deal yet, it's important to keep your hopes in perspective, but it's also a good time to start thinking about how to present your authentic self.

Practice. Seek out a trusted friend to debrief with, get feedback, help discern, etc. Maybe a colleague, a friend, or even a counselor. It can be very helpful to practice interviewing with this person. Do you fidget? Do you say "um" too much? Someone's gotta tell you. Also, before your interview make a plan to debrief your interview with a trusted friend after the fact. It will help to have someone on hand to talk through what happened and how you felt about it, etc.

Investigate. Learn AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE about this congregation. Contact all their references (and send them a thank you note). The call committee will hear back or ask the references if you've contacted them. Read through the congregation's website, Facebook page, etc. Try to discern what is important to them.

During the interview it can be good to refer to how your specific skill set matches what they have included in their congregational profile. Perhaps while talking about your internship project experience highlight how that corresponds to some of the things you've understood about their community.

Interview Practices. Synods and congregations will vary widely in their interview practice. Some will bring you in for a full day, including dinner and a tour of the community. Others will expect a mere hour from you. If you have the option, urge greater human connection. Ask if you might have a meal together as a committee. Be curious about their community, and ask for a walking tour. Pray together (and be prepared to lead that prayer). It is especially helpful if to ask what prayer requests the committee members have. For example, perhaps the community has just experienced a death, or difficulty that has affected them deeply. They'll appreciate your concern, and they'll need the prayers.

Some call committees are very prepared; others are more nervous than you are. Be prepared to help lead the committee through the interview process, but don't demand this role. If they are anxious, they'll appreciate your confidence and willingness to guide them.

Boundaries. What's appropriate to respond to, what's not, and how to respond. If they want to ask you about how you met your spouse, that's probably understandable...but if they want to ask you which one of you is the "man" of the household, that's not appropriate. It's ok to say things like "I think we can save that question until we get to know each other a bit better." Or "I think we've crossed a pastoral boundary and as a candidate, I think it's important to get back to talking about ministry." Be prepared to be asked questions about your family and their involvement and make a plan for how you want to respond.

Questions. Generate a few questions for the committee about their experience and congregational priorities. Their ultimate question will be "Is the Holy Spirit calling us to partner together in mission and ministry?" This is important for you to ask yourself as well. You are being interviewed, *and* you are interviewing the call committee. Ask yourself, What do I need to know? And make a list of a few questions their paperwork or website etc. has raised for you.

Likely, you have about 10 minutes to ask questions in your 1st interview (do your homework on this congregation and highlight things that interest you about them). For example:

- “Your website has many pictures of people eating together, are meals and eating together central to this community? Who’s the cook?!”
- “St. Pauline’s sounds like a really warm and friendly congregation. Has it always been that way or did you have to work on specific things to make the community more inviting?”
- “I saw in your Congregational Profile that y’all have a strong affinity for ministers with liturgical proficiency. I love liturgy, and I’d be interested to hear more about the ways in which worship really matters to the church.”
- “What has been the highlight and the biggest challenge in the last few years?”

Spouses/Family. Many folks choose to include family details in the side stories that happen at various points during the lengthier interview process. For those who are single, you already know what kind of culture exists in churches for single folks. The call committee might want to know about your plans for dating, interest in "settling down," etc. What they may be afraid of (consciously or unconsciously) is the stereotype of gay-frivolous-sexual-behavior. When confronted with these questions, try not to get defensive. Instead, consider it a teachable moment, acknowledge the stereotypes they may have, and then politely also acknowledge your respect for your role as a representative of the church. If you feel like it you might set a boundary about trusting each other as a potential future relationship may unfold.

I had dinner with the call committee first thing when I arrived for my interview and I just talked leisurely about my life with my spouse as it is a part of my life and nothing to hide.

You may ask about spousal and familial roles with previous pastors if you feel the question needs to be asked. “Could you tell me about the previous pastor’s spouse and their involvement in the church?”

Be up-front and honest. If you don’t have a family, but it is something that is very important you, feel free to let them know.

I was honest in sharing with my congregation that at some point in the future my spouse and I would like to have a family.

First call, sole candidate is different than if there are multiple candidates interviewing (multiple factors about whether you are chosen or not, may not be about you AT ALL). You can ask the bishop’s assistant if they could tell you approximately how many other candidates they are interviewing if you want to know. If you’re the only one, they will probably tell you.

