

## Other Documents: Policy Regarding Ordination in ‘Unusual Circumstances’

### Background:

The Division for Ministry prepared a draft of the proposed policy to be used in reference to proposed bylaw change 7.31.17. The policy describes the procedural steps to be taken in the event a candidate for ordination seeks an exception to the ordination practices of the ELCA, including the consultation between the synodical bishop of assignment and the presiding bishop of this church.

The possible bylaw, if adopted by the 2001 Churchwide Assembly, would require implementation in accordance with policy developed by the Division for Ministry, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council.

The text of proposed bylaw 7.31.17. follows:

*Ordination in Unusual Circumstances.* For pastoral reasons in unusual circumstances, a synodical bishop may provide for the ordination by another pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America of an approved candidate who has received and accepted a properly issued, duly attested letter of call for the office of ordained ministry. Prior to authorization of such an ordination, the bishop of the synod of the candidate’s first call shall consult with the presiding bishop as this church’s chief ecumenical officer and shall seek the advice of the Synod Council. The pastoral decision of the synodical bishop shall be in accordance with policy developed by the Division for Ministry, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council.

The Church Council, at its April 2001 meeting, voted:

*To adopt the “Policy for Ordination in Unusual Circumstances in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” [as printed below]...contingent upon approval by the 2001 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America of the text of proposed bylaw 7.31.17. as recommended by the Church Council to the assembly.*

### POLICY FOR ORDINATION IN ‘UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES’ IN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

1. Introduction
  - a. Ordination to the office of Word and Sacrament in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is a rite of the Church administered according to the practices of this church in order to extend the mission and ministry of the Church. It is not a personal privilege to be determined by the candidate.
  - b. The purpose of this policy is to describe how a synodical bishop may exercise pastoral judgment in unusual circumstances to allow an exception to this church’s established ordination practices.
  - c. All requests for exceptions to this church’s ordination practices shall be considered on a case-by-case basis.
2. Definitions

The terms, “for pastoral reasons in unusual circumstances,” are broadly stated in order to allow the synodical bishop and the presiding bishop to use their judgment in evaluating individual cases according to their particular circumstances. However, the following principles should be considered as decisions are made:

  - a. The decision should enhance and extend the ministry and mission purposes of this church.
  - b. The decision should contribute to the unity of the Church.
3. Procedural Steps
  - a. A candidate for ordination who seeks an exception to the ordination practices of this church will meet individually with the synodical bishop of assignment to discuss the candidate’s request for an exception, and for the bishop to interpret to the candidate the bishop’s concerns. A written statement describing how the circumstances of the candidate’s ordination are unusual, warranting an exception, shall be provided to the synodical bishop.
  - b. The synodical bishop may, and when inclined to grant an exception shall, seek the advice of

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Synod Council and incorporate that advice in

c. The synodical bishop may, and when inclined to grant an exception shall, consult with the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The purpose of this consultation is to consider together whether such an exception to this church's ordination practices is consistent with the principles as stated in 2a. and b. above. After such consultation, the synodical bishop shall exercise pastoral judgment and determine whether to authorize the ordination by another

considering the request.  
pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. There is no appeal to the synodical bishop's decision.

d. Should emergency circumstances prevent the presence of the synodical bishop at an ordination, the bishop may authorize another ELCA bishop or another ELCA pastor to serve as ordinator.

e. This policy shall be evaluated periodically by the Division for Ministry and reviewed by the Conference of Bishops and by the Church Council.