NAD
Ministry

Building a Comprehensive Partnership for Lay Minister Certification

The Case for Four Partners
in Developing an NAD Lay Minister Credential

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North American Division Year-End Meetings—2026

North American Division Year-End Meetings

Leaders, pastors and administrators in the room where these decisions are made











FANG PROVERB · GABON

“He who does not ask questions, learns nothing.”

African Proverbs: Wisdom of the People (Comboni Missionary Publications, 2019)

We Asked the Questions. You Answered!

Clergy Continuing Education Survey · 2025 NAD Year-End Meeting

170

Leaders surveyed

at the 2025 NAD Year-End Meeting

79%

Serve at Division, Union or Conference level

15% Division · 18% Union · 46% Conference · 21% Congregational

10

Territories represented

Nine Unions plus Guam–Micronesia

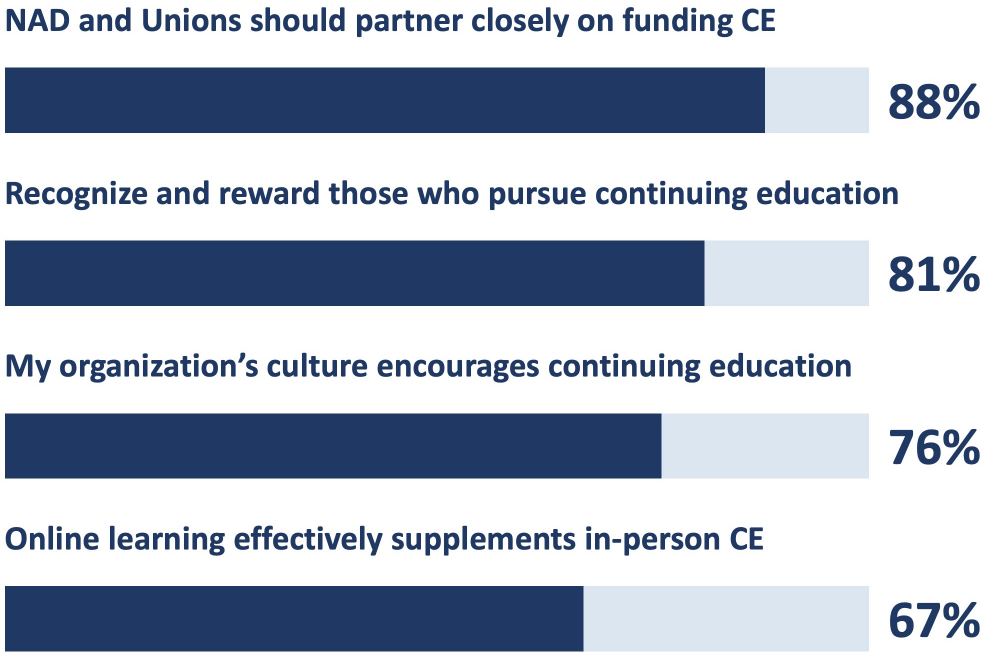
Who answered, by role



The people who answered are the people who decide — and the people who will carry this out.