Rejection. Sometimes they might not move you on to the next round. This can be devastating. This decision may not have anything to do with you personally. On the other hand, it might. If

you want, you can ask for feedback from places you interview if you don't move forward in process. Thank them for taking the time to interview you and ask if they have any suggestions or feedback you might consider as you meet other committees. Just make sure you don't come across as whiny or "sour grapes." Asking for genuine feedback lets them know that you're willing to be a partner in ministry...and if their other candidates don't pan out, they might come back to you, and if not...then you might get some helpful tips.

Skype or some other video conference thing is probably going to be the way you'll interact with a committee far away. You might Skype first with a bishop or bishop's assistant too. Consider a few things: 1) Practice Skyping with a friend if you're not familiar. Make sure you are comfortable with the technology. 2) Background should be boring but not bare, lighting should be tested. 2) You should look nice (clericals perhaps) 3) Remember to look at the camera instead of the screen and Smile!...maybe put sticky notes up near the computer camera to remind you where to look and to smile.

Meeting the Call Committee

God, you know how I've waited for this and wanted this. Help me listen for your call, to trust that you will bring leader and parish together, and that it may be here or it may not be, but that this time is holy because you are here. I am your pastor, these are your people, may we be church together in this time, to your glory. Amen.

Often, if a committee isn't able to meet a candidate in person in the first round, then for a second interview they will pay for the candidate to come visit with the committee at the congregation or ministry. This is not when a candidate would meet the whole congregation. This is an opportunity to meet just the call committee in person and maybe preach at a nearby church ("neutral site") just for them to observe.

Names. This is a secret bonus for you: Names are super important! Unfortunately, not everyone is gifted with remembering names. Jot down the names of folks on the call committee, and maybe a note about them. Try to learn who they are. If you call them by name during the interview, that will speak highly of your attention and care. ALSO, you can totally look everyone up on Facebook later...because they have looked you up for sure!

The call committee may use this opportunity to make a recording introducing you to the council. So, think about a few of the main things you'd like to say. Maybe mention a couple things you've observed about the congregation and how you see yourself fitting in with their mission and ministry. Remember to smile!

I proactively talked about my experience as an out gay man during the call process interviews. Even though the committee didn't bring up my being gay, I knew it was important for us to talk about, and so I initiated those conversations. I think one of the reasons the committee chose to recommend me for the call was my forthrightness and gentleness. They appreciated my questions and being able to share their experiences as I listened.

Recommended to the Council

The call committee makes a formal recommendation to the church council. It varies, but the council may or may not have read all your paperwork. They are usually given at least a brief biographical sketch/résumé and perhaps a recorded message introducing yourself to the council, along with the committee's formal rationale for recommending you. If the council votes to present you to the congregation, then the end may be in sight. They will set a date for you to meet the congregation. At this point the call committee and the church council are on your team!

Meeting the Congregation

I am (uncertain/excited/terrified/etc) and could really use your help here! Stir up your spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and holy fear and joy, that we might worship and discern wisely, trusting you to guide our ministry in whatever shape it takes today. Amen.

While some candidates do preach or conduct a small service during this visit, the call committee is supposed to prevent this from being a "trial sermon" or "free-for-all interview" for the congregation. Remember, you've already been through those hoops. This visit is essentially for getting acquainted with folks, so enjoy it. And maybe write down names and impressions of folks afterwards, because that will be fun to look back on.

Decide in advance how you will talk about your sexual orientation and/or gender identity and your family - practice with some trusted colleagues or friends so it feels natural. Help folks see this part of you as a gift, and not a liability! For example: "My husband was raised in a very conservative Christian household and isn't interested in being super active in the church, but he is excited to meet you and ease into a more nurturing community."

Connect your coming out story and call story, if they're connected. This can be a great way to tell parts of your story.

Mostly smile and try to call people by names if you can. The congregational vote requires a 2/3 majority to pass. It might be worth talking with the bishop's assistant about what a closer vote might indicate (more about this in next section).

When I was first coming out, a friend gave me some good advice: ‘You don’t come out once. You are always making decisions about coming out in every new context.’ The call process made that very clear. I made the decision to share it at each stage in the process – call committee, council, and congregation. I was committed to being open and honest while also keeping the focus on finding a good match in terms of ministry and mission. The synod staff was incredibly supportive.

