



Internship and Gender & Sexual Minorities: A Resource for Supervisors and Committees

Internship in the Evangelical Church in America (ELCA) takes place under the direction of its seminaries. It has proven to be a valuable component in the preparation of candidates called to rostered ministry in the ELCA. Internship is an occasion for all candidates to learn and grow in the practice of ministry and to give shape and definition to their understanding of the pastoral role.

This resource can be helpful for working with any intern but it is offered by Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM) especially for internship supervisors and committees as they welcome the gifts of gender and sexual minorities (for example lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or asexual people) in our church by hosting them as interns. This guide seeks to complement the important work done by the ELCA's seminary internship directors. We hope this guide will provide internship supervisors and committees with useful information as the whole church welcomes the full diversity of gifted and called leaders to serve in our church, including gender and sexual minorities. A companion resource written for gender and sexual minority interns themselves is also available. Please contact ELM for a copy.

First, a word about Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries

Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries is a social ministry organization that works across the church to support LGBTQ Lutheran ministry leaders and to celebrate their gifts for ministry. ELM is funded by donations from individuals, congregations, and family foundations

Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries believes that the public witness of gender and sexual minority Lutheran ministers transforms the church and enriches the world.

We live out this belief through the work of our three programs: Candidacy Accompaniment, Ministry Engagement, and Proclaim—a professional community for LGBTQ rostered leaders, candidates, and seminarians. Learn more at www.elm.org.

Exploring the Questions

Having an intern serve in your congregation can be an enriching and rewarding experience for both the intern and your congregation. Our seminaries and faith communities are raising up and training a wide diversity of gifted leaders to serve our church, including an increasing number of gender and sexual minorities. Might your congregation be open to teaching and learning with an LGBTQIA+ intern? We hope this resource can provide some insight and guidance about this possibility.

Is your congregation open to having an LGBTQIA+ intern?

Maybe the answer seems obvious to you. Or maybe you haven't thought much about it. Either way it is good to have conversation with members of your council and other leaders. ELM has prepared a resource for call committees entitled *Enrich and Transform: Welcoming LGBTQ Candidates into the Call Process*. Parts of that resource may be helpful for beginning a discussion in your congregation about having an LGBTQIA+ intern. *Enrich and Transform* is available on the main page of our website under "Resources" (www.elm.org).

Feedback from interns suggests that it can be quite challenging if the pastor is open to having an LGBTQIA+ intern but the council and congregation are not on board. Also, we advise caution if the primary motivation for having an LGBTQIA+ intern is to help the congregation move toward becoming more LGBTQIA+ friendly. While having an LGBTQIA+ intern might help a community move in that direction, that's a lot of pressure to put on an intern who is looking to learn and practice the skills of ministry. A way to start the process of LGBTQIA+ welcome might be engaging with the Reconciling in Christ process, if your congregation has not already done so (see information in next section).

How might you help the congregation get ready to be open to an LGBTQIA+ intern?

The more people who are involved in the discussion to host an LGBTQIA+ intern and who feel invested in serving the church by developing its leaders, the better. Here are some suggestions for how to introduce the idea of having an LGBTQIA+ intern in your congregation

- With your council, adult education class, or others, watch *ELM Today*, a six-minute video about ELM's work with LGBTQIA+ leaders in the church. Have discussion around your congregation's role in becoming a more inclusive church. The video is on the front page of our website. www.elm.org
- Invite an LGBTQIA+ person to supply preach one Sunday. Sometimes seeing an LGBTQIA+ person in this role can open up the idea for people. We have a list of people connected to Proclaim who are interested in supply preaching. <http://www.elm.org/proclaim-pulpit-supply>. If there is no one on the list near you, contact ELM to see if we might have some suggestions.

- The 20-minute video *Sailing on Faith* is a great film for thinking about how the Holy Spirit works in unexpected ways calling unexpected candidates including gender and sexual minorities, people with disabilities, and people of color. <http://video.com/29332407>. Make this video part of an educational forum.
- Have a local LGBTQIA+ pastor come and talk about their call and the role of internship for their leadership development.
- If you are not Reconciling in Christ (RIC) consider entering into that process of public welcome of LGBTQIA+ people. <http://www.reconcilingworks.org/what/ric>

The church asks candidates to be open to the call of the whole church. We invite you also to be open to and celebrate the whole diversity of candidates that God has called to serve the church.

