



## Care of Information on Persons Rostered in the Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

---

*To practice good record keeping, bishops and synodical staff are encouraged to use these guidelines for the retention of documents in the files of clergy and other rostered persons . . .*

### Respect for Information on Rostered Persons

***Your records  
have a life  
cycle!***

**Ownership** Information that is retained in hard copy or electronic formats is the property of the synod; it is not the property of the synodical bishop or the synodical staff members to remove, retain personally, or destroy at will. Synod staff members are the custodians of the documents they retain. Roster files are not personnel files. The person whose name is on a particular file does not own it and has no right to see what is in it. The synod may choose to share, or not, anything in that file with the person, but may also choose to keep the entire contents confidential. They may do so on a comprehensive policy basis or on a case-by-case basis.

**Privacy** Only persons committed to privacy should have access to these documents on a need-to-know basis.

**Needs** Balancing different needs is important in any records retention policy: There is the need to keep all relevant and important documents; there is also the need not to accumulate irrelevant material. Any one of the following may be required to substantiate past policies, practices, and actions in many different settings: the individuals, the synodical or churchwide offices, the congregations, or other employing entities.

**Consistency** Bishops or members of the synodical staff are frequently called upon to use good judgment in the retention and disposition of individual documents. A pattern of consistency in the care of records is needful. Any records retention policy has validity, once accepted as policy by the organization, only as it is uniformly practiced. It should be neither selectively implemented nor disregarded at the whim of the custodians of the records. Policies must not be modified or disregarded solely because of possible claims or litigation.



## Care of Information on Persons Rostered in the Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

---

***To make the task of maintaining and retaining documents on clergy and other rostered leaders more efficient, consider a three-part folder . . .***

### **Permanent Biographical Documents**

*These documents will become the permanent biographical file for the synod's archives and should be transferred upon retirement, resignation, removal from the roster, or death . . .*

- Educational and professional history;
- Copies of letters of call, acceptance, and termination;
- Questionnaires answered by the individual, including subjective essays describing the person's understanding of vocation;
- Family history, including marriages and divorces, which are legal contracts and part of the public record;
- Photographs, identified by name, location, and date;
- Personal correspondence between the pastor and the bishop (Retain only letters or reports that relate to the pastoral vocation here.);
- Manuscripts, and sermons should be acknowledged and filed by subject or treated as part of the basic biographical information file for later transfer to synod's archives;
- News releases, honors, bulletins for installations, anniversaries, retirement, and funerals.

### **\*Long-Term Controlled Access Documents**

*These documents will be kept, under controlled access, in the synod office or synod archives for **25 years** after retirement, resignation, removal from the roster, or death, and then destroyed . . .*

- Signed letters regarding the performance of a rostered person. If such letters warrant the bishop's attention, they should be acknowledged and retained in the synod's file. A copy of the acknowledgement as well as a record of what action was taken regarding the issue must be retained.
- Personal correspondence between the pastor and the bishop or synodical staff member;
- Correspondence and documentation on matters that could result in disciplinary action or that relate to serious concerns about conduct;
- Rostered leader's reports to the bishop;
- Mobility forms;
- Performance evaluations;
- Letters of recommendation;
- Medical or psychodiagnostic reports are subject to physician/patient privilege. They should be retained if they relate to fitness for service or disability status.

### **Temporary Documents**

*These documents have temporary value and may be destroyed as soon as they are no longer useful or at the time of a change of call . . .*

- Signed letters regarding the performance of a rostered person. If such letters relate to habits or practice that do not warrant the attention of the bishop, they should be acknowledged by directing the writers to address their concerns directly to the individual or to the congregation council involved. Such material should not be allowed to accumulate in the rostered leader's file.
- Transcripts of academic records are private and should be purged after initial placement or after satisfactory completion of a graduate program for which leave time or money has been provided;
- Contractual arrangements, including grants or sponsorships, represent vital records while the contractual agreement is in effect. They need not be retained when the agreement is no longer in force.



## Care of Information on Persons Rostered in the Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

---

*\*Access to the long-term controlled access files is reserved to the bishop of the synod, or a designated synod staff person, the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and legal counsel.*

### Constitutional Provisions for Special Circumstances

**Files for persons removed from the roster** “When an ordained minister is removed from the roster of this church, the roster record shall be retained by the secretary of this church. . .” (churchwide bylaw 7.41.18.). A parallel provision exists for those on the official lay rosters (7.52.25.). Upon notification of the individual’s death, the file is to be sent to the archives of the synod in which the person was last listed on the roster.

**Files for persons who resign from the roster** In keeping with ELCA churchwide bylaws (7.41.18.) and (7.52.25.), note that the roster records are to be retained by the secretary of this church. A record of the location of the file should be kept in the synodical office for retrieval of the file in the event of an application for reinstatement. Upon notification of the individual’s death, the file is to be sent to the archives of the synod in which the person was last listed on the roster.

**Files for ordained ministers who resign during disciplinary hearing** When the resignation of an ordained minister occurs during a disciplinary investigation, but before written charges are filed, the synodical bishop shall decide to what extent a record of the matter should be preserved. When the resignation of an ordained minister occurs after the written charges have been brought, a copy of the charges is to be forwarded to the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for retention as provided by ELCA churchwide bylaw (20.21.07.).