In both congregations where I interviewed with the call committee, I came out during the official interview so that the call committee would hear it all at once. I gave us plenty of time to talk about mission and ministry before it came up, but I also made sure it wasn’t just thrown in at the end in a way that wouldn’t allow us to talk about it. In the interview with the call committee of the congregation I now serve, there was an immediate affirming response and it was seen as a potential way to strengthen their public witness to inclusion.

I came out in a similar way to the church council during my interview with them and received a similar response. When it came time to meet the whole congregation I preached in worship then began answering questions after the service. I was very aware as each hand was raised that I needed to find an opportunity to share my sexual orientation. Several questions in, someone asked if I would be bringing a family with me if I were called. I shared that I had recently become engaged and that I wanted them to know that I was gay and was engaged to another man. I shared his name and that his occupation was music therapy. There were maybe about 3 seconds of silence before the same person asked a follow-up question: “Well, is he going to sing in the choir?”

I almost laughed out loud, partly in relief and partly in response to the way that despite the challenge to traditional gender roles, the important question was whether the pastor’s spouse would sing in the choir.

Discerning a Fit

Oh, God, you know how I want a call. A genuine call, not just a job. Help me listen for your voice and follow your leading here. Help me ask good questions and listen well. Help me keep my focus on your kin[g]dom regardless of how this process leads. Thank you for these people and this ministry, which you have already been present in and will be present in long after I am gone. Thank you for these conversations. Thank you for your promised Spirit. Into your hands we have already been given - grant us the Grace to trust your guidance. Amen.

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Matthew 18:20

% vote - what is the threshold that would indicate the health of the call? In general, a vote of $\frac{2}{3}$ (of those present and voting) is needed from the congregation to issue a call. If it’s close to $\frac{2}{3}$, be aware that there are potentially some big challenges ahead. Have some clarity ahead of time of what is workable for you. Some candidates like to have this conversation with someone from synod staff ahead of time so you’re all on the same page.

Set your own priorities in advance- are you willing to take anything? Would you rather wait longer to get a more ideal spot? What are you willing to be flexible on? Are you open to a less than full time call?

Does this feel like a good fit? Are you excited about the possible partnership in ministry together? Do your gifts match the visions of this community? What does your heart, gut, soul, mind say?

Sometimes the fit will feel perfect! Or close to it. This will feel like it's the right fit at the right time and you can't believe you've finally found each other! You're excited. They're excited. And you're ready to move forward.

Sometimes after an interview it will seem like it's a bad match. And while a congregation might have a receptive call committee for LGBTQ candidates, you may pick up some serious "red flags" about accepting the call. Pray about it. Talk about it with trusted colleagues. Be honest with the synod mobility person about your concerns.

Generally, folks advise to proceed through a process; if it's a bad fit, chances are that will become clear to the call committee as well. It's best to "trust the process" so bishops and bishop's assistants see that you understand the reality of placements. Plus the extra interview experience will help you next time.

It's easier to leave a bad call than it is to be ordained in the first place. Once you're ordained, you have more agency in a second call process. Of course, no one wants you to accept a call that is clearly bad, but it is very important to participate as fully as possible. Also be sure to communicate honestly with the bishop's assistant. This will help them better select potential matches in the future.

Say you do accept it, and for whatever reason your call isn't working out. There are several channels you probably need to avail yourself of before calling it quits. First, your pastoral mentor. If you don't have one, get one. Find a pastor in the synod you respect, and ask them...or ask the synod office to select someone for you. This person will be crucial in helping you evaluate normal (albeit outrageous) stresses of being a pastor versus genuine long term problems. Second, your mutual ministry committee. This committee is formed from congregation members of your choosing who can help you in how you relate to the congregation, provide valuable feedback, and keep the gossip loop as closed as possible. Third, synod staff...they have tons to deal with, but part of their job is to support you in your ministry. Telling the bishop's assistant or the bishop that things are challenging and asking for their guidance is a really savvy maneuver.

If it's a bad fit, try to learn as much as possible about why. Become a detective. As you explore you might identify deeper reasons...future congregations and synods will be curious and you'll want to say that you learned valuable lessons that you'll take with you into future ministries.

