

# RESOURCES FOR CANDIDACY COMMITTEES IN SUPPORTING LGBTQIA+ LEADERS



# CONTENT



## THE HOPE FOR THIS RESOURCE

This resource is meant to provide information and insight for Candidacy Committees to support LGBTQIA+ Candidates seeking ordination.

## HOSPITALITY IN ACTION

How we create welcome has a tremendous impact on engagement. Learn some recommendations to create a safe and inviting process.

## TRAINING & EDUCATION FOR CANDIDACY COMMITTEES

There is always something new to learn in how to best see, name, and care for LGBTQIA+ people. These suggestions are here to support you in continuing ed.

## DOCUMENTS & FORMS TO REVIEW AND UPDATE

It is critical we see our documents as an extension of hospitality. Learn how to review, and update documents and forms to ensure a safe and clear welcome.

# HOPES FOR THE RESOURCE



*“The ELCA candidacy process is meant to be a welcoming and joyful opportunity for people to discern how to serve in and through the church.”*  
– *ELCA Candidacy Manual pg. 8*

This resource is meant to provide information and insight for candidacy committees to support LGBTQIA+ Candidates seeking ordination. It will be divided into three sections: of Training and Educational Opportunities, Preparation, and Hospitality in Action, to support a more welcoming and inclusive process for candidates.

“The ELCA is a church centered on worship of the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The good news of Jesus Christ conveyed through God’s Word and the sacraments, liberates God’s people and gives them the freedom and courage to wonder, discover, and boldly participate in God’s mission in the world. In our life together, we gather around the presence of the crucified and risen Christ, and we respond to the leadership of the Holy Spirit by engaging in ministry in the world.” – ELCA Candidacy Manual pg. 22

ReconcilingWorks understands the complexities of beauty and wonders within the diversity of the LGBTQIA+ community. This resource is an introduction on how to practice hospitality in our wondering, and remember the importance of being committed to learning how to continue accompanying LGBTQIA+ people/candidates in their journey of call and ordination.

As our church strives to grow more diverse it is important to be aware of how the biases we as people bring to the process and are aware of the dangers of assimilation. This journey of accompaniment and leadership will require all to pause, breathe, and ground themselves in the gifts the church receives when people are able to bring their full selves to their call and service.



# HOSPITALITY IN ACTION

"Characteristics of synodical candidacy committee members should include a sense of hospitality and the ability to build nurturing relationships, patience, and willingness to receive training." – ELCA Candidacy Manual pg. 13

How we create welcome has a tremendous impact on engagement. Learn some recommendations to create a safe and inviting process.

As LGBTQIA+ leaders strive to navigate the candidacy process faithfully, they far too often encounter a system created in a way that allows exclusion, othering, and continued marginalization. The suggestions shared are meant to help create a safer and more welcoming experience for LGBTQIA+ candidates and increase awareness for committee members as they strive to build nurturing relationships, practice patience, and increase their awareness in how to best see, name, and care for LGBTQIA+ leaders.

# HOSPITALITY IN ACTION

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## ASKING FOR & USING PRONOUNS

Understanding there is a difference between a person's sex, gender identity, and gender expression makes pronouns important. Pronouns are the words taking the place of the noun used to describe a person, in the way a person wants others to use when talking to or about them. Asking someone, "What pronouns do you use?" is a great way to hospitably see, name, and care for LGBTQIA+ people. Pronouns can be used in email signatures, in your name on Zoom/video calls, and on nametags.



## MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE MOST VULNERABLE/MARGINALIZED PERSON IN THE ROOM

What adaptations can be made to address the need of the most vulnerable/marginalized person and still meet the goal and purpose of the space and meeting? For people in marginalized communities, there are many ways to be unintentionally excluded from gathering safely. As a committee, be mindful of how barriers such as physical, financial, emotional, and spiritual can have an impact on a person's ability to gather.

## ADAPTING TO DIVERSE NEEDS & IDENTITIES

If the candidate is the "first" in some way, there is a great possibility that the candidate will need to teach the committee new awareness about their identity and needs. It is important for the committee not to become defensive about their lack of awareness but rather be grateful to the candidate for the new learning and awareness they offer.

Examples of how a committee can express gratitude are:

- Thank you for sharing \_\_\_\_\_ with the committee. What is a better way for the committee to ensure you are seen, named, and cared for in a way that's is honoring/respectful to you?
- Thank you for sharing \_\_\_\_\_ with the committee. We have some learning to do on this. We are committed to finding resources and expanding our awareness and learning.
- It takes vulnerability and courage to name your needs in this space. We are committed to creating an environment where we are offering the best hospitality we can for you.
- I heard you say \_\_\_\_\_. Can you tell me more about that so I can have a better understanding of what you are sharing?

