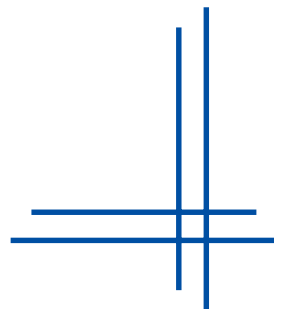


*Partners in Ministry:
Ethical Conduct for
Professional Church Workers*



Michigan District
Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
2006





LETTER FROM PRESIDENT HOESMAN

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

It is indeed a great day when we can focus on the blessings that our Lord showers upon us. It is indeed a great day when we can share His Good News through word and action. It is indeed a great day when we reflect on our shortcomings and rejoice in the forgiveness that is ours and the gift of eternal life which has been assured through the suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord! It is indeed a great day to be a child of God!

As professional church workers of our District, Ordained and Commissioned Ministers of Religion, we have a high calling. We are blessed to be in our Lord's service in a full time capacity. We know and recognize the importance of our role and the privilege we have to serve God's people in so many ways. While our tasks differ, our ministry is the same – to proclaim the Good News of Salvation and to reach out to His people in Christian love.

The document that you are about to read has been prepared to assist us in examining our ministry and to help us remain focused on the work before us. It is designed to remind us of our obligations and our responsibility to the Lord, ourselves, family, and community. It is designed to provide us with a mirror in which we can seek to serve more effectively. The document is designed to underscore good practice and to help us guard against actions which might interfere with our ministry. You are encouraged to personally explore the issues raised in this document and to adjust your life accordingly.

Our Lord continues to bless our congregations with faithful workers. It is our prayer that this document will help each one of us be more effective in telling others about Him.

Serving our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. William Hoesman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

C. William Hoesman, President
The Michigan District
The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod

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Table of Contents

Letter from President Hoesman..... 2

Table of Contents..... 3

Introduction..... 4

I. Purpose of the Document..... 5

II. Basic Foundations for Ethical Conduct..... 5

III. Principles of Conduct..... 6

 A. The Professional Church Worker is Committed to Personal and Corporate Spiritual Life..... 6

 B. The Professional Church Worker is Committed to His/Her Spouse and Family..... 6

 C. The Professional Church Worker is Committed to Relationships within the Congregation..... 6

 D. The Professional Church Worker is Committed to Relationships in the Community and Wider Church... 7

 E. The Professional Church Worker is Committed to Appropriate Social Behaviors..... 7

 F. The Professional Church Worker is Committed to Appropriate Speech and Actions..... 8

 G. The Professional Church Worker is Committed to the Stewardship of His/Her Own Body..... 8

 H. The Professional Church Worker is Committed to Faithful Stewardship of Time, Talent, and Treasures..... 8

 I. The Professional Church Worker is Committed to Competency in Ministry..... 9

IV. Additional Specific Guidelines for Ordained Ministers of the Gospel.....10

V. Additional Specific Guidelines for Lutheran Teaching Ministers.....10

 A. In His/Her Personal Conduct, The Lutheran Teacher:.....10

 B. In His/Her Relationship with Students, The Lutheran Teacher:.....10

 C. In His/Her Relationship with Parents, The Lutheran Teacher:.....10

VI. Resources.....11

VII Listing of Committee.....11

INTRODUCTION

The Christian's ethic is to live by faith in Christ even as Christ lives in us. We repent daily and believe the Gospel, trusting in its sure promises: through Baptism God makes us His holy people; in the Lord's Supper God feeds us with the holy food of heaven for life on earth. God's Word has been fulfilled: *"I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy"* (Exodus 33:19, RSV).