Ultimately, if it's a terrible fit, and you've tried everything then there's no shame in looking elsewhere. After you are ordained, you can send your RLP wherever you want. So, maybe check the ELCA website or synodical websites for lists of open calls (they aren't the most accurate lists by any means). Don't tell your current call that you're looking elsewhere. If you are extended a call elsewhere, and you choose to accept it, THAT is the time to tell them you will be leaving and give them the timeline. Don't linger, but have enough time for good closure and to help them make initial plans for after you leave.

Typical first-call positions last 3-5 years, FYI.

Negotiating

If a call and compensation package is extended to you, you have a brief window for negotiating some points. Review the synod compensation guidelines. If the dollar figure is below the standards, you will want to talk with the synod staff or congregational references about what the congregation is capable of paying. Keep in mind that even if you don't want money to be a make or break issue, that your strongest negotiation moment is before you have accepted the call. In some congregations, salary will never again, after that initial package, keep pace with cost-of-living increases, so it is important for your financial health and the congregation's financial health to begin in a healthy place.

A suggestion (if this is your approach to giving): One thing that I always communicate openly is that my plan is to tithe. Thus, however they increase my salary, it is an increase to the church general offering as well.

You should also have appropriate time off, a clear understanding of parental leave and/or sabbatical policies (if any). If no policies currently exist in writing, ask if there is openness to following synod recommendations for these, and continuing education/professional expenses as reimbursable expenses. This means that if a congregation is in a very tough financial place, the pastor has the opportunity to restrict his/her own spending and thus participate in any budget keeping measures that might be needed. In regards to rationale for continuing ed, a good teaching is that as pastors, we need to continually be learning along the way in an ever-changing church and culture, and that we will commit to sharing with our congregation what we're learning along the way.

If there is not openness to thinking creatively and intentionally about compensation now, be careful about your expectations for the future. Typically, a congregation's use of money reflects their value system. This can change along the way because of your leadership; however, you want to be free to preach about money and ask for money for God's mission in this place, and you probably don't want people to see your stewardship sermons as self-serving. So, it's best if you are able to go into a call with a sense of "enough"—that you are being paid enough, that you will have enough time away, and that you feel enough sense of respect (reflected in the package) as you go into it.

Shared Time. What if it is a part time package?

Some calls are less than full time packages. The roster manual calls this "shared time." It might be shared with an opportunity to have more time for yourself and family. It might be shared with another position. It might be shared with an opportunity to do more learning, like grad school or intensive Spanish. It might be shared with another congregation. It might be shared with stronger lay leadership.

Sometimes with shared time calls it is more difficult to determine what is "fair" or "just" in terms of compensation. Sometimes congregations want to get all they can for the dollars they pay, but balancing time to find other work to pay the bills is important as a shared time pastor. Talk with Proclaim colleagues, other colleagues, and the synod office to see if they have resources to navigate this complicated process.

Accepting the Call

You will have a certain amount of time to make a decision about accepting the call. Pray about it. Talk about it thoroughly with spouse, friends, etc. If you accept the call, then here are the next steps:

- CELEBRATION!
- Once it's public, tell ELM and your Proclaim colleagues – we want to celebrate with you!
- Ordination (usually at home congregation or seminary or at the new congregation or at synod assembly or somewhere else that has been meaningful for you along the way). Your new bishop will be on hand to do the actual ordination, but you can invite your own preacher and presider if you want and if it's okay with the bishop.
- Albs cost \$150-\$300 btw, stoles can be expensive too, but if there are quilters in your home congregation, this could be a neat project for them.
- ELM has beautiful worship banners for Proclaim that you may want as part of your service. Be in touch and we can mail them to you.

- Some people in Proclaim have mentioned ELM in their service bulletin or included ELM in their offering as a way of showing how ELM has supported them on their path to ordination. ELM will send you some suggested wording.
- Moving. The congregation pays for you to move. If possible, take time to select a good housing option so you aren't trying to move again soon after you land there.
- Start Day/First Sunday. It's probably gonna be a little awkward. Think about how you want your first sermon to help you enter into the community, share the Good News, and begin your partnership in ministry together. Perhaps the council or call committee chair could lead a liturgical welcome at the baptismal font for you and your family before you begin presiding on your first Sunday.
- Installation. This will probably happen after you've officially started. Although sometimes ordination and installation happen on the same day. This is a party for the church to celebrate your leadership and this beginning new partnership. Your new bishop or bishop's assistant will be there and often preaches.