You Told Us: The Will Is There

Percent who agree or strongly agree



88%

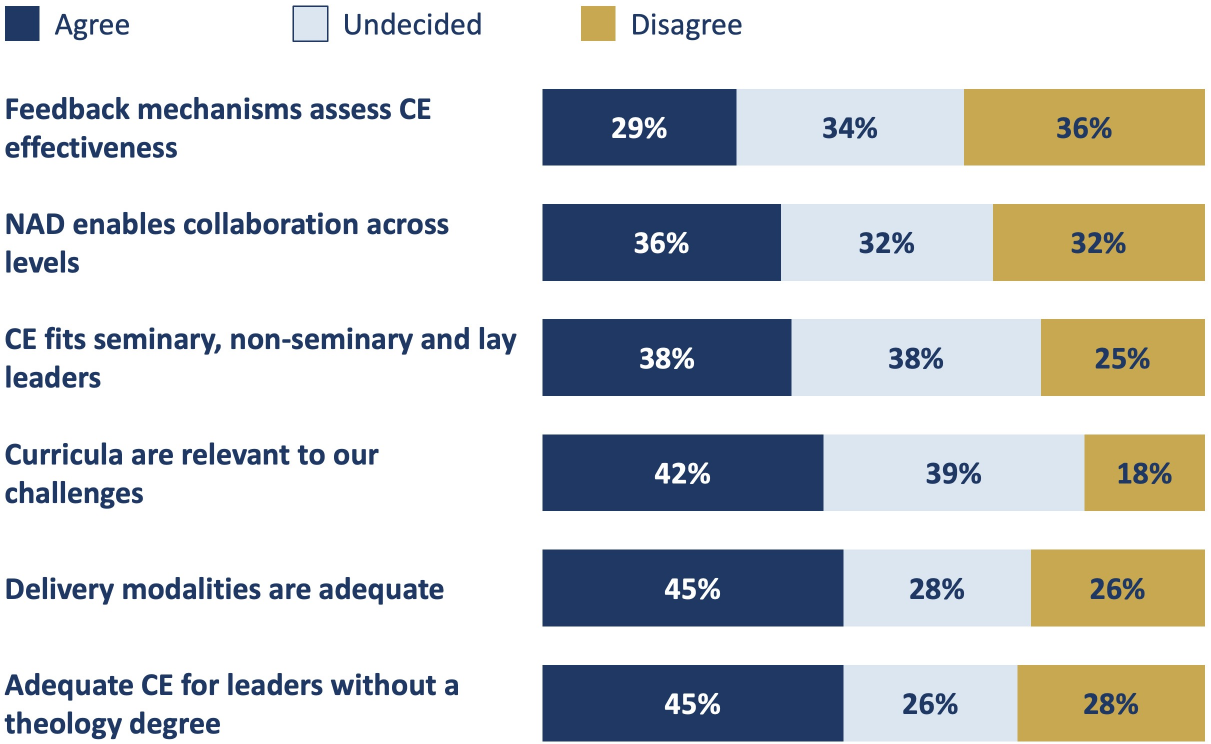
asked NAD and the Unions to partner closely to find funding for continuing education.

The highest agreement of any item in the survey.

A mandate with a funding preference already attached.

Source: NAD Clergy Continuing Education Survey, 2025 NAD Year-End Meeting (n = 162–164 per item).

The systems are thin; leaders unsure of current state



36%

agree the NAD enables effective collaboration among congregations, conferences and unions.

32% disagree. Another 32% are undecided.

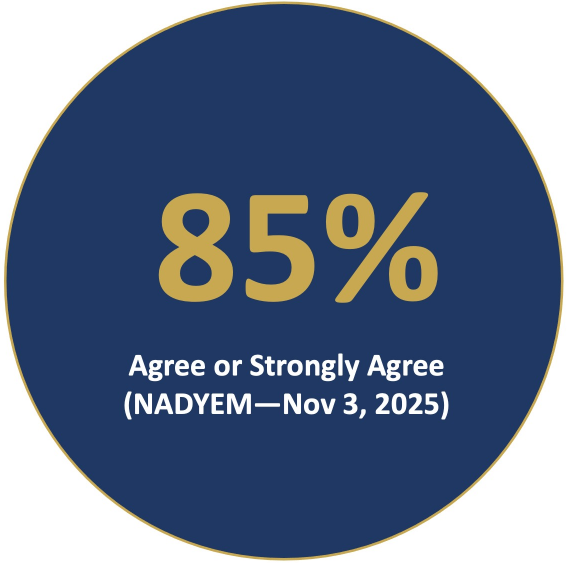
Adequate CE exists for MDiv-trained ministers (53% agree) far more than for leaders without a theology degree (45%).

