

First Call Theological Education – Southeastern Synod

Assessment Tool

From the document, “Vision for First Call Theological Education”

The Southeastern Synod is focused on these actions for those who are within their first three years of ordained ministry:

1. *Equip* ministers with individual assessments and resource development
2. *Empower* ministers by establishing mentor relationships
3. *Engage* our ministers in group learning (in-person and virtual) to discern next steps

Assessments Overview

The method for assessing what will constitute the content for FCTE will be as follows:

1. SITUATE SELF - Create a baseline through individual reflection
2. ACTION - Hold conversations with the FCTE mentor to discuss general concerns / needs
3. REFLECTION / RETREAT - prioritize individual or collective concerns that need to be addressed

STEP ONE: Situate Self

The FCTE participant has several options from the start.

1. Self-reflection is an option, whereby the participant self-identifies issues that are of concern to their development as ministers.
2. An ELCA Coach can be engaged to help the participant self-identify struggles or challenges. This will lead the participant through self-discovery and identifying opportunities for growth.
 - a. *These struggles will vary in nature depending on the participant and the context in which the participant is located.*
 - b. *Struggles could include: self-identity, mastery of a ministerial skill, or simple administrative tasks*
 - c. *Each issue is valid.*
3. The Mentor may engage the participant in place of the coach, but the Mentor will NOT be expected to take the role of the Coach.

Step ONE may take time, as struggles may take time to become apparent.

If the participant needs some questions to start the process of self-reflection, here are a few questions to consider:

- “How am I relating to God and participating to God’s mission in the world?” instead of “How am I running an institution?”
- Where have I experienced the presence and power of God at work in my ministry in the last year?
- What in my ministry gives me life? Where do I feel most alive in my ministry and most energized? What do I find as life-depleting in my ministry? Where is my ministry drained?
- How do I feel about ministry now versus 1,3, 5, 10 years ago?
- What kinds of theological questions have I struggled with?

From time to time, the synod leadership will suggest a topic be addressed by all FCTE participants, but these requests will be limited, to respect the individual callings and contexts of our FCTE participants.

NOTE: This process is not a strictly linear process. The same challenges may arise on a regular basis, or sometimes, the challenges may be faced and no longer become a concern. We will give space for this process to live itself out and see what challenges are to be addressed.



STEP TWO: Action

By completing Step ONE, the participant is creating a baseline from which to progress in their identity and skills as a rostered minister.

Step TWO, then, provides space for the participant to develop an ACTION PLAN to work on the ministry challenges identified in Step ONE.

Here is where the participant can identify a practical application in the life of their ministry. The Mentor, Coach, or a colleague of the participant may help develop this action plan. Alternatively, the participant may be interested in self-identifying a plan.

The synod leadership and FCTE team will provide guidance to mentors, as needed, and are able to connect FCTE participants to ELCA Coaching (at the expense of the FCTE participant). ELCA Coaching provides the most direct assistance to our FCTE participants, and all FCTE participants are highly encouraged to establish a coaching relationship for at least 6 sessions, after which, the participant is free to continue this relationship, change ELCA Coaches, or find an alternate path forward.

The action plan may include some or all of the following:

- Access ELCA or synodical resources, like previous / upcoming webinars, one-on-one consultations with synod staff or colleagues, professional continuing education events, and more;
- Work with ELCA Coach to figure out action steps;
- Include congregation in a conversation, if appropriate;
- Use case studies to work through the issue(s) being addressed; these can be developed by FCTE participant or synod staff could provide.

The congregation should be invited – in part, or in whole – to assist the participant in the action plan in whatever way seems prudent to the participant. The congregation’s participation could be about assessing the FCTE participant’s skill level or the ability of the participant to address the challenges being addressed in Step TWO. Perhaps the congregation could provide support for the FCTE participant in their action plan, or help the congregation to get on board with the participant’s action plan(s).



STEP THREE: Reflection / Retreat

All Ministers of Word and Sacrament or Word and Service have already completed lots of self-assessments and spent much time on self-reflection. This process is NOT meant to duplicate those efforts. Rather, this FCTE process supplements the work that Candidacy Committees and seminary education offers. As such, Step THREE of the ASSESSMENT process is meant to provide a space for reflection or retreat so that the self-assessments and action plans might be shared and that the staff and FCTE participants might join in this learning together.

The synod will provide at least one time of retreat per year (in-person, when conditions are satisfactory) and online via video calls 2-3 other times per year, so that our FCTE participants might grow together and share in their joys and struggles of ministry, and build relationships with their fellow colleagues.

These three steps will allow you to identify and seek the proper coaching / assistance that is most helpful for YOU. Some of this help will come from colleagues, some will come from the synod, and some will come from self-exploration.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me or anyone on our staff for further assistance.

For more information or questions or comments, please contact

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