



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

A Relational Agreement *created by the ELCA Conference of Bishops for the ELCA Conference of Bishops' use.*

PREAMBLE:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America understands itself to be one church in three expressions: congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization. Each expression, while fully the church, recognizes that it is not the whole church, and therefore lives in an interdependent relationship with the others.¹

Synod bishops are called to serve as their synod's pastor.² Synod bishops are also members of this church's Conference of Bishops.³ This body consults with and advises the Church Council.⁴ The Conference also provides a forum for learning, regular opportunities for conversation, and other collegial enterprises that seek to advance the ministry of the Gospel within each expression of this church.⁵

Synod bishops recognize that the nature of their office is to serve the unity of the whole church⁶ and to provide authentic leadership for the local mission of each synod.⁷ Because this work is best done collegially, the synod bishops of this church, along with the Presiding Bishop and the Secretary of this church, pledge themselves to this relational agreement. We will review this agreement annually.

SECTION I: MUTUAL RESPECT AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

We agree to respect the other members of the Conference of Bishops for the sake of the offices to which they have been elected, and we pledge to be trustworthy in our own exercise of the office to which we have been called. Specifically,

I agree that I will attend the meetings of the Conference as a high priority.

I agree that I will respond in a timely manner to communications from colleagues in the Conference.

I agree that I will speak directly to other colleagues about matters that pertain to the care of the Church, and follow the other specific efforts described in Matthew 18:15 if needed.

I agree that I will interpret my colleagues' actions in the best possible light,⁸ and engage with my colleagues in a spirit of curiosity.

¹ ELCA Constitution, provision 8.11. And we recognize other expressions of the Church not specifically named in this provision, such as the Lutheran World Federation, all the baptized members of the Body of Christ, and church-related agencies and institutions.

² Synod Constitution, provision †S8.12.

³ ELCA Constitution, provision 10.81.

⁴ ELCA Constitution, provision 10.81.01.

⁵ ELCA Bylaw 10.81.A16.

⁶ Synod Constitution, provision †S8.12.g.1)

⁷ Synod Constitution, provision †S8.12.g.2)

⁸ Luther's interpretation of the Eighth Commandment.

I pledge to serve in my own context in faithfulness to the vows I made at my ordination and at my installation into the office I now hold.

I pledge not to perform any ministerial functions in a synod other than my own without the knowledge and consent of that synod's bishop.

I pledge to inform my colleagues in the Conference in advance if I am aware that a local action I am about to take or that my Synod Council (the Church Council) has taken will likely present a challenge of interpretation in other expressions of this church.

SECTION II: MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

As members of the Conference of Bishops, we agree to hold one another accountable for our individual and corporate actions, and we pledge to be accountable to others for our own exercise of the office to which we have been called. Specifically,

I agree to speak directly to a colleague in the Conference about any matter in that colleague's exercise of the office I find inappropriate before speaking to others about it, and

I pledge to receive direct expressions of concern from colleagues in the Conference in the spirit of Proverbs 15:31.⁹

I agree to receive the decisions made in other synods in Candidacy, Mobility, and Discipline as authentic expressions of care for the whole Church, and

I pledge to make decisions in my own synod in Candidacy, Mobility, and Discipline that are in the best interest of the whole Church.¹⁰

We agree to find consensus within the Conference before publishing a pastoral letter from the Conference on any matter, and

I pledge to voice my concerns in the process of deliberation, or to accept as my own the result of the deliberation of the Conference if I choose to remain silent during the debate.

I agree to use the authority of my office to support those whose circumstances in life require special care, not only in our meetings and in my ecclesial responsibilities but also within the wider world, and

I pledge to provide a public voice of admonition to rebuke the actions of those who use power to abuse or malign others.

POSTAMBLE:

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. (Colossians 3:12-15)

Adopted September 30, 2022

⁹ "The ear that heeds wholesome admonition will lodge among the wise." NRSV

¹⁰ This church has several other resources that describe in greater detail what best serves the whole church in matters of Candidacy, Mobility, and Discipline.