Source: NAD Clergy Continuing Education Survey, 2025 NAD Year-End Meeting (n = 158–166 per item). Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

The Consensus: The NAD Field Has Spoken

NAD Clergy & Lay Leader Survey · 170 Respondents—November 3, 2025 NADYEM

"Lay minister certification will enhance our efforts to complete God's work in the North American Division."



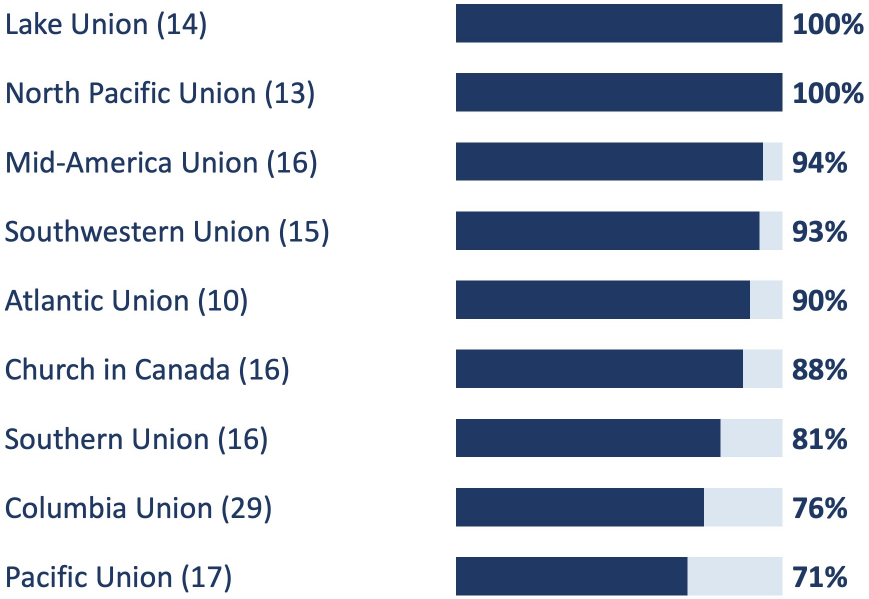
By Credential Type:



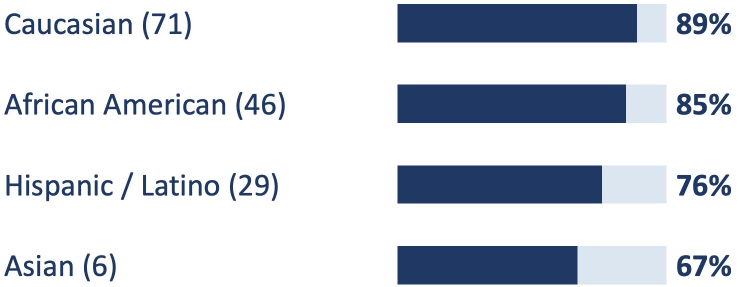
Support Holds in Every Union and Community

Agree or strongly agree: "Lay minister certification will enhance our efforts to advance God's work in the North American Division."

By Union (respondents)



By racial / ethnic group (respondents)



Not one Union and not one group falls below a majority. The lowest: Asian respondents at 67% (n = 6) and the Pacific Union at 71%.

Not shown (very small samples, all 100%): Guam–Micronesia (n = 1), Native American / First Nation (n = 1), Pacific Islander (n = 2). Source: NAD Clergy Continuing Education Survey, 2025 NAD Year-End Meeting (n = 164).

The Need: The Ministry Landscape Has Changed

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION • 2025

6,761 Congregations in 2025

5,876
Churches (86.9% of congregations)

885
Companies (13.1% of congregations)

~4,300

Credentialed Pastors

250 members per pastor
(was 86 per pastor in 1913)
Pastors: NAD Ministerial · Ratio: 2025 NAD Ex. Sec. Report

427+

Projected Pastor Deficit by 2027

930 exits — 503 graduates
(NAD Ministerial, 2023 Year-End Meeting)

"We do not have adequate numbers in the system to replace those who are going to be retiring."