"Partners in Ministry: Ethical Conduct for Professional Church Workers" is not about what we do for God, but about what God has done on the cross and how that applies to us. The death of Jesus on the cross transforms our lives, and the Holy Spirit makes Jesus' death applicable for holy living. As Christians, then, we are holy people living holy lives.¹

The central principle of Lutheran ethics is identical with the central principle of Lutheran theology: justification by grace through faith on account of Christ.²

Conduct and relations within the church reflect the "already-not yet" existence of the church on earth – already justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, but not yet free of the influence of sin and the power of the devil. Under the cross of Christ, both forgiven and forgiving, congregations and their professional church workers are called to live lives controlled by the Spirit (Romans 8:1-17). "Partners in Ministry: Ethical Conduct for Professional Church Workers" is written in the present tense, depicting the lives of congregations and professional church workers controlled by the Spirit as sanctified servants of Jesus Christ.

St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful"* (1 Corinthians 4:1-2, NIV). Following St. Paul's dictum, the purpose of this document is to guide professional church workers in remaining faithful to the trust given to them by God and the people who have called them by defining an ethics policy for professional church workers in the Michigan District of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

I. PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

The purpose of this document is not to be a moralistic code or to be used to force submission by those in authority. Rather it is intended as a helpful look at our commitments as shepherds and servants of God's flock with the following purposes:

- A. An examination and reminder of biblically mandated principles for pastors and other professional church workers.
- B. A tool for personal evaluation, examination, and reflection.
- C. An opportunity for encouragement of continuing dialogue and mutual ministry among professional workers.
- D. A vehicle for reaffirming one's dependence on the grace and power of God.
- E. A way of examining new possibilities for growth in the conduct of one's ministry.
- F. A way for professional church workers to grow by the Gospel's power into more principled, committed, and grace-filled servants of Christ for the sake of the Gospel, the Church, and its Mission.

II. BASIC FOUNDATIONS FOR ETHICAL CONDUCT

- A. The professional church worker remains faithful to the Triune God and His baptismal covenant. According to Luther's Small Catechism, "*The Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.*"³
- B. The professional church worker honors his Confirmation commitment "*to conform all (his/her) life to the divine Word, to be faithful in the use of God's Word and sacraments, which are His means of grace, and in faith, word, and action to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death.*"⁴
- C. The professional church worker honors his/her installation vows "*to be faithful to the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice and to be faithful to the three Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions.*"⁵
- D. The professional church worker honors the specific duties of the particular call that the Holy Spirit has led him/her to accept.

III. PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT

- A. The professional church worker is committed to **personal and corporate spiritual life**.
1. He/she spends time in personal Bible study and prayer.
 2. He/she expresses commitment to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.
 3. He/she is faithful in corporate worship and Bible study.
 4. He/she models the servant role, following Jesus' example (John 13:1-17).
- B. The professional church worker is committed to his/her **spouse and family**.
1. The worker may remain single and fill his/her life with commitments to parents, brothers, sisters, and other close relatives and friends within the congregation or without. Whether single or married, he/she is to be above reproach, which means his/her life and conduct are shaped by his/her commitment to Christ.
 2. A married church worker views his/her marriage as a blessing and responsibility. His/her conduct in marriage is an example to the congregation.
 3. For the sake of his/her family, the professional church worker blessed with children is a responsible, loving, Gospel-centered, caring parent.
 4. The professional church worker views his/her family as a God-given responsibility and allocates his/her time accordingly.
 5. The church worker seeks personal, spiritual, and professional help when encountering problems in his/her marriage or family life, using appropriate resources. Church workers are aware of the implications of the Council of Presidents document, Guidelines for Dealing with Marital Crisis Involving Separation and Divorce.⁶
- C. The professional church worker is committed to **relationships within the congregation**.
1. Professional church workers understand the role of the pastor as spiritual leader of the congregation and support and encourage the work of the pastor and all other professional staff members.
 2. Professional church workers support the role of the laity, encouraging the development of lay leadership.
 3. When dealing with those entrusted to his/her care, the professional church worker will assume the role of servant rather than that of master.
 4. The professional church worker shows respect for all cultures, recognizing each member of the congregation as a baptized and valued child of God and seeking to understand the diversity that is present.
 5. Professional church workers engage in direct and mutual conversation and support with colleagues and, for the sake of reconciliation and growth, speak the Word of the Lord directly to one another. (Matthew 18; Ephesians 4:2; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; Colossians 3)
 6. Disagreements among professional church workers are resolved in a manner that demonstrates an understanding of Confession and Absolution as a model for reconciliation in the Body of Christ.
 7. The professional church worker respects and protects confidential information shared by colleagues in the course of personal and professional relationships and transactions. When disclosure of confidential information is legally required, the professional church worker does so to the proper civil authorities, attempting first to inform the colleague of this action.