## LGBTQIA+ REPRESENTATION

“As the ELCA seeks to welcome and nurture a wide diversity of candidates for rostered ministry, the need for cross-cultural sensitivity and awareness is critical. In cases where a candidacy committee does not have people serving on the committee who are part of the same cultural background as a candidate of color, it is strongly recommended that the candidacy committee identify a person from the same ethnic community who can serve as a mentor and welcoming presence for a candidate during the candidacy process.” – ELCA Candidacy Manual pg. 11

It is strongly recommended this same hospitality be extended to the LGBTQIA+ community. It is important to have an open/OUT member of the LGBTQIA+ community as a part of every candidacy committee. If the committee cannot find an LGBTQIA+ person to serve, ensure candidates are invited to have an LGBTQIA+ mentor/support person present for all meetings throughout this process.

Consider who the committee has assigned as the candidate's mentor/relator and are either LGBTQIA+ or a safe ally.

## NOT FREEZING PEOPLE IN TIME

As candidates learn more about themselves in the discernment process of ordination, it will be important not to freeze them in time. Who they were when they started this journey will not be the same as the person who finishes the process. It is important for the committee to remember to accompany people where they are in their journey today and help nurture and guide them into tomorrow.

## HOSPITABLE CURIOSITY IN QUESTIONS

Practice hospitable curiosity by asking questions that will mutually build trust in the relationship. Often LGBTQIA+ people can be made to feel like the “exotic other” by the kinds of questions asked about their bodies and how their bodies are in relationships. It is important to not root questions from a place of bias, assumption, lurid curiosity, and outdated stereotypes.

Examples of how hospitably curious questions can be framed are:

- Try to avoid asking “why” questions because they tend to leave people feeling defensive.
- When you have wonderings about how someone's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression impact their lives and call consider inviting the candidate to ***"Tell us more about that?"*** Frame the question so a candidate can share what they feel comfortable with the committee. More information will come as trust is built.
- Can you tell us who taught you about \_\_\_\_? Can you share more about where you learned that?
- Share with us more about the people you have that support you in discerning your call to rostered leadership?

## COMMITTEE ACCOUNTABILITY

What happens if questions are asked that make a candidate uncomfortable? Or if a comment is made that is rooted in bias against a candidate due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression? Holding committee members accountable for their words and actions towards an LGBTQIA+ candidate is critical in this process. As a committee in partnership with your synod office, create a way for candidates to report potential inappropriate behavior, harassment, or discrimination by a committee member.

Things to have in place for accountability.

- Make sure it is clear to whom a candidate should report any incident. Ensure this person has been trained in LGBTQIA+ diversity and is prepared to listen and take the allegations seriously
- Determine how the incident will be handled promptly. Make sure to keep proper documentation of how it is being handled.
- Have a plan in place on how to remove a member of the committee if needed. Bias against LGBTQIA+ persons should not be tolerated.

If or when a candidate makes a report of inappropriate behavior, harassment, or discrimination by a committee member, it is critical to listen, gather the facts, and take action. All too often, LGBTQIA+ people who experience inappropriate behavior, harassment, or discrimination in the church are met with comments like "Oh \_\_\_\_\_ is a good person, and I am sure they didn't mean it that way." or, "Don't be so sensitive \_\_\_\_\_ is still learning about gay people." or, "If that was offensive to you, you need to grow some thicker skin to make it in this church." When a victim of inappropriate behavior, harassment, or discrimination is not heard and action is not taken, the church perpetuates a gaslighting culture and abuse.

*"Characteristics of synodical candidacy committee members should include a sense of hospitality and the ability to build nurturing relationships, patience, and willingness to receive training."*

*– ELCA*

*Candidacy  
Manual pg. 13*



# DOCUMENTS & FORMS TO REVIEW AND UPDATE

Print and media resources are often the first introductions someone has to an organization, institution, and processes/policies.

In the call process, candidates have many documents to read and interact with throughout their journey of discernment. This section is intended to help candidacy committees review how their documents and forms can be used as an extension of hospitality.



# DOCUMENTS & FORMS TO REVIEW AND UPDATE

## MODIFICATION OF FORMS & DOCUMENTS

As a candidacy committee, it will be important to create a list of all the documents and forms a candidate is asked to read and complete.

Items to be mindful of updating in documents and forms:

- Are non-binary pronouns used in the text? Modify from she/he to **she/he/they**
- Are candidates allowed to share their **pronouns and gender identity**? (Asking for someone's gender identity rather than gender or sex is a more hospitable way to learn more about whom someone knows themselves to be.)
- Using the language of "**siblings**" rather than "brothers and sisters" is more inclusive of the diversity of the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Is the title "**Mx**" (pronounced "mix") included in options for candidates who do not use a binary title?