— G. Alexander Bryant, NAD President, 2023 Year-End Meeting

With a median Sabbath attendance of 53 per congregation, every equipped lay leader is not a substitute for a pastor — but a missiological force multiplier.

THE INITIATIVE

What Is A Lay Minister Credential?

A Division-wide standard for lay ministry formation

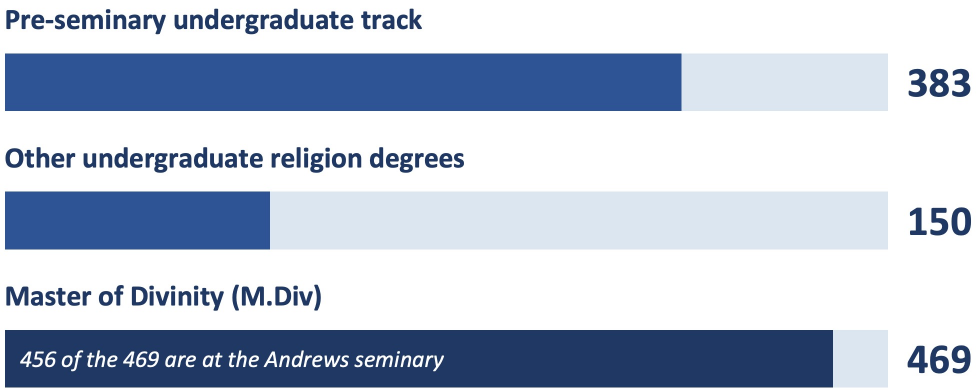
How Many Are Training for Ministry?

__Fall 2025__ enrollment in ministry-related programs at NAD schools—BMTE

1,002

students enrolled in ministry-related programs, Fall 2025

Pre-seminary, other undergraduate religion and M.Div, across 13 reporting campuses and programs.



Finishing each year: about 115 expected in 2025 (61 from the pre-seminary track, 54 M.Div) and about 135 in 2026 (48 and 87), as reported.

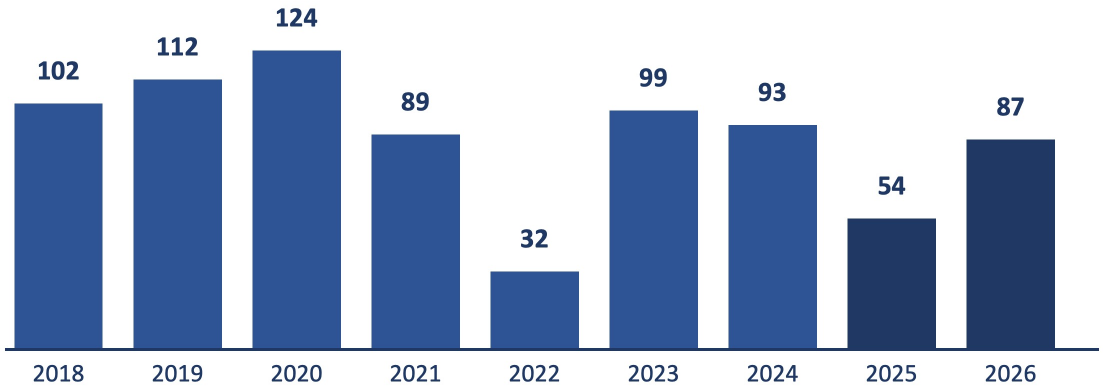
A real pipeline of about a thousand students, and it runs almost entirely through one seminary.

Source: NAD BMTE, 2025 Fall Enrollment report (all figures recomputed from the school-level counts). “Other master’s” programs are left out: 2025 reporting is incomplete.

