

[Originally approved on November 19, 1989, and subsequently approved in revised version (appearing below) on December 5, 1993, by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, pursuant to ELCA Bylaw 20.71.11.]

Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline of Ordained Ministers

As an expression of its life in the gospel of Jesus Christ, this church embraces disciplinary processes of counseling, admonition, and correction, with the objective of forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing.

Simultaneously, out of deep concern for effective extension of the gospel, this church remains alert to the high calling of discipleship in Jesus Christ. The ordained ministers of this church, as persons charged with special responsibility for the proclamation of the gospel, are to seek to reflect the new life in Christ, avoiding that which would make them stumbling blocks to others. To that end, this church recognizes that there is behavior that is deemed to be incompatible with ordained ministry, and that calls for disciplinary action.

The following definitions and guidelines do not set forth the high expectations this church has of its ordained ministers. (A document of such expectations has been developed by the Division for Ministry for this church.) The normative expectations of this church for its ordained ministers focus upon faithful and effective exercise of ministerial leadership. In all matters of morality and personal ethics, this church expects its ordained ministers to be exemplary in conduct.

These definitions and guidelines describe the grounds for which ordained ministers may be subject to discipline according to the practice of this church. Their purpose is juridical: to assist in the processes of consultation, discipline, and appeals.

Grounds for discipline of ordained ministers are as follows:

a. **Preaching or teaching in conflict with the faith confessed by this church** is grounds for discipline of ordained ministers. A summary of the faith confessed by this church is found in Chapters 2 and 3 of this church's constitution.

b. **Conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office** is grounds for discipline of ordained ministers. These guidelines define and describe kinds of behavior which are incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.

1) **Confidential Communications**

Ordained ministers must respect privileged and confidential communication and may not disclose such communication, except with the express permission of the person who has confided it or if the person is perceived to intend great harm to self or others.

2) **Professional Attention to Duties**

An ordained minister of this church has made commitments through ordination and through acceptance of a letter of call. Continued neglect of or indifference toward such duties constitutes conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.

3) **Relationship to Family**

This church is committed to the sanctity of marriage and the enhancement of family life. Ordained ministers of this church, whether married or single, are expected to uphold Christian ideals of marriage in their public ministry as well as in private life. Spouse and children, if any, are to be regarded with love, respect and commitment.

Any departure from this normative behavior may be considered conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office. Such departure might include any of the following:

a) Separation or divorce that occurs without consultation with the synodical bishop's office and appropriate implementation of such consultation. Each such relationship must be considered pastorally.

b) Desertion or abandonment of spouse or children.

c) Abuse of spouse or children.

d) Repeated failure to meet legally determined family support obligations.

4) **Sexual Matters**

The biblical understanding which this church affirms is that the normative setting for sexual intercourse is marriage. In keeping with this understanding, chastity before marriage and fidelity within marriage are the norm. Adultery, promiscuity, the sexual abuse of another, or the misuse of counseling relationships for sexual favors constitute conduct that is incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.

Practicing homosexual persons are precluded from the ordained ministry of this church.

5) **Substance Abuse**

Misuse of alcohol or mind-altering substances impairs the ability of an ordained minister to perform the duties of the office with full effectiveness. The approach of this church in dealing with such a problem is to recommend and enable effective treatment. However,

failure to accept treatment or to follow through on treatment and abide by the terms of such treatment and the consequent impairment of performance is conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.

6) Fiscal Responsibilities

Ordained ministers of this church are expected to conduct their fiscal affairs in accordance with ethical and legal requirements. Among those fiscal activities which may be considered conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office are:

- a) Indifference to or avoidance of legitimate and neglected personal debts.
- b) Embezzlement of money or improper appropriation of the property of others.
- c) Using the ministerial office improperly for personal financial advantage.

7) Membership in Certain Organizations

This church has specifically declared in 7.47.01. that discipline may be administered to any of its ordained ministers who belongs to any organization other than the church which claims to possess in its teaching and ceremonies that which the Lord has given solely to the Church.

8) Conviction of a Felony

The society in which this church ministers has placed a high premium upon the role of law in regulating the rights and duties of individuals to promote the common good. This includes laws which define certain conduct as felonies. Pleading guilty to, or being convicted of, a felony is grounds for discipline as conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office, but may not be grounds for discipline in those instances where the violation of law was to protest or to test a perceived unjust law or as an expression of civil disobedience.

- c. **Willfully disregarding or violating the functions and standards established by this church for the office of Word and sacrament** is grounds for discipline of ordained ministers. Such functions and standards established by this church are found in Section 7.20. through 7.47.01. of this church's constitution, bylaws and continuing resolutions.
- d. **Willful disregard of the constitution or bylaws of this church** is grounds for discipline of ordained ministers.

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Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline of Associates in Ministry, Members of the Deaconess Community, and Diaconal Ministers

As an expression of its life in the gospel of Jesus Christ, this church embraces disciplinary processes of counseling, admonition, and correction, with the objective of forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing.

