

## **A RELATIONAL COVENANT BETWEEN THE ROSTERED MINISTERS OF THE LA CROSSE AREA SYNOD OF THE ELCA**

### **PREAMBLE:**

The grace of God through Jesus Christ has called us together in the power of the Holy Spirit to be the Church. God's triune life shapes us to be in relationship with God and one another for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As rostered ministers in the La Crosse Area Synod, we value the strength of the relationships we have with one another. We therefore pledge to be in intentional relationship together while leading and serving in the name of the One who calls us.

### **THE OFFICE OF PASTORAL MINISTRY**

All baptized Christians are called to serve the world God loves in the name of Christ. The offices of Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Ministers of Word and Service are given by God for the sake of God's mission in the world through the Church. Ministry belongs not just to rostered leaders alone, but to the whole Church. As partners in this larger ministry rostered leaders are called to lay aside individualistic notions of ministry that would lead to competition and isolation, and work and pray for practices and relationships that contribute to our collegiality and partnership.

### **ROSTERED OFFICES**

As rostered ministers of the ELCA, we understand that it is our responsibility to live within the constitution of the ELCA, and the duties prescribed for our individual offices.

### **ROSTERED MINISTER TO ROSTERED MINISTER**

Ministry is practiced as Christian faith is practiced – in community. We will be exemplary in speech and conduct, in both public and private settings, beginning with how we treat one another as rostered leaders and in how we relate to our bishop and synod staff. Living in intentional relationship and for the sake of the gospel, we will:

1. honor the work God is doing within each other's context.
2. listen to and respect one another, giving high priority to communication with colleagues,
3. pray for one another.
4. build one another up and not tear each other down.
5. speak well of one another and interpret one another's actions in the best possible light.
6. exercise confidentiality.
7. follow Matthew 18:15-17, when restoration of relationship is needed, and speak directly with one another, beginning with a one-on-one conversation.
8. attend conference and synod events, such as:
  - a. Text Study
  - b. Conference Meetings
  - c. Spring and Fall Theological Events
  - d. Pre-Assembly Caucus
  - e. Synod Assembly
  - f. Welcome and farewell events for conference clergy
9. foster accountable relationships that enable honest and mutual conversations about possible ministry difficulties that may be emerging in each other's congregations.

### **WHEN MEMBERS CHANGE CONGREGATIONS**

When members of other congregations in our area worship with us, we will welcome them but not treat them as prospective members. Rostered ministers are encouraged to contact their colleagues about visitors in a timely manner.

If members of other congregations approach us about transferring their membership, we will engage in pastoral conversation about their departure from their current congregation. If they have not already done so, we will recommend that they discuss their intention to transfer with their current rostered minister. If they still want to transfer, we will encourage them to contact their current congregation to request the transfer.

### **WHEN A ROSTERED MINISTER LEAVES**

We agree to establish and maintain healthy boundaries with congregations we have previously served. Honoring relationships forged during our ministries is central to our understanding of the Gospel, yet we are also committed to protecting the integrity of the congregation's ministry and its present and future leadership<sup>1</sup>

When we leave a call to a congregation, we will clearly communicate to the members of that congregation that we will no longer be available to perform pastoral functions in that congregation after the effective date of our resignation. Such functions include, but are not limited to: funerals, weddings, baptisms, pastoral calls, counseling, and other similar actions. We will communicate this to our congregations in written media such as newsletter articles and in the letter of resignation; and in personal and public conversations.

In the event we are contacted to perform a pastoral act in a former parish we will take responsibility for maintaining proper pastoral boundaries by answering with a firm "no." We will not respond to the request with "I will come if your current minister invites me" or with any other response that puts the current minister in a difficult position.

### **WHEN A ROSTERED MINISTER RETIRES**

When we retire, we understand that the same healthy boundary considerations that apply to leaving a congregation guide us in our retirement. If, in our retirement, we choose to remain in the same community, we will transfer our membership to and attend another parish<sup>2</sup>.

### **PERSONAL COMMITMENT AND DISCIPLESHIP**

As part of our commitment to the gospel and mission of the church, we will place growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ as a high priority. We will support each other in carrying out the following commitments. We will:

1. attend to our spiritual lives, practicing daily prayer and devotions.
2. grow in generosity.
3. read for the purpose of professional development and to stay current and intellectually alert.
4. hone our craft as rostered leaders and sharpen our skills for the work of ministry.
5. participate in continuing education opportunities.
6. tend to our physical and emotional wellbeing.
7. take vacation and weekly days off.
8. remain current with the life of the church by reading church periodicals, synodical publications, and attending to issues before the church.
9. foster healthy relationships.

### **SIGNATURE**

With my signature, I express my intent to live within this covenant.

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*Signature*

*Printed Name*

*Date*

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<sup>1</sup> There is a recognition that relationships with former parishioners may continue beyond a minister's call. It is very important to realize that such relationships will affect the current ministry in that congregation, often in ways that we may not realize.

<sup>2</sup>See previous footnote