The Pipeline and the Need

Expected M.Div graduates each year, against the pastors we expect to lose

186 pastors a year expected to leave (930 over 2023–27)



Darker bars: 2025 and 2026 are expected graduates, as reported.

2 : 1 — Exits for every expected M.Div graduate: 186 a year against an average of 83 (2023–26).

97% — of M.Div students (456 of 469) study at one seminary.

–16% — Pre-seminary enrollment since 2018: 456 then, 383 now.

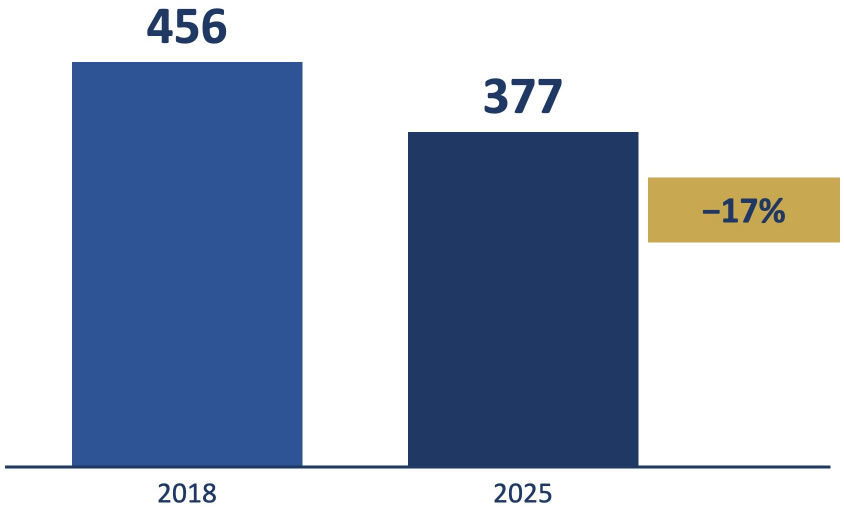
Seminary alone cannot close the gap. Equipped, certified lay ministers can carry what the pipeline cannot.

Source: NAD BMTE, 2025 Fall Enrollment report (all figures recomputed from the school-level counts). Exits and graduates: NAD Ministerial, 2023 NAD Year-End Meeting. The 2022 figure (32) is as reported and may be incomplete.

