



# Pastoral Ethics

NORTH CAROLINA SYNOD OF THE ELCA





Boundaries are our friends!



# *RELATIONSHIPS*

*Are God's greatest gift to us*





Until, because of  
our selfish  
sinfulness....

They become  
our greatest  
challenge  
and burden.





# Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline, ELCA 1989, 2004, 2020





# Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline

1. Preaching/Teaching in conflict with teachings of ELCA
2. Conduct incompatible with character of ministerial office.
  - A. Confidential communication
  - B. Integrity
  - C. Professional Attention to Duties
  - D. Relationship to Family
  - E. Sexual Matters—"chastity and abstinence are required outside marriage and chastity and fidelity are required within marriage"





F. Addiction and substance abuse

G. Fiscal Responsibilities

H. Membership in Certain Organizations

I. Conviction of a Felony

3. Willfully disregarding Ch. 7 of ELCA Constitution standards for ministers

4. Willful disregard of the constitution or bylaws of this church



# **PROPOSED REVISIONS to Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline in the ELCA, Spring 2021**

Confidentiality now extends to ALL RMs, pastors and deacons (currently only pastors)

New section on care of the family

Tougher rules on pirating intellectual property, i.e., plagiarism can mean off roster



# PROPOSED REVISIONS to Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline in the ELCA, Spring 2021

Stronger language around retaliatory action or contact by someone against whom complaint was made to the person filing the complaint

Language around sex before marriage somewhat less clear--proposal was morphing into “no casual or non-committal” sexual intimacy (but adultery is always forbidden) applies to mostly not married folks. Conf. of Bishops was as of this past week trying to retain the word “marriage.”



# PROPOSED REVISIONS to Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline in the ELCA, Spring 2021

Addiction and Substance abuse language more as disease than as “abuse”

Stronger language against soliciting gifts from parishioners for personal gain (wills, etc.)

Hate speech or actions in any context, especially social media—completely new provision



# PROPOSED REVISIONS to Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline in the ELCA, Spring 2021

Any abusive language or actions to family, congregation, colleagues, or others)

Stronger language around retired ministers in congregations—staying in a congregation formerly served now to be grounds for discipline UNLESS explicitly invited to do so on an annual basis by new pastor AND Council of congregation and with permission of bishop



# PROPOSED REVISIONS to Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline in the ELCA, Spring 2021

Inciting a congregation to leave ELCA is conduct unbecoming rostered min & subject to discipline

Also will be adding a revised section that fleshes out a bit more the Guidelines of Discipline of Church members, not just rostered persons, already outlined in Constitution





# Leaving a Parish

RESIGNING OR RETIRING



# Congregational Membership


- ▶ A retired pastor should not remain a member of the congregation served at the time of retirement. Transferring one's membership to another congregation allows the successor pastor to assume pastoral leadership more readily. It also provides an opportunity for the retired pastor to enter fully into the life of a different congregation with clarity about the pastor's retired role.
- ▶ approved November 1998 by ELCA Church Council, CC98.11.45



# Ethics for Pastors Resigning

- ▶ 1. It is your responsibility as a former pastor to decline invitations to conduct pastoral acts in any former parish. It is important that you do not pass the burden of such decisions back to the pastor who currently holds that call. If asked to function in a pastoral role, the best response is “because I am no longer your pastor it would not be appropriate for me to do that,” perhaps followed by “I will pray for you and would be happy to attend as a friend.



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- ▶ Do not say “you will have to consult the current pastor.” That puts the current pastor in the no-win situation of either relinquishing the pastoral role to you, or appearing to be jealous and uncaring (NC Synod Call Process Manual, Book I, pp. 13-14).



# Ethics for Pastors Resigning

- ▶ 2. It is your responsibility as a former pastor to be supportive of your successor, even when that is difficult to do. If your ministry was appreciated, then you have great power to affect your successor's ministry. If you can't say good things, say nothing, and do it graciously.
- ▶ 3. While the above statements are addressed to pastors, spouses of pastors should consider the same factors, and also respect the recommendations made above. (NC Synod Call Process Manual, p. 13)




One of the greatest gifts you can give your former parish is a successful successor.



*The clearest, most helpful path to a successful successor is for the former pastor who just resigned or retired, to leave.*





Ordained ministers shall respect the integrity of the ministry of congregations which they do not serve and shall not exercise ministerial functions therein unless invited to do so by the pastor, or if there is no duly called pastor, then by the interim pastor in consultation with the Congregation Council.

- ▶ (†§14.14. in the Constitution for Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).



# Social Media for Former Parishioners

- ▶ As with “in person” relationships, it’s okay to be friends with former parishioners and it’s appropriate to be friends on Social Media, so long as we don’t act in a pastoral role. When approached in such a way, it’s best to say, “You need to talk with your pastor about that.”



# Are there exceptions?

- ▶ If an exception to ELCA, NC Synod, or Congregational Policy is necessary or desired, according to the ELCA Call Process Manual, Book One, pp. 13-14, that should be done in consultation with the bishop. Our new practice in such cases in the NC Synod is a covenant with clear expectations that is revisited annually and must be agreed upon and signed by the bishop, the Congregation Council president (indicating Council approval), the new pastor (or interim pastor), and the former pastor.



# What about gifts from parishioners?

- ▶ There is no one-size-fits-all rule here, but the simple wisdom is to be careful and to be reasonable. Particularly with larger gifts like use of a vacation home, a car, or large cash gifts, ask yourself, “Is this person buying influence?” Will it appear to others that they are?



# Boundaries in the Pulpit

“Calling out” people with whom you differ

Making it “all about me”

“Jokes” that target a particular gender, nationality, ethnicity, race, etc.

Specifically partisan political discourse





# Substance Abuse

- ▶ Any report of suspected substance abuse by a rostered minister will be investigated by the office of the bishop. Depending on the findings, the rostered minister may need to complete successfully a counseling and/or rehab regimen as well as commit to continued participation in a 12-step group in order to remain active on the roster.



# CASE STUDY

- ▶ You have taken a call in a part of the country far from home. A couple in your congregation has been especially nice to you. They drop by your house unexpectedly three or four times a week and stay a while to visit. They regularly bring you flowers, food, CDs and tickets to events. At first you experienced this as friendliness, but now it has begun to feel intrusive of your private time. How do you handle the situation?



# Questions?