**Records of the proceedings of the discipline hearing committee** If the charges were not sustained and a disciplinary hearing action was not imposed, documentary and physical evidence presented at the hearing should be returned to the party that presented the same and the balance of the material is to be destroyed. If the discipline hearing committee sustained the charges and imposed disciplinary action, (a) documentary and physical evidence shall be returned to the party that presented it; (b) the written charges, the written decision of the discipline hearing committee, and the certification or other proof that notice was given to the accused ordained minister or congregation is to be delivered to the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to be held as provided in ELCA churchwide bylaw (20.21.07.). *All* other material is to be destroyed.



## Care of Information on Persons Rostered in the Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

---

### Candidacy Files

From the *Candidacy Manual*, prepared by the Vocation and Education unit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2004. (updated February 5, 2008)

- Synod Records** It is essential for the synod to maintain and preserve complete and accurate records on every candidate for rostered ministry.
- A. The Vocation and Education unit is to be notified of every Entrance, Endorsement, and Approval Decision.
  - B. Files on applicants/candidates are the property of the Candidacy Committee and should be maintained in a secure location and manner.
  - C. The Candidacy Committee, at its discretion, may allow an applicant/candidate access to the committee's records concerning that applicant/candidate. The committee, at its discretion, may choose not to allow access to confidential communications, letters, or other information. The applicant/candidate may read the contents of the file at a location and under a procedure determined by the Candidacy Committee. When a candidate reviews the file, someone from synod staff or the committee should be present. Copies should be made only as authorized by the committee.
  - D. Committees should use care when duplicating and distributing file material in preparation for meetings. Duplicated file material should be sent to committee members as CONFIDENTIAL mail, and then such duplicates should be destroyed at the conclusion of the meeting. Files that may have been distributed electronically should be deleted.
  - E. A candidacy file shall be maintained at the appropriate administrative office of the candidate's seminary in a secure location, available to the faculty advisor and synod Candidacy Committee members, as appropriate. (See below – Seminary Records)
  - F. A candidacy file transferred from another synod requires a new congregation registration. Transfer of candidacy is made only when there is agreement by the bishops and Candidacy Committees of both synods.
  - G. In the case of a candidate whose endorsement or approval is denied or postponed with no further action or a candidate who withdraws from the Candidacy Process, the file is to be retained by the synod for **ten years** and then should be destroyed.
  - H. The synod file for each candidate is the file of record. In the case of a candidate who is approved, the synod file is retained for **50 years** in hard copy or microfiche and then destroyed. The electronic files may be retained for ready reference for as long as they are useful, but staff should be aware that, like all electronic records, they may be



## Care of Information on Persons Rostered in the Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

---

vulnerable to hardware and software that become obsolete. All relevant information on a candidate is shared with the synod of assignment. The original contents of the candidate file remain with the Candidacy Committee and are not forwarded to the synod of assignment; the candidacy file is not intended for use as part of the call process.

### **Seminary Records**

- Seminaries are to maintain a separate and private candidacy file for use until a candidate is assigned to a synod.
- The seminaries may have separate policies for the retention of their candidacy files.

### **Vocation and Education Deployed Staff Records**

Deployed staff of the Vocation and Education unit should retain files on active candidates in a secure manner. The file may include all of the information in the Candidacy Committee file. When the file is no longer active, it should be destroyed.

### **Churchwide Office Records**

- The Vocation and Education unit tracks the candidacy of every candidate.
- The candidate's application and associated documents are maintained for reference and distribution purposes in a database.
- When a candidate's file is no longer active, paper copy of each candidate's file is sent to the Records Center for **50 years** and then destroyed.
- In addition, essential dates and decisions are entered into and become part of the ELCA Rostered Leaders database.



## Care of Information on Persons Rostered in the Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

---

**See also these additional guidelines . . .**

- Active Records Management : Advice for Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*
- Candidacy Manual (Vocation and Education)*
- Resources for Synodical Treasurers and Administrators (Office of the Treasurer)*
- Active Records Management : Advice for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*
- Maintaining the Parish Register: Advice for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*
- Resources for Congregational Treasurers and Bookkeepers (Office of the Treasurer)*
- Certification of Congregation Records at the Time of a Pastoral Transition (form)*
- Disposition of Records for Disbanding Congregations*
- A Brief Guide for Archives of Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*
- A Comparison of Microfilming and Scanning Technologies*

© 2008 edition. Office of the Secretary, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This document may be duplicated for use in the synods provided copyright is acknowledged.

### For additional information contact . . .

Director for Records Management and Library  
*Office of the Secretary*  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
8765 West Higgins Road  
Chicago, Illinois 60631  
Telephone 800.638.4198 ext. 2811  
Claire.Buettner@elca.org

Associate General Counsel  
*Office of the Secretary*  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
8765 West Higgins Road  
Chicago, Illinois 60631  
Telephone 800.638.4198 ext. 2101  
David.Ullrich@elca.org