

North/West Lower Michigan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Seminary Scholarship Fund¹

Statement of Purpose

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod (“NWLMS” or “Synod”) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (“ELCA”) supports called leaders to the rostered ministry of the Church. As supported by resolution at the 2003 Synod Assembly, funds are available for distribution to those preparing for rostered ministry. The amount of the scholarship will be determined by the NWLMS Seminary Scholarship Committee.

The purpose of the NWLMS Seminary Scholarship Fund shall be (1) to decrease the amount of debt a candidate for rostered ministry may incur by decreasing need through a scholarship process, 2) encourage a partnership in ministry between the Synod and rostered leader candidates from the NWLMS in faithful stewardship of resources, and 3) to decrease the challenges of seminary debt which can impact the quality of ministry when a candidate receives and transitions into a call.

Scholarship applications may include both tuition and non-tuition expenses that will be incurred as part of the seminary education and development processes. Non-tuition expenses may include items like books and fees, necessary computer software, housing support, required clothing (i.e, alb, clerical shirts, etc.), related travel within the educational program, etc.

¹ *Adopted at the 14-Dec-2024 Synod Council Meeting*

Goals

The goals of this scholarship fund are as follows:

1. Reduce the burden of debt incurred by seminary candidates and students through scholarship support for both tuition and non-tuition expenses.
2. Provide an honest conversation about stewardship and the need to minimize and/or effectively manage the amount of debt incurred during the educational and development of candidates for rostered ministry.
3. To enable a more focused and effective ministry by decreasing the economic stress and burden of seminary debt prior to and after graduation.

Eligibility

Each applicant for a scholarship must:

1. Be a member of a congregation within the NWLM Synod of the ELCA
2. Have received a positive entrance decision from the NWLMS Candidacy Committee
3. Been admitted to an accredited ELCA seminary (or equivalent as approved by the NWLMS Candidacy Committee)
4. Complete and submit a scholarship application by stated deadlines which includes providing a copy of the financial aid package offered from the seminary
5. Be enrolled in and actively taking courses at the approved educational institutions
6. Remain in good standing with the NWLMS Candidacy Committee throughout the seminary process

Procedures

1. The NWLMS Seminary Scholarship Committee will oversee administration of this program.
 - a. The Committee Chair and other members will be appointed by the Synod Bishop and may each serve three-year terms. Each member may be re-appointed to the Committee for up to one additional term.
 - b. The Committee will be accountable to the Synod Bishop (or delegate) and/or the Executive Committee of the Synod Council.
 - c. The Committee will work under the functional leadership of the NWLMS Candidacy Committee.
 - d. The Committee will work in partnership with the NWLMS Director of Finance. The Director of Finance will provide an accounting of funds available for distribution and process such distributions as authorized by the Committee.
2. Funding is managed using the synod's "Seminary Education Assistance Endowment Fund" (originating from 2003 Synod Assembly action) in accordance with policies set by the NWLMS Endowment Fund Committee.
3. The Seminary Scholarship Committee will have the following responsibilities:
 - a. Organize and conduct virtual and/or in-person meetings aligned to management and oversight of the program.
 - b. Develop and maintain all documentation and communication related to the scholarship program and availability and management of the fund. This includes, but is not limited to creation and update of program overview documentation, application format and instructions, information provided / linked on the synod website, fund-related communications in synod newsletters and at synod meetings, process and communications related to donating to the fund, etc.
 - c. Partner with the Synod Bishop (or delegate) to ensure candidates who apply meet the eligibility standards. Note: The Bishop or delegate (if applicable) are to serve as a resource (as needed) but not as a voting member of the Committee.

- d. Review all applications received and determine the scholarship amount each candidate will receive.
 - e. Submit periodic reports to the Synod Bishop to communicate scholarship distribution decisions and actions.
4. Program procedures and requirements include the following:
- a. Funds available for distribution each year in accordance with NWLM Synod Endowment Committee policies will be determined with assistance from the NWLMS Director of Finance.
 - b. Processes and procedures for enabling on-going donations to the fund will be managed by the NWLMS Seminary Scholarship Committee in partnership with the NWLMS Director of Finance.
 - c. Applications will be available to all candidates in the candidacy process via a link on a Synod website. Applications will include instructions, deadlines, and contact information for questions and submission.
 - d. Applications will be due to the Synod Scholarship Committee by stated deadlines (either on an annual or semester basis).
 - e. Approved scholarship tuition payments must be made payable directly to educational institutions. Approved non-tuition support will be managed on a case-by-case basis.
 - f. Scholarships will be awarded and paid out either annually or on a semester basis. Candidates may re-apply annually as needed, as long as the candidate continues to meet all requirements.
 - g. As the candidacy process is part of a rostered ministry discernment process, candidates and/or seminary institutions are not expected to return funds received via this scholarship program if, during this time they or partners in the candidacy process determine that the process in candidacy toward rostered ministry has come to an end.