

**SEMINARY  
AND  
THE CANDIDACY PROCESS  
OF THE  
NORTH AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH**



Approved by Executive Council  
March 11, 2022

# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ADMISSION TO THE NALS NETWORK</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ENTRANCE TO THE CANDIDACY PROCESS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ENDORSEMENT FOR INTERNSHIP</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>INTERNSHIP</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>APPROVAL FOR THE CALL PROCESS AND ORDINATION</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>FIRST CALL</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>OTHER MATTERS</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>REQUIREMENTS FOR COMPLETION OF THE CANDIDACY PROCESS</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>10</b>



NORTH AMERICAN  
LUTHERAN  
CHURCH

## INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this document, then you likely have some interest in the steps it takes to become a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the North American Lutheran Church. Perhaps you have spent time praying, pondering, talking with trusted family and friends, and even exploring what it would mean for you to be a pastor.

This process, unbeknownst to nearly all who come to discern a call to ministry, begins in the waters of Holy Baptism. It is in and through the water and God's Word in baptism where we are reborn children of God and where God places on our lives a holy calling. Our baptismal calling, or vocation, can take many forms throughout our lives. All are equally important they are just different.

The call to ministry is one that comes from God. As Paul put it in Galatians 1:1, "Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." (ESV) Paul wants everyone to know that it was the Lord who called him to be an apostle. It was not his idea, it was not a whim or a phase he was going through. It was the call to preach and proclaim the Good News of Jesus in the name of the Risen Christ.

The Lord alone calls us to serve his kingdom whether that is by being a doctor or nurse, mother or father, artist, seamstress, mechanic or laborer. No matter the work we do, when we do it recognizing the call of the Lord on our lives, our work is deemed holy by the one who sends us. It is the same for the call to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. The difference is that we are one, among the many in the church, who is called to lead Christ's people in worship, discipleship, partaking of the means of grace, shepherding and empowering God's people to hear Christ and live their lives for him.

As Lutherans we hold to the unaltered Augsburg Confession where in Article IV it states, "Concerning church order they teach that no one should teach publicly in the church

or administer the sacraments unless properly called." (Book of Concord, Kolb, Wengert, p. 47) The North American Lutheran Church, the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALC) Network, and the Candidacy Committee take great care to help candidates discern God's call in their lives. That call comes in two key ways: internally and externally. Internally as God's still small voice speaking to certain people to "Come, feed my sheep." (John 21:17) Externally God's call comes from those who know us, who see gifts for ministry in us, who affirm to us that God is indeed calling us to the ministry of the Church: to preaching his holy Word and administering his holy Sacraments.

This manual outlines the process of the NALC whereby a person answers God's call to Ordained Ministry of Word and Sacrament. There are two key parts which are separate but related: Admission to the NALS Network and the Candidacy process which includes Entrance, Endorsement, Internship, and Approval.

**\*\* For easier reference, paragraphs are numbered, unless a section contains numbered steps. Numbers will resume after such sections.**

## ADMISSION TO THE NORTH AMERICAN LUTHERAN SEMINARY NETWORK

(1) Admission to Seminary and the NALS Network is separate from Entrance into the Candidacy Process. A key component of the ordination process is the selection of a seminary. Selecting where one engages in theological education is a serious issue for the candidate and for the NALC. The NALS Network is currently comprised of five seminaries in six locations. The North American Lutheran Seminary administrative office is housed within the Trinity School for Ministry, Ambridge, PA. The other five seminaries are: Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, AL, Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, CA, and Houston, TX, Concordia Seminary in Edmonton, Alberta, CA, and Sioux Falls Seminary

in Sioux Falls, SD. (Students may matriculate with Sioux Falls Seminary through St. Paul Seminary, St. Paul, MN or the Luther House of Studies, Sioux Falls, SD.)

### Admission to Seminary

(2) Review of admission materials to the NALS Network happens four times a year (January, April, July, October) and is arranged by the staff in Ambridge, PA.

**1. Submit an Admission Application to the NALS Network** which can be found at <https://www.thenals.org/find-your-calling/take-the-first-step/> and include these components:

- All contact information.
- A short spiritual autobiography.
- Two letters of recommendation: one from your pastor or Mission District Dean and one from a lay person.
- Indicate which seminary in the NALS Network (listed above) you plan to attend or are currently attending.
- Take part in an in-person or zoom admissions interview with the admissions team of three to four people which includes the NALS President and a member of the Board of Regents.