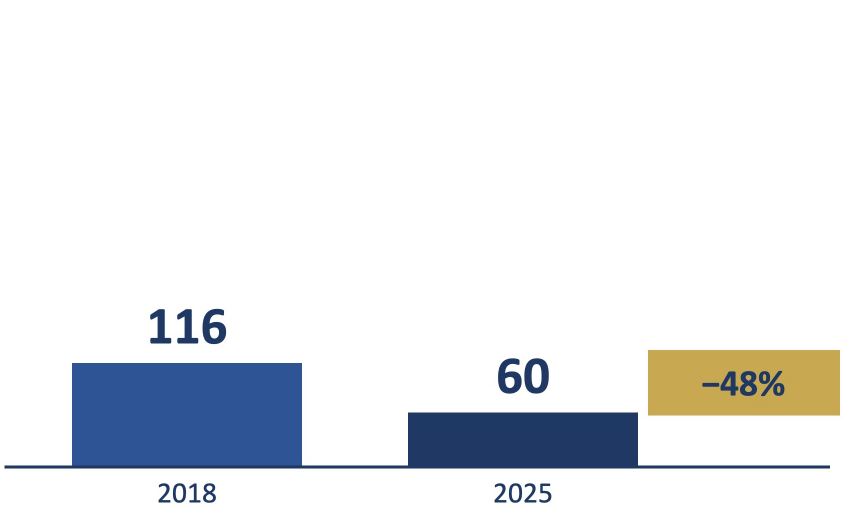
Same Campuses, Seven Years Later

Pre-seminary track at the 10 campuses that reported in both 2018 and 2025

Students enrolled in the track



Expected to complete the track

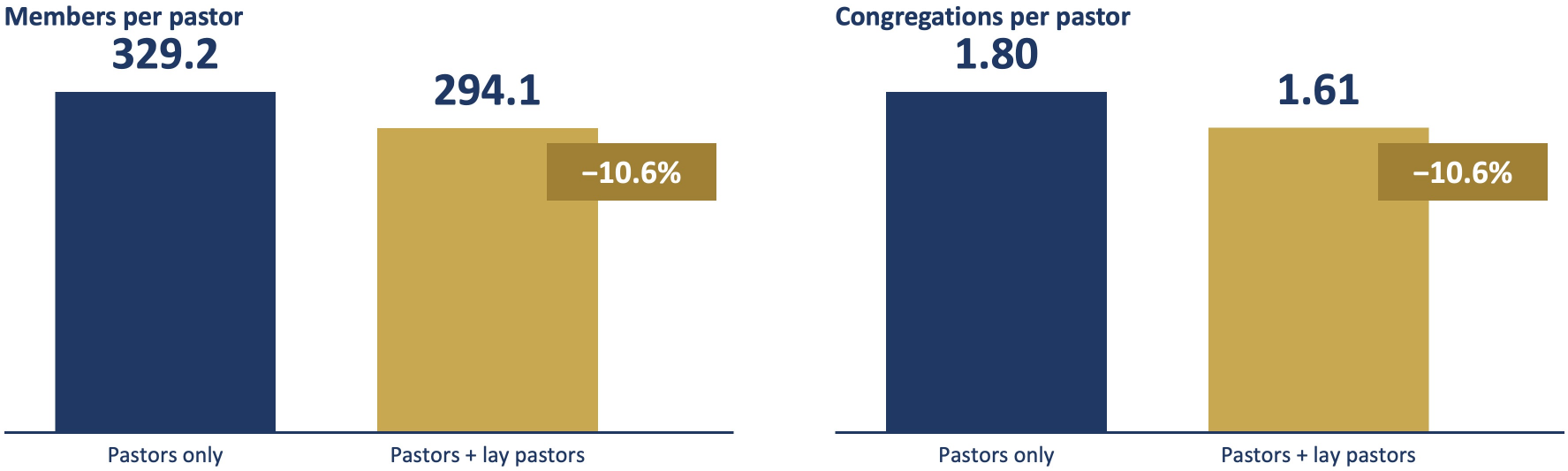


In 2018, about 25 expected completers for every 100 enrolled. In 2025, about 16.

Source: NAD BMTE, 2025 Fall Enrollment report; AU, BU, LSU, OU, PUC, SAU, SWAU, UAU, WWU and WAU, recomputed from school-level counts. Online units and the seminary are excluded because they did not report in both years.

Lay Pastors Already Lighten the Load

Members and congregations per pastor, all 59 reporting Conferences, 2026



3,919 pastors and 473 lay pastors. About one lay pastor for every eight pastors already lowers the load by roughly a tenth.

Source: NAD 2026 Annual Council, Secretary's Report (K. Ahn), pp. 34–35. Averages of Conference ratios, as reported.

The Case for a Comprehensive Lay Pastor Credential

What the report proves, and what only a common standard can fix

WHAT THE REPORT PROVES

- Lay pastors lighten the load: 329 to 294 members per pastor.
- Where the practice is deep, the effect is large: up to −36%.
- The Division already screens about 32,000 volunteers a year.

WHAT ONLY A COMMON STANDARD CAN FIX

- Only 473 lay pastors across 59 Conferences, and use is uneven.
- Each Conference writes its own rules: Texas and Florida already differ on size, cycles and curriculum.
- No common curriculum, credit or portable credential.

A comprehensive credential turns a local practice into Division-wide capacity.