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence, the compassionate, in cheerfulness. Romans 12:4-8

Hosting an LGBTQIA+ Intern

While hosting an LGBTQIA+ intern is a gift to the ELCA and important in preparing the future leadership of the church, the primary benefit is to the particular intern in helping develop the necessary skills and identity for faithful and effective leadership in the church.

There are also benefits for the congregation in the additional ministry that the congregation receives and in the part it is playing in shaping a future leader for the whole church.

- You are making a powerful statement of welcome and witness—not just in words but also in action.
- Many LGBTQIA+ persons have persevered in their call despite many challenges—they are faithful and dedicated to the church— and hosting them is an affirmation of their journey.
- LGBTQIA+ interns are often able to understand and/or connect with young adults and others who have been hurt or abandoned by churches and faith communities.
- Hosting an LGBTQIA+ intern is both service and witness—who in your community might see this as a new welcome?

The Application Process

Your paperwork/internship application to seminary

If your congregation is open to an LGBTQIA+ intern, make it clear on the application you submit to the seminary's internship director. Prospective interns will be reading about your community and will want to know if their gifts and presence might be welcome. If you are not Reconciling in Christ (RIC), but feel that your congregation is open to an LGBTQIA+ intern, you might want to share about your congregation's work around LGBTQIA+ issues in your application.

Interviewing potential LGBTQIA+ interns

If interviewing potential interns is part of the placement process used by the seminary through which you are applying, in addition to questions that you would ask any potential intern, you may also want to invite an LGBTQIA+ student to share how being LGBTQIA+ is a gift for their ministry and about some of the joys and challenges they have experienced in the church.

Because of the changing legal and ecclesial landscape around LGBTQIA+ relationships, it's a good idea to have an open and honest conversation with the student about relationships and the expectations of the congregation. Expectations about living/visiting arrangements for the candidate's partner or about the candidate's ability to date while on internship should be discussed before the intern arrives. You might also want to have conversation about if/how an intern's partner might or might not want to be involved in the congregation, aware that many LGBTQIA+ folk have been harmed by churches and may be reluctant to participate in a faith community.

It is best if the internship supervisor is out about their sexual orientation and gender identity (LGBTQIA+ or not). While closeted rostered leaders can be wonderful supervisors, it can be a dangerous situation in which to put a candidate. For example, the rostered leader, if LGBTQIA+, could become envious of the candidate's ability to be open with the congregation; or could act in inappropriate ways in order to keep their secret; or could develop an unhealthy dynamic where the intern is asked to keep secrets from colleagues, the congregation, the seminary, or their candidacy panel that are potentially harmful.

Preparing for and Welcoming an LGBTQIA+ intern

The congregation as a whole, not just a small group in the congregation, should be open to an LGBTQIA+ intern. In consultation with your intern, internship supervisors can help educate the congregation about LGBTQIA+ issues before the intern arrives. An “LGBTQIA+ 101” adult ed class prior to the intern’s arrival could be helpful. Of course, the intern will bring some expertise in the area of LGBTQIA+ education, but it is helpful if they don’t get pigeonholed into this role. Are there others in your congregation or community who might be able to lead this discussion? While solidifying their LGBTQIA+ identity might be an important dimension of the internship, be careful not to overlook their other gifts and skills and opportunities for learning. The primary learning for all interns is the appropriation of the skills for ministry and the development of a pastoral identity.

It is best if the intern is out about their sexual orientation and gender identity before arriving—perhaps through a newsletter article in which the intern introduces themselves. This way everyone knows at once, the intern does not have to come out to each individual person, and there is not the unhelpful distinction between people “in the know” and those outside. Having the intern come out after arriving at the internship site not only makes it harder for the intern to be a student in that setting, but it can create an unsafe environment. Additionally, it risks the congregation feeling as if it has been tricked. Regardless of how the congregation handles it, a plan to keep secrets from the congregation (particularly secrets about sexuality) is dangerous and a poor example for an intern. Thus, the intern must be able to be publicly transparent in the congregation and authentic in the self-understanding of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

As you are preparing for their arrival, practice and model the language the intern uses for their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and for their relationship. Do they use gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer? Do they call their significant other spouse, partner, wife, husband? Check in with them and then practice using that language in speech and print.

There are lots of ways that people are in relationship. LGBTQIA+ persons have often had to create relationship structures in the absence of state or ecclesial celebrations or protections. Respect the various ways that people may be navigating committed relationships, especially given that marriage equality is a relatively new thing and the different views in the ELCA about LGBTQIA+ people and relationships. Engage in open and thoughtful conversation about their relationship.

