

STANDARDS FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY



NALC

North American Lutheran Church

Executive Committee
Published: 8/5/2011

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PREFACE

In order to obtain the faith that is justified by God's grace, God has instituted the office of pastoral ministry, the office of Word and Sacrament (Augsburg Confession 4 and 5). The purpose of the ministry of Word and Sacrament is to establish, sustain, and extend faith in God's grace in Jesus Christ so as to fulfill the mission and proclaim the message of the Lord.

The North American Lutheran Church shall provide for the calling and ordaining of persons to the office of the ministry. "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call" (Augsburg Confession 14).

An ordained minister in the North American Lutheran Church shall be a person whose soundness in the faith, aptness to teach, and educational qualifications have been examined and approved; who accepts and adheres to the confession of faith of the North American Lutheran Church; who is diligent and faithful in the exercise of the ministry; and whose life and conduct are above reproach. A ministry shall comply with the constitution and other enactments of the North American Lutheran Church and shall participate actively in its undertakings for Christ's kingdom.

Ordained ministers of the North American Lutheran Church shall be persons whose life of prayer and devotion, personal faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and commitment to the Church shall enable them to:

- Care for God's people, bearing their burdens and not betraying their confidence;
- Discipline themselves in life and teaching, that the truth is preserved, giving no occasion for false security or illusory hope;
- Witness faithfully in word and deed to all people;
- Give and receive comfort as they serve in and outside the Church;
- Carry out their ministry in the confidence that God has called them, and that their labor in the Lord is not in vain.

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STANDARDS

A pastor in the North American Lutheran Church shall, above all, be a baptized and believing Christian, who trusts in Christ as the way of salvation for the world. A pastor shall also have an ongoing awareness, a sense of vocation, to the office of the ministry of Word and Sacrament in the church.

A pastor shall have completed the candidacy process for the ministry: approval by the candidacy committee, a call to ministry, and ordination by or at the authorization of the bishop.

As a part of the candidacy process, a pastor shall be a graduate of a college or university and shall be the recipient of an M. Div. degree or its equivalent from a recognized theological seminary.

A pastor shall have the requisite skills for ministry - competence in preaching and teaching, commitment to the growth and mission of the Gospel, the capacity to relate the Gospel to others, and the ability to foster human relationships in and outside the church.

A pastor shall be a person, whose personal life and morality shall be above reproach, in accordance with Biblical standards for human behavior. A pastor shall be a model of the godly life.

A pastor shall be a faithful user of the means of grace, Word and Sacrament, and shall diligently engage in personal prayer, devotions, and other spiritual disciplines.

A pastor shall personally believe and publicly profess the Christian faith, in accordance with the Word of God, the ecumenical creeds, and the Lutheran confessions; and in accordance with the confession of faith and the Common Confession of the North American Lutheran Church (constitution, article 2 and 3, and the appendix).

A pastor shall possess a sense of the wholeness of the Christian church and shall participate in the various ministries of the North American Lutheran Church. A pastor shall regularly seek the counsel and advice of the district dean and the bishop of the church and shall, as a matter of course, be an attentive participant in gatherings and meetings with other ministers of the church.

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A pastor typically carries out the ministry within a congregational setting. There are other ministries, specialized ministries, which are recognized by the North American Lutheran Church. Examples of such ministries include teachers at academic institutions, chaplains, counselors, global missionaries, mission developers, and elected leaders of the church. The executive council shall extend calls to such ministries, on the recommendation of the bishop.

A pastor who is retired remains an ordained minister of the church and may serve as supply or interim pastor, without a call, according to need and availability. Except for a pastor in retirement, a pastor without a call shall remain an ordained minister of the church "on leave from call." Such a pastor remains an ordained minister for a period of time (normally three years), after which time the pastor may be removed from the office of the ordained ministry with the concurrence of the bishop and the executive council.