The First 6 Months

“Who knows? Perhaps you have come...for just such a time as this.” Esther 4:14

Don't let your head fall off. Pray. Reach out to others. Enjoy the ride. And here are a few tips that might come in handy:

A new partnership:

- It's not about you; it's about the congregation. Find out what makes them tick, learn about these people you're in partnership with, what is the culture and history here, etc.
- Don't assume everything is about you when things go wrong (or right!).
- Don't change a million things right away (worship, etc) - they existed before you got there, enter into this community to observe and learn.
- If you do institute changes, they will be seen as symbolic of your leadership, so think through them and what you hope to convey/accomplish. If possible gain support from committees and the council before any noticeable changes so that they experience you as a partner in ministry.

Who are you following?

- Who are you following in ministry and what was their relationship to the congregation? Be aware of feelings about your predecessor - did they leave on good terms, were they beloved, was there a lot of conflict, etc.

- How are they grieving their previous pastor? How is it expressed? Is there anger? Sadness? Frustration? Feelings of abandonment?
- It may take them some time to warm up. It may be because of grief and not because you're LGBTQ, for example.

Getting to know the congregation:

- Establish relationships within the congregation. In some places inviting yourself over works well. Being a change agent is easier in the later months if you set a strong relational foundation in the first several months.
- Take notes, observe and ask questions. The reality of a call may be different than what you expected and that's okay.

During my first two months I hosted a 'Conversations with the Pastor' series encouraging individuals to meet with me for drinks or coffee. Sign-ups were online, on paper, or via e-mail. I used remaining call committee budget money to buy everyone a drink too. It was a great way to get to know parishioners.

Support:

- Get into a clergy support group/text study - like, immediately. It's a great way to get to know area colleagues and develop supporting relationships.
- Meet other clergy in churches nearby. Are there queer clergy from other denominations around?
- Therapy is a thing lots of pastors do on a regular basis. It's very healthy to be cared for in a similar way that you yourself are offering to care for others.
- Consider spiritual direction. Lots of folks find that to be a vital source of strength for ministry.

I am part of a women's clergy writing group where the rule is only one person per denomination so it really can be supportive and not overly focused on denominationalism.

Mutual Ministry Committee:

- Set up a mutual ministry committee (discussed above). OR...

Since a Mutual Ministry Committee didn't exist when I began, we created a 'Transition Committee' made up of call committee members who I had already built a relationship with and knew me from the process. This committee helps give me support, feedback, and historical information about the church to consider. This is SUPER helpful as a solo pastor. The idea is that after a year we'll transition to a Mutual Ministry Committee with other non-call committee members included. I think it's a great way to start a Mutual Ministry Committee with those who are invested in your success.

Nourish your spirit:

- Some days you will feel like you have 30,000 things to do. Other days you will feel unsure about what to do. Learn a routine that works for you. Take time to settle in.
- Focus on the skill set for which you have been called. Don't get too overwhelmed with the secondary stuff that is part of ministry.
- Sabbath!! Like seriously, take a damn day off. REALLY OFF, no church work.
- Pray and read scripture. It can seem so obvious, but it can also be so hard to find the time without intentionality.

Blessed are you, Lord God, Queen of the cosmos, however frustrating and compelling you and this call may be. Blessed are you for keeping the wheels turning, for being our sanctuary and the fire within. Blessed are you in the dark of confusion and in the light of joy. Blessed are you in the questions and in the space between questions. Blessed are you for holding on to us every time we feel like letting go or falling apart, and for setting us free from every constraint that would keep us from living fully in your love. Blessed are you for all of the expressions of creativity you have surrounded and filled us with, for the reflections of yourself which sparkle and whisper and are a wonder to behold. Blessed are you. Blessed are we, for we are yours.

Gratitude

This resource is collected wisdom and advice and storytelling from so many individuals, too numerous to name. Thank you to ELM's Accompaniment Team and members of Proclaim for sharing your experiences and formatting them into this readable, faithful, and fabulous resource. We hope it blesses all who read it.

Contact Us

For more resources and information, please check out www.elm.org.

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Ideas, experiences, things to share? Let us know!

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