The intern’s family (however they define it) should be welcome to participate fully in the life of the internship site. However, the discrimination that persons have experienced in the church may mean that the intern’s family is not Christian, Lutheran, or interested in participating in the life of the internship site. The candidate’s family should be encouraged to decide what level of participation is right for them. Proactively talking about these things with the intern can prevent unnecessary conflicts.

Especially when they first arrive, create opportunities for the congregation to get to know the intern. If people in the community are not quite sure about having an LGBTQIA+ intern, creating opportunities to meet person-to-person are great. A “welcome dinner potluck,” identifying small groups the intern can visit, and having supportive members invite the intern (and their family) for dinner are a few ideas. Be creative and aware of what works best in your congregation and context.

One former intern shared this great idea: “My internship congregation welcomed me and my brand new wife with a restaurant gift card shower. It was a great way to be welcomed to the neighborhood—members of the congregation gave us gift cards to their favorite eateries. This helped us get to know the area, the members, and it helped us afford to go out to eat on an intern’s budget. This was awesome and I highly recommend it to congregations hosting interns.”

Additional Suggestions for Internship Committees

Each seminary already provides excellent materials for internship committees. Here are just a few additional thoughts that LGBTQIA+ interns have shared for committees working with an LGBTQIA+ intern.

- In dialogue with the intern, discuss: How as a congregation can we support you as a publicly identified LGBTQIA+ pastor? What challenges do you anticipate, and in what ways can we partner with you to meet those challenges. What joys do you anticipate? How can we celebrate those with you?
- In addition to conversation about all aspects of ministry and the internship experience, include conversation about how the intern’s experience is going with regard to being LGBTQIA+—what are the challenges? How is their identity opening up opportunities for ministry?
- It could be helpful to have at least one, if not more, LGBTQIA+ persons on the internship committee so that there is more comfort for the intern discussing LGBTQIA+ related concerns that they may be having. However, internship supervisors and committees should not assume that LGBTQIA+ members of the congregation or LGBTQIA+ interns will automatically connect or have a lot in common.
- If you are a gay or lesbian affirming congregation already, in what ways might you continue to stretch yourself? What further work could you do around bisexual, transgender and/or queer identities?

Additional Suggestions for Internship Supervisors

LGBTQIA+ interns have shared some things that were/could be helpful in the supervisor relationship:

- It’s great if you can proactively offer support: “I support you. If you run into issues, feel free to come and talk to me about it. I’ve got your back.” Homophobia and

heterosexism are real and something that LGBTQIA+ folk deal with on a regular basis. But sometimes we worry that it sounds like complaining or that we should just “deal with it.” Having you open up lines of communication and support is invaluable.

- Ask questions and have conversations about the gifts of being LGBTQIA+ in ministry. Maybe ask, “Where have you seen being LGBTQIA+ as a gift in this ministry?”
- You know how significant colleague relationships can be. If you are not LGBTQIA+ but there are LGBTQIA+ colleagues in your area, introduce your intern to them. Additional collegiality and mentoring for an intern is a gift!
- Try not to put the intern in the middle of a conflict around LGBTQIA+ issues. If members of the congregation are struggling with having an LGBTQIA+ intern, serve as the point person for those concerns, rather than making the intern deal with them. While you might work together on developing a strategy, it is challenging and not conducive to internship learning for the intern to have to spend all their energy focusing on those who are not accepting.
- Support your intern’s continuing education outside the congregation with resources of time and money. A great opportunity for continuing education and spiritual renewal is ELM’s annual Proclaim Retreat (www.elm.org/gathering/). This gathering of LGBTQIA+ rostered leaders and those preparing for rostered leadership is a time of learning, community building, and formation. Interns have found the retreat especially helpful during this time of internship as they live into their pastoral identity.

Finally, a reminder for both internship supervisors and committees

LGBTQIA+ interns are often exploring both pastoral identity and LGBTQIA+ identity at the same time. They are figuring out what it means to wear these public and personal identities together. As supervisory conversations happen, keep in mind the ways an intern is constantly growing in their pastoral identity at the same time they are growing as an “out” LGBTQIA+ leader in this role. When engaging in conversations about pastoral identity, try to offer space for the intersections of these identities to be explored deeply and regularly.

Conclusion

The counsel of a Proclaim leader to prospective interns can be helpful for all of engaged in the process of internship: *Pray. Take a deep breath. Relax. Be your authentic self. And remember: being LGBTQIA+ is a gift for ministry.*

Contact Information

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