Source: NAD 2026 Annual Council, Secretary's Report (K. Ahn), pp. 34, 36, 51; Texas and Florida Conference VLP guidelines booklets.

Defining a Best-in-Class Lay Minister Credential

Toward an Official Definition

"An official authorization issued by the NAD, its Unions, and its Conferences, empowering qualified laypersons to carry out designated pastoral duties in Conference-assigned ministry contexts."
L. N. Pollard, Consultant to the NAD



Voluntary service · Not a paid employee position

What the LMC Means in Practice

1. **Official NAD Authorization.**
   Issued by the NAD, its Unions, and Conferences to authorize a class of local church appointees drawn from the laity.
2. **Certified and Certifiable Training.**
   Signifies successful completion of a pastoral care certification track of training courses.
3. **Ongoing Education.**
   Indicates annual completion of leadership, shepherding, and other training courses required to maintain the initial certification.
4. **Conference Assignment.**
   Qualifies the holder for Conference Committee assignment to work under a supervising pastor and facilitate the work of elected local church officers.
5. **Lay Volunteer Service.**
   The LMC is not a paid employee position — it is an authorized ministry role within the lay order of the church.

What the LMC Is NOT — and What It IS:

Answering the Concern That Lay Certification Becomes a Back Door to Conference Ministry

✕ The LMC Is NOT ...

Not a seminary substitute

The LMC curriculum does not replicate theological education. It is focused, ministry-specific formation — not an MDiv compressed into certificate form.

Not a pathway to ordination

Completion of the LMC does not confer, imply, or qualify a holder for ordained ministry. The ordination track remains exclusively through the seminary and BMTE.

Not a Conference employment credential

The LMC authorizes voluntary lay service. It is not a hiring credential. Conference employment requires ordination or commissioning — not an LMC.

Not a lifetime certification

Biennial recertification (12 CE contact hours every 2 years) is required. There is no permanent lay minister credential — accountability is built in.

✓ The LMC IS ...

An official NAD authorization

Issued through the NAD → Union → Conference chain. This is a denominationally-weighted credential — not a self-certified lay title.

A lay order ministry credential

The LMC places the holder squarely within the lay order of the church — working alongside, never above, the ordained clergy.

A supervised ministry role

Every LMC holder serves under a supervising pastor with a Conference Committee assignment. The ecclesiological guardrails are explicit.

A response to a documented crisis

With 1,002 students in ministry-related programs and a projected deficit of 427+ pastors, the LMC is not a threat to the clergy pipeline — it is a lifeline to the church.

ECCLESIOLOGICAL FIREWALL: Point 5 of the LMC Definition — 'The LMC is not a paid employee position. It is an authorized ministry role within the lay order of the church.' — L. N. Pollard

FANG PROVERB · GABON

“It takes many beads to form one necklace.”

African Proverbs: Wisdom of the People (Comboni Missionary Publications, 2019)

Four Links — One Chain . . .

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

Standards · Branding
Quality Framework · Policy
Essential NAD Departments:
NADEII, ALC, Ministerial,BMTE, etc.

UNION COMMITTEES & MINISTERIAL DEPARTMENTS

Coordination
Conference Oversight

LAY MINISTER CREDENTIAL

CONFERENCE COMMITTEES & MINISTERIAL DEPTS.

Candidate Selection
Mentors · Field Supervision

INSTITUTIONS OF NAD HIGHER EDUCATION

Academic Curriculum
Faculty · Credit · Assessment

+ Adventist Learning Community (ALC) — Common Digital Delivery Platform for Online Components, including selected content.

Why Four Partners? Your Data Points the Way

What the 2025 survey says each partner can influence . . . .

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION · FRAMEWORK AND STANDARDS

38% **say CE serves seminary-trained, non-seminary and lay leaders alike**

→ NAD sets differentiated pathways and builds evaluation in: only 29% say CE feedback mechanisms exist.