8. When a professional church worker has direct knowledge of a colleague's incompetence, impairment, or unethical behavior, he/she offers assistance to the individual in the spirit of Christian fellowship as presented in Matthew 18. Situations are disclosed or reported to civil and/or synodical authorities as required by law or synodical guidelines.
 9. The professional church worker defends, supports, and assists colleagues who are unjustly charged.
- D. The professional church worker is committed to relationships in the **community and the wider church**.
1. The professional church worker is in a special relationship with his/her fellow church workers in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. He/she makes every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).
 2. The professional church worker consults with his/her fellow church workers in the circuit and District when making difficult decisions or decisions that affect the public witness and practice of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.
 3. The professional church worker recognizes that he/she is called to his/her congregation and to no other. He/she does not counsel members of other churches without their pastor's permission, perform pastoral functions for them, or criticize their congregation or staff.
 4. Professional church workers who have moved from a congregation or retired from active ministry avoid exercising influence or offering opinions of a professional nature where they have no call.
 5. Professional church workers, in "walking together" in our Synod, honor commitments corporately made through the conventions of the District and Synod, especially those expressed in the constitution and by-laws.
 6. The professional church worker respects those who have been placed above him/her and honors their authority as ecclesiastical supervisors. Each professional church worker serves as part of the public ministry of the Church under the doctrinal oversight of the Pastoral Office and within the administrative structure of the congregation.
 7. The professional church worker is involved in his/her community, weighing this involvement's effect on his/her ministry. He/she examines the time commitments involved as they affect his/her family. He/she seeks the advice and counsel of congregational leadership and avoids activity that will lead to a compromise of his/her ministry and calling.
- E. The professional church worker is committed to appropriate **social behavior**.
1. The professional church worker honors the sixth commandment and its meaning as he/she recognizes his/her own sexuality, remembering that the ultimate gift of sexual expression is found only in marriage.
 2. The professional church worker avoids pornography and impure speech and refrains from inappropriate physical contact.
 3. The professional church worker uses common sense and care lest he/she give offense when dealing with members of the opposite sex and with children.
 4. The professional church worker recognizes that the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod considers homosexual propensity to be a result of our fallen nature and has refused to sanction for ministry those who are practicing homosexuals.