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DISCIPLINE

The following provisions describe the grounds for which pastors may be subject to discipline according to the disciplinary procedures of the North American Lutheran Church. The purpose of these provisions is juridical: to assist in the process of consultation, discipline, and appeal. Grounds for discipline of pastors may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A. Preaching or teaching in conflict with the faith confessed by the North American Lutheran Church is grounds for discipline of pastors. A summary of the faith is found in chapters 2 and 3 of the constitution of the North American Lutheran Church, and in the Common Confession, as an appendix to the constitution.
- B. Conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office is grounds for discipline of pastors.
 - 1) Disclosure of confidential communications. Pastors must respect privileged and confidential communication and may not disclose such communications, except with the express permission of the person who has confided or if the person is perceived to intend overt harm to self and others.
 - 2) Professional inattention to duties. A pastor has made commitments through ordination and through acceptance of a letter of call. Continued neglect or indifference toward such duties constitute conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.
 - 3) Sexual misconduct. The Biblical understanding which the North American Lutheran Church affirms is that the normative setting for sexual intercourse is marriage between one man and one woman. In keeping with this understanding, chastity before marriage and fidelity within marriage are the norm. Ordained ministers of the North American Lutheran Church are expected to preach, teach, and live in accordance with this Biblical standard. Adultery, promiscuity, the sexual abuse of another or the misuse of counseling relationships for sexual favors constitutes conduct that is incompatible with the character of the ministerial office. Persons who engage in sexual activity outside the marriage covenant of one man and one woman, whether homosexual or heterosexual, are precluded from the ordained ministry of the North American Lutheran Church.
 - 4) 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 the North American Lutheran 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.

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- 5) Fiscal mismanagement. Pastors are expected to conduct their fiscal affairs in accordance with ethical and legal requirements. Among those fiscal activities which may be considered incompatible with the character of the ministerial office are: indifference to or avoidance of legitimate and neglected personal debts; embezzlement of money or improper appropriation of the property of others; using the ministerial office improperly for personal financial advantage.
 - 6) Membership in certain organizations. It is the policy of the North American Lutheran Church, that its ordained ministers refrain from membership in any organization, other than the church, that claims to possess in its teachings and ceremonies that which the Lord has given solely to the church. Membership by an ordained minister in such an organization is a ground for discipline.
 - 7) Conviction of a felony. The society, in which the Church ministers, has placed a high premium on the rule 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 the North American Lutheran Church for the office of Word and Sacrament is grounds for discipline of pastors.
- D. Willful disregard of the constitution or bylaws of the North American Lutheran Church is grounds for discipline of pastors.
- E. Divorce and re-marriage. The North American Lutheran Church considers divorce to be a violation of God's plan for marriage. Divorce affects the pastor and the family, the congregation, and the community. The pastor facing divorce or separation will make every effort to restore the marriage relationship. While guilt or fault in the dissolution of a marriage is often difficult to discern, the pastor may need to acknowledge responsibility for the failure of the marriage.

The North American Lutheran Church is committed to the sanctity of marriage and the enhancement of family life. Pastors, whether married or single, are expected to uphold Biblical Christian ideals for marriage in their public ministry as well as in their private life. Spouse and children 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 may include any of the following:

- 1) Separation or divorce that occurs without consultation with the bishop of the church and the district dean and without appropriate implementation of such consultation;

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- 2) Desertion or abandonment of spouse or children;
- 3) Physical or other forms of abuse of spouse or children;
- 4) Repeated failure to meeting legally determined family support obligations;
- 5) A pattern of divorce in which one divorce follows another in succession;
- 6) A lack of effort by the pastor to salvage the marriage.

In the case of separation or divorce, concern for the good of the congregation shall be uppermost. The pastor shall consult with the bishop of the church and pastor's dean. A plan will be implemented that will include the following: public disclosure to the congregation; the possibility of a leave of absence from the pastoral office; the possibility of a leave of absence from the current ministry; a plan for repentance, healing and reconciliation (personal absolution, counseling, and other resources); adequate attention to the spouse and children; the possibility, depending on circumstances, of the pastor's removal from the office of the ministry. The bishop shall seek the counsel of a small panel of pastors and lay people as to the proper procedure to implement, whose recommendations shall be dispositive absent modification by the bishop..

The re-marriage of a divorced pastor calls for the utmost serious attention by the North American Lutheran Church according to Biblical principles. Prior to re-marriage, the pastor will consult with the bishop and pastor's dean and will secure their advice and counsel. In evaluating the continued fitness for the pastoral office of such a pastor, the bishop shall seek the counsel of a small panel of pastors and lay people, whose recommendations shall be dispositive absent modification by the bishop. The pastor will also bring the matter for consideration to the leaders of the congregation.

Failure to fulfill the above procedures may constitute a cause for discipline by the church.

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