(3) If you are admitted into the NALS Network you will be informed of the academic requirements. You will also be eligible to apply for financial aid and must provide a current FAFSA to the NALS Network. However, continuing financial aid will be dependent upon entrance into the ordination process through the Candidacy Committee. Ask for an application at the NALS Network office.

(4) Information concerning those who are admitted to the NALS Network will be forwarded to the chair of the Candidacy Committee. The Candidacy Committee will shepherd students through the four-step process (entrance, endorsement, approval and internship) leading to ordination.

(5) Under extraordinary circumstances, the candidate may pursue theological education at another education institution, but only with the approval of the NALS Network admissions panel. If a candidate, after being accepted into the NALS Network, requires an “extraordinary” request concerning their MDiv, the NALS admission panel will communicate a decision to the chair of the Candidacy Committee .

## CANDIDACY PROCESS FOR WORD AND SACRAMENT MINISTRY NORTH AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH

(6) The candidacy process of the North American Lutheran Church ensures that we are forming future pastors who are intentionally part of the NALC Ministerium. This process ensures that candidates for Word and Sacrament ministry are competent theologians, orthodox in their beliefs and teachings, and disciples of Jesus Christ. The candidacy process, which is laid out in the following pages, runs parallel with the seminary education experience. While the candidates are receiving their education, the Candidacy Committee meets with, interviews, advises, and supports the formation of the NALC’s future pastors.

(7) The Candidacy Committee functions prayerfully to help candidates discern a call to ordained ministry in the NALC. The decision to move forward or suspend the ordination process is the committee’s to make. The committee seeks to ensure that those who are called to the ministry of Word and Sacrament accept the [NALC’s confession of faith](#) and are committed to the mission of the Church. It also functions to encourage the students; assisting the forming of pastoral identity for the candidates; support, prayers, and walking alongside the candidates throughout the process. This document serves to familiarize the reader with the process and the various steps towards ordained ministry in the North American Lutheran Church.

(8) There are three primary steps in the candidacy process: **Entrance, Endorsement, Approval.** Between endorsement and approval an internship is coordinated through the Candidacy Committee. These steps are specifically outlined in this document, along with many other pertinent details. Entrance is the initial step and it serves to formalize a relationship with candidates and the North American Lutheran Church.

## ENTRANCE TO THE CANDIDACY PROCESS

1. **Successful admission** to the NALS Network.
2. **Essay.** The spiritual autobiography and references that were given to the NALS Network will be shared with the Candidacy Committee.  
The candidate will also write an essay about such topics as Christian formation to date, profession of faith, why the candidate is considering ordained ministry, and why the individual is seeking candidacy in the NALC. The essay questions will be sent to you upon initial contact with the chair of the candidacy committee.
3. **Background Checks.** As part of the entrance process, candidates will give permission to the NALC to run a background check. The NALC uses a company called “Clear Investigative Advantage.” The cost is \$45.
4. **Psychological Evaluations.** Also as part of the entrance process, each candidate will complete a psychological evaluation with an approved clinician through Crossroads Counseling Service. This evaluation shall occur at least one week before the entrance interview with the Candidacy Committee. The evaluation will include specific critical components related to personality traits, vocational aptitude, relational maturity, and other relevant competencies and inclinations.

The cost of the evaluation will be split in thirds between the candidate, the candidate’s home congregation or mission district and the NALC.

5. **Interview.** The candidate will meet with members of the Candidacy Committee in a entrance interview. The interview will include questions related to the call to ministry within the NALC. The committee will make clear to the candidate that formation for ministry is a priority during the years of candidacy. The candidate will demonstrate an understanding of the unfolding formation process and his/her discernment of a possible call. The candidate will be provided with resources to be used during the process of formation for ministry. The NALC document, “Standards for Pastoral Ministry,” shall be utilized and discussed throughout the formation process. Candidates will seek to live and serve in a way that is compliant with that document.
6. **Decision by the Candidacy Committee.** The Candidacy Committee will make a decision on the candidate – approve, postpone, deny or developmental – and will communicate its decision to the candidate on the day of the entrance interview, and then in writing.