UNIONS · COORDINATION AND FUNDING

36% **say NAD enables effective collaboration across congregations, conferences and unions**

→ Unions link the partners, and 88% of you want NAD and Unions to partner on funding.

CONFERENCES · SELECTION AND SUPERVISION

76% **say their organization's culture encourages continuing education**

→ Conferences choose, mentor, supervise and release lay ministers. 81% back rewards for CE.

NAD HIGHER EDUCATION · CURRICULUM AND CREDIT

42% **say current CE curricula are relevant to the challenges we face**

→ Institutions build the academic core. Only 45% see adequate CE for leaders without a theology degree.

+ Adventist Learning Community: 67% say online resources supplement in-person CE well.

Source: NAD Clergy Continuing Education Survey, 2025 NAD Year-End Meeting (n = 158–166 per item).

Four Partners, One Credential

Today we ask for your support and participation at the table — not a financial commitment.

1

TODAY

Support the Partnership

Affirm that the Lay Minister Credential will be developed jointly by the NAD, Unions, Conferences and NAD institutions of higher education.

2

YEAR 1 · 2026–27

Inform the Design Team

Unions and Conferences shape selection, mentoring and Conference assignment. Institutions set credit policy. All through the NAD Continuing Education Advisory.

3

AUGUST 2027

Run and Evaluate the Pilot Program

50–75 lay pastors across 5–6 Conferences and 3–4 universities. Texas Conference's Volunteer Lay Pastor program is the first foundation. Florida helps point the way as key resource advisors.

4

August 2028–years 2–3

Launch Division-Wide

NAD-wide implementation with formal articulation agreements and one portable, NAD-recognized certificate.

PROPOSED ENDORSEMENT

To support the collaborative development of a comprehensive NAD Lay Minister Credential as a shared work of four partners — the North American Division Office, its Unions, its Conferences, and its institutions of higher education.

[All work will be vetted within the Continuing Education Advisory, recommended and reviewed by NAD President for presentation to NAD executive committee].

North American Division	Unions	Conferences	NAD Higher Education

+ Adventist Learning Community as the common online platform

What does not change: voluntary lay service, not a paid employee position · supervised by a pastor under Conference assignment · renewed every two years · the ordination pathway stays through the seminary and BMTE.

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SPIRIT OF PROPHECY · MINISTERS AND MEMBERS, ONE WORK

“Not upon the ordained minister only, rests the responsibility of going forth to fulfil this commission. Everyone who has received Christ is called to work for the salvation of his fellow men.”

Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 110

THE MINISTER’S SIDE

“Those who have the spiritual oversight of the church should devise ways and means by which an opportunity may be given to every member of the church to act some part in God’s work.”

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 116

THE CHURCH’S SIDE

“As ministers manifest earnestness in improving the talents entrusted to them, the church should help them judiciously.”

The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 353, 354

Ministers open the door. Members walk through it. The church backs them both. The credential is how we do it in good order.

With Gratitude: Many Hands Built This Path

Colleagues who made the survey, and this initiative, possible

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

Dr. G. Alex Bryant
Instrument review and counsel

Dr. Rohan Wellington
Then-Director of Professional Services

Neat Randriamilison
Director, Professional Services

Sheldon Kennedy
Professional Services

Dr. Ivan Williams
Chair, Continuing Education Advisory

SOUTHERN UNION · SURVEY ORIGINATION AND ADVISEMENT

Dr. Ron Smith
President

Dr. Alan Machado
Then Florida Conference President

Dr. Orlando Lopez
Current Florida Conference President

Dr. Michael Owusu
Southeastern Conference (July 2025)

Dr. Prudence Pollard
President, PAVE, Inc—Chief Statistician

SOUTHWESTERN UNION

Dr. Elton DeMoraes
Union President

Dr. Ismael Castillo
Texas Conference President

Good work is rarely solitary work.

African Proverb (attributed)

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together!”