Simultaneously, out of deep concern for effective extension of the gospel, this church remains alert to the high calling of discipleship in Jesus Christ. The individuals on the official roster of laypersons of this church, as persons charged with special responsibility for the gospel in the ministries to which they are called, are to seek to reflect the new life in Christ, avoiding that which would make them stumbling blocks to others. To that end, this church recognizes that there is behavior that is deemed to be incompatible with the standards for the rostered ministries of this church, and that calls for disciplinary action.

The following definitions and guidelines do not set forth the high expectations this church has of individuals on the official roster of laypersons of this church. (A document of such expectations has been developed by the Division for Ministry for this church.) The normative expectations of this church for individuals on the official roster of laypersons of this church focus upon faithful and effective exercise of their leadership. In all matters of morality and personal ethics, this church expects individuals on the official roster of laypersons of this church to be exemplary in conduct.

These definitions and guidelines describe the grounds for which individuals on the official roster of laypersons of this church may be subject to discipline according to the practice of this church. Their purpose is juridical: to assist in the processes of consultation, discipline, and appeals.

Grounds for discipline of individuals on the official roster of laypersons of this church are as follows:

- a. **Confessing or teaching in conflict with the faith confessed by this church** is grounds for discipline of individuals on the official roster of laypersons of this church. A summary of the faith confessed by this church is found in Chapters 2 and 3 of this church's constitution.
- b. **Conduct incompatible with the the standards for the rostered ministries of this church** is grounds for discipline of individuals on the official roster of laypersons of this church. These guidelines define and describe kinds of behavior which are incompatible with the standards for these rostered ministries.

- 1) **Professional Attention to Duties**

An individual on the official roster of laypersons of this church has made commitments through the appropriate liturgical rite and through acceptance of a letter of call. Continued neglect of or indifference toward such duties constitutes conduct incompatible with the standards for the rostered ministries of this church.

- 2) **Relationship to Family**

This church is committed to the sanctity of marriage and the enhancement of family life. Individuals on the official roster of laypersons of this church, whether married or single, are expected to uphold Christian ideals of marriage in their public ministry as well as in private life. Spouse and children, if any, are to be regarded with love, respect and commitment.

Any departure from this normative behavior may be considered conduct incompatible with the standards for the rostered ministries of this church. Such departure might include any of the following:

- a) Separation or divorce that occurs without consultation with the synodical bishop's office and appropriate implementation of such consultation. Each such relationship must be considered pastorally.
- b) Desertion or abandonment of spouse or children.
- c) Abuse of spouse or children.
- d) Repeated failure to meet legally determined family support obligations.

- 3) **Sexual Matters**

The biblical understanding which this church affirms is that the normative setting for sexual intercourse is marriage. In keeping with this understanding, chastity before marriage and fidelity within marriage are the norm. Adultery, promiscuity, the sexual abuse of another, or the misuse of counseling relationships for sexual favors constitute conduct that is incompatible with the standards for the rostered ministries of this church.

Practicing homosexual persons are precluded from the rostered ministries of this church.

- 4) **Substance Abuse**

Misuse of alcohol or mind-altering substances impairs the ability of an individual on the official roster of laypersons of this church to perform the duties of the office with full

effectiveness. The approach of this church in dealing with such a problem is to recommend and enable effective treatment. However, failure to accept treatment or to follow through on treatment and abide by the terms of such treatment and the consequent impairment of performance is conduct incompatible with the standards for the rostered ministries of this church.

5) Fiscal Responsibilities

Individuals on the official roster of laypersons of this church are expected to conduct their fiscal affairs in accordance with ethical and legal requirements. Among those fiscal activities which may be considered conduct incompatible with the standards for the rostered ministries of this church are:

- a) Indifference to or avoidance of legitimate and neglected personal debts.
- b) Embezzlement of money or improper appropriation of the property of others.
- c) Using one's position improperly for personal financial advantage.

6) Conviction of a Felony

The society in which this church ministers has placed a high premium upon the role of law in regulating the rights and duties of individuals to promote the common good. This includes laws which define certain conduct as felonies. Pleading guilty to, or being convicted of, a felony is grounds for discipline as conduct incompatible with the standards for the rostered ministries, but may not be grounds for discipline in those instances where the violation of law was to protest or to test a perceived unjust law or as an expression of civil disobedience.

- c. **Willfully disregarding or violating the functions and standards established by this church for the rostered ministries of this church** is grounds for discipline of individuals on the official roster of laypersons of this church. Such functions and standards established by this church are found in Section 7.52. through 7.53. of this church's constitution, bylaws and continuing resolutions.
- d. **Willful disregard of the constitution or bylaws of this church** is grounds for discipline of individuals on the official roster of laypersons of this church.

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**Definitions and Guidelines
for Discipline of Congregations**

- a. **Departing from the faith confessed by this church** is grounds for discipline of a congregation of this church. A summary of the faith confessed by this church is found in Chapters 2 and 3 of this church's constitution.
- b. **Willfully disregarding or violating any of the criteria for recognition as congregations of this church** is grounds for discipline of a congregation of this church. These criteria are set forth in 9.21. and 9.22. of this church's constitution.
- c. **Willfully disregarding or violating the provisions of the constitution or bylaws of this church** is grounds for discipline of a congregation of this church.