## ENDORSEMENT FOR INTERNSHIP

(9) The purpose of endorsement is to affirm a sense of call for ordained ministry and to confirm the progress in the first portion of seminary education. A particular concern will be to determine the candidate’s commitment to the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions. Endorsement is required prior to going on Internship. Endorsement interviews may be set up once a student has 60 credits. This interview will be in person in the Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas area.

The steps outlined below explain this portion of the candidacy process.

1. **Essay.** The candidate will complete an

essay by answering questions provided by the Candidacy Committee. The essay will be written after the candidate has concluded a primary course on the Lutheran Confessions. The essay will measure biblical, confessional, and theological knowledge and understanding and will provide the opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate the ability to articulate and synthesize biblical and theological thought. The essay will also address the candidate's personal spiritual growth and identity as a candidate for ministry. While not a research paper, the essay must reflect competency in thinking, writing, and English grammar reflective of a master's level degree program.

2. **Interview with the Candidacy Committee.** The Candidacy Committee will meet with the candidate and will discuss the candidate's practice in ministry and the candidate's ability to relate to persons. A common set of questions will be used, addressing matters including the nature of the church, what it means to be Lutheran, the meaning of ordination, the doctrine of the Word, the role of the law in human behavior, and other relevant matters. The committee will review the candidate's academic performance from the seminary where the candidate is studying. The committee will inquire into the candidate's worship life, both corporate and personal, and participation in the seminary community.
3. **Decision.** The Candidacy Committee will make a decision in regard to the candidate's future preparation for the ministry — to endorse for internship; delay; or deny. The committee's decision will be communicated the same day in person to the candidate, and then in writing. Endorsement is given when the committee ascertains that the candidate is ready to go on internship. The decision to delay is made only when clear steps are to be completed prior to a reconsideration of the postponement. A specific timeline and date for reconsideration is to be set as soon as is

practical. The decision to deny constitutes a termination of the candidacy process. A candidate who is denied may approach the bishop to request re-initiation of the process after a minimum of one calendar year has passed.

## **INTERNSHIP**

(10) An internship is an integral element in the candidacy process for ordained ministry in the NALC. Internship may occur after the second year of theological education, or after completion of the student's coursework. An internship is normally a full year. The Candidacy Committee has the responsibility to arrange internship sites for the candidate.

**(11) If your seminary assigns a contextual education requirement and calls it an "internship" this does not qualify for the internship that the NALC requires. The church's requirements are above and beyond the seminary's requirements for field education.**

(12) During the internship year, interns will meet regularly (typically over the phone) with a Life-to-Life Discipleship Guide, provided by the NALC. The meetings are intended to facilitate the intern's continued growth as a disciple of Christ, as well as help him/her develop lifelong habits of prayer and living that ensure a healthy and fruitful ministry for the long-term.

## **APPROVAL FOR THE CALL PROCESS AND ORDINATION**

(13) The approval step of the candidacy process is the final component to be completed before moving toward seeking a first call to ordained ministry. It takes place near the completion of the final year of theological education and the expectation is that the candidate has a satisfactory understanding of the Lutheran Confessions; pastoral identity and formation; a strong understanding of the Bible; the capacity for ministry within the NALC; and a devotional



life that reflects the candidate as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The candidate can expect to share examples of his/her ministry within a church setting and to be able to respond to real life ministry issues that may arise in congregational life.

(14) This interview will be in person in the Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas area.

1. **Essay.** The candidate will complete an essay to answer questions provided by the Candidacy Committee. In addition, the candidate will prepare the text for a sermon, and a one-page exegetical summary that exhibits the theological basis for the sermon.
2. **Interview.** The candidate will meet with the Candidacy Committee for a personal interview. The committee will review the academic performance of the candidate and may consult with a representative from the seminary. The committee will review and evaluate the entire body of documents relating to the candidate's preparation, formation, and internship. Throughout the interview, the committee will seek to determine the candidate's readiness for ministry in the church.
3. **Decision.** The decision to approve, delay, or deny is made by the committee and communicated to the individual, in person the same day, and then in writing. The decision to approve is made when committee members are as certain as they can be that the candidate has been formed and prepared well for the office of ministry. The decision to postpone is made only when clear, concrete steps are to be completed prior to a reconsideration of the postponement. A specific timeline and date for reconsideration are to be set as soon as is practical. The decision of denial represents significant doubt about a candidate's fitness for ministry. Reasons for denial will be given in person, the day of the interview, and in writing. Pastoral care for the candidate will be arranged by

the chair of the Candidacy Committee in such a case. A candidate who is denied may approach the bishop to request re-initiation of the process after a minimum of one year has passed.