The image shows a portion of a registration form titled "EVENT REGISTRATION FORM" with the subtitle "Ensuring inclusivity for people of all gender identities and gender expression is easy if it's options on your registration form." The form includes several sections:

- TITLE:** Options for Mr., Ms., and Mx, with checkboxes for "None" and "Custom".
- GENDER IDENTITY:** Checkboxes for Female, Male, Gender-Non-conforming, and Custom.
- PRONOUNS:** Checkboxes for She, Her, Hers; He, Him, His; They, Them, Theirs; and Custom.
- ADDITIONAL WAYS TO EXTEND HOSPITALITY INCLUDE:** A section with icons for accessibility, a sign, and a person, with text about providing personal pronouns to name tags and ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities.
- INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE:** A section with text about using inclusive language in communications and materials.

If you would like a one-page resource to support updating your forms and documents you can find it at [www.reconcilingworks.org/resources/churchwide/](http://www.reconcilingworks.org/resources/churchwide/)

## UPDATES IN COMMUNICATION

Incorporating pronouns in communication is an indicator of your awareness and helps build trust.

Here are a few helpful ways to use pronouns:

- Add them to the signature of your emails.
- Add pronouns to your social media accounts.
- If you make a mistake and someone corrects you, thank them for teaching you their pronouns.

## ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Section 1.8 Guidelines for People in Same-Gender Relationships can place LGBTQIA+ people as they "exotic other" in the eyes of a candidacy committee. The awkwardness of singling out the LGBTQIA+ community in the Candidacy Manual does not feel healthy or whole. The first point in this section of the document states, "All applicants and candidates shall be treated equitably" and is then followed by six additional points that reinforce a narrative that LGBTQIA+ people are an exception to this process.

It is also important to remember LGBTQIA+ people did not have federal employment protections until early 2021. A large number of the LGBTQIA+ community have experienced employment discrimination and harassment. This community also often works minimum wage jobs to provide for themselves and their families.



# TRAINING & EDUCATION FOR CANDIDACY COMMITTEES

Synod candidacy committee responsibilities include providing appropriate pastoral care for candidates and participating in training and ongoing education (1.4.3.1).

The following are suggestions of continued learning for each committee member to attend and have access to their accompaniment and leadership in candidates ordination journeys. It is recommended your committee consider how to have all members trained within the first three months of their term.

# TRAINING & EDUCATION FOR CANDIDACY COMMITTEES

## **ONLINE TRAININGS**

### **LET'S TALK ABOUT SOGIE**

As we seek to deepen and expand the holy work of welcome, inclusion, and celebration of LGBTQIA+ people in the church and society, we can find ourselves asking, "What does LGBTQIA+ mean?" Together we will co-create a safe space to learn helpful skills and tools to support you and your ministry.

### **BIAS AND ITS IMPACT ON WELCOME**

Bias is a part of our lives and ministries. This training will invite attendees into exploring how bias impacts welcome, creativity, and innovation for our lives and ministries. Together we will co-create a space to increase our awareness about how shifting our thinking can create new paths forward that were not possible before.

## **PRINT RESOURCES**

### **RECONCILING SCRIPTURE FOR LUTHERANS - ON SEXUALITY AND GENDER IDENTITY**

A short commentary that takes into account biblical integrity and knowledge, key Lutheran interpretative lenses, and the diverse experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community, deepening the understanding of God's inclusive and expansive welcome.

### **LUTHERAN INTRODUCTION SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY & GENDER EXPRESSION**

A basic introduction to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

## **MEDIA RESOURCES**

### **CLUNKY QUESTIONS VIDEO SERIES**

In our work, we often hear people with good intentions feel they aren't able to ask questions about what it means to be LGBTQIA+ because they are afraid of offending someone or they don't have the right words with which to ask. If this sounds familiar, or if your faith community is interested in how to better support LGBTQIA+ Lutherans, then the "Clunky Questions" series is for you.

Some we would highlight are:

- "LGBTQIA" Why do you need a label for everything?
- You're LGBTQ and a pastor! How does that work?
- I didn't know you were a gay/trans pastor! You seem so normal.

All suggested resources can be found at [www.ReconcilingWorks.org](http://www.ReconcilingWorks.org)



You are not alone in the holy work of deepening and expanding your welcome, inclusion, and celebration of LGBTQIA+ candidates for ministry. ReconcilingWorks is here to support you.

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