## FIRST CALL

(15) The approved candidate will discuss with the Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry the process for receiving a first call to ordained ministry in the NALC. The procedures outlined in the NALC call process will be followed.

(16) Ongoing formation in the pastoral office will continue in first call through a support system with peers, an experienced pastor, and through the ministerium. The continuing process of formation will include worship, personal devotions, theological study, and mutual conversation and consolation.

## OTHER MATTERS

(17) **Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).** CPE is available for candidates who intend to serve as ordained ministers within the NALC. The Candidacy Committee will determine if a candidate should participate, on a case-by-case basis. The candidate may voluntarily choose to participate as well. Securing a particular site for CPE is the responsibility of the candidate, in consultation with the Candidacy Committee and the President of the North American Lutheran Seminary. Normally CPE comes at the conclusion of the candidate's first year of theological education, but may take place at any point during the candidacy process. There are other options beside CPE that provide effective training in pastoral care. A conversation with the Candidacy Committee and the candidate will help to determine what, if any, training is required. The NALC will reimburse half of the fee for CPE upon satisfactory completion of the program.

**(18) Introduction to Congregational Ministry.**

Prior to the Internship year, the candidate will participate in an introduction to congregational ministry (variously called Field Education; Mentored Ministry; or Contextual Ministry) under the supervision of a competent NALC pastor. The President of the North American Lutheran Seminary will consult with the theological seminary regarding the fulfillment of this expectation.

**(19) June Term Intensive Course.** Candidates are required to participate at least twice in an in-person intensive course at the North American Lutheran Seminary center in Ambridge, PA as well as an accompanying retreat for NALC candidates. These courses focus on practical ministry.

**(20) Standards for Pastoral Ministry.** The North American Lutheran Church is committed to providing pastors who will have the gifts and abilities to serve the church according to the church's Standards for Pastoral Ministry. The candidates for ordained ministry in the NALC are called to live in accordance with these standards.

**(21) Additional Studies:** Depending on circumstances, the Candidacy Committee may require candidates to take additional study in Lutheran-specific matters – Lutheran church history, worship, the Lutheran Confessions, preaching, or other studies that reflect the Lutheran Confessions.

**(22) Equivalencies.** The process outlined in this document is considered to be the norm for theological education in the North American Lutheran Church. However, based on need and circumstances, the Candidacy Committee may approve alternate routes for theological education. In such cases, the requirements for a Mas-

ter of Divinity degree and other elements in this document may be waived, at the discretion of the committee. A description of the alternative candidacy process will be provided to the candidate, in writing, by the Candidacy Committee and maintained in the candidate's permanent file.

**(23) Financial Aid.** The NALC has established a fund for theological education. To be considered for financial assistance, a current FAFSA form must be sent to the NALS office along with the Financial Assistance Application. Students receiving aid must maintain a 2.0 GPA (if on a 4.0 scale) in all courses passed (if on a pass/fail scale). Any courses that are not passed have to be retaken at the student's expense.

## **REQUIREMENTS FOR COMPLETION OF THE CANDIDACY PROCESS**

**(24) By the time you are finished you will have completed the following items:**

- Participate in person at least twice in a June term intensive course at the North American Lutheran Seminary in Ambridge, PA and an accompanying retreat for NALC candidates.
- Successfully complete a 9 month to 1 year internship in a congregation other than your home congregation.
- Receive a positive Approval from the Candidacy Committee of the North American Lutheran Church.
- Receive a Master of Divinity degree or the equivalent thereof within the NALS Network.
- All courses must be passed with a 2.0 GPA or higher (in a 4.0 system) and pass all courses (in a pass/fail system).



---

---

## APPENDIX

---

---

### Requesting Your Background Check:

1. Go to <https://www.ciaresearch.com/ec=NALC>. Complete and submit the online request form for the background check.
2. Immediately send a check for \$45.00 payable to the NALC to the address below. Be sure to note "Background Check" on the check's memo line.

### Send to:

North American Lutheran Church  
2655 Innsbruck Drive, Suite A  
New Brighton MN 55112-9304