5. The professional church worker recognizes that there are times when church professionals may engage in behavior that, although not sin, may cause offense to the weak Christian or misunderstanding to the unbeliever. He/she is aware that his/her public behavior is representative of the Office of the Public Ministry and as such he/she is never a “private citizen.”
- F. The professional church worker is committed to appropriate **speech and actions**.
1. The professional church worker does not divulge confidential information. He/she does not identify names when discussing a case with his/her peers nor share these confidences with his/her spouse or staff. He/she carries out his/her legal responsibilities concerning confidentiality.
 2. The professional church worker honors the spirit of the Second Commandment. He/she avoids the use of profanity, vulgar words and phrases, and off-color jokes and stories.
 3. The professional church worker avoids losing his/her temper and exploding with rage.
 4. The professional church worker avoids language that stereotypes people by economic or social class, sex, race, age, or religion. He/she avoids racial slurs, jokes, and stories that are degrading and dehumanizing. In conversation with the opposite sex, he/she avoids terms of endearment that should properly be reserved for his/her spouse.
 5. The professional church worker speaks truthfully and avoids deceit of all kinds. He/she does not let his/her silence on a matter be a means of deception.
 6. The professional church worker puts the best construction on the actions of fellow church workers, always being careful to avoid breaking the Eighth Commandment.
 7. The professional church worker speaks well of congregation members and continually prays to the Lord on their behalf.
- G. The professional church worker is committed to the **stewardship of his/her own body**.
1. The professional church worker seeks to practice proper hygiene and wear proper attire that does not give offense in the specific context of ministry.
 2. The professional church worker is aware of the dangers of substance abuse and avoids using legal substances in excess. He/she always avoids illegal drugs.
 3. The professional church worker does not allow any activity to progress to the point of excess and the neglect of his/her calling. He/she carefully weighs his/her activities based on comments from family, peers, and congregational leaders.
 4. The professional church worker avoids becoming a “workaholic.” He/she schedules time with family, for vacations, for physical exercise, for hobbies and avocations.
 5. The professional church worker avoids addictive and abusive behavior that will hurt self or others while giving offense to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and always seeks support for the healing process.
- H. The professional church worker is committed to faithful **stewardship of time, talent, and treasures**.
1. The professional church worker avoids undue and offensive dependence on material objects.
 2. The professional church worker avoids inaccurate and unscrupulous reporting of income for the purposes of taxation.

3. The professional church worker avoids indifference and neglect toward personal obligations and debts.
4. The professional church worker avoids inappropriate use of another's property, including borrowing money from congregational members, not returning borrowed objects, and considering the church's property his/her own.
5. The professional church worker avoids unnecessarily handling church funds and the funds of others.
6. The professional church worker manages his/her own household finances in such a way as to model Biblical stewardship and to demonstrate sound fiscal management.
7. The professional church worker strives to maintain faithfulness to the observance of a healthy stewardship of work and life as addressed in the Third and Seventh Commandments.

I. The professional church worker is committed to **competency in ministry**.

1. The professional church worker continues to study and pursue his/her education for the sake of ministry.
2. The professional church worker manages his/her time properly. He/she performs in a self-directed manner.
3. The professional church worker welcomes the evaluation of his/her ministry. He/she asks for help in evaluation from his/her peers, selected members of his/her congregation, and the District President or staff.
4. The professional church worker tries to maintain a realistic view of his/her skills and training and their limitations. He/she refers people to other professionals (psychologists, counselors, etc.) when helpful and necessary. He/she seeks written permission from a congregational member to disclose information when a referral is made to another professional.
5. The professional church worker takes the time and effort necessary to prepare adequately for the daily tasks of his/her ministry.
6. The professional church worker prayerfully and enthusiastically does the whole ministry to which he/she has been called and accepts responsibility for any activity that directly or indirectly relates to his/her job description.
7. The professional church worker is alert to and seeks to prevent conflicts of interest that interfere with the exercise of professional discretion, impartial judgment, and a full teaching of the Word of God. He/she informs the parishioner when a real or potential conflict of personal, political, or business interests arises and, if necessary, refers the parishioner to another professional staff member.
8. The professional church worker is intellectually honest, observing copyright laws, avoiding any hint of plagiarism, and giving credit where credit is due.

IV. ADDITIONAL SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR ORDAINED MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL

- A. The pastor honors his ordination and installation vows to be faithful to the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as *“the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice, to be faithful to the three Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions, to instruct young and old, to forgive sins of those who repent, to never divulge the sins confessed, to minister faithfully to the sick and dying, to admonish the people to a lively confidence in Christ and holy living and to adorn the office of the public ministry with a holy life.”*⁷
- B. The pastor proclaims the whole will and counsel of God, in season and out of season.

V. ADDITIONAL SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR LUTHERAN TEACHING MINISTERS

- A. In his/her **personal conduct**, the Lutheran teacher:
 - 1. Demonstrates the gift of teaching.
 - 2. Uses Christ-centered teaching styles.
 - 3. Intentionally and deliberately integrates faith into all areas of the curriculum.
 - 4. Nurtures the faith development of all children.
 - 5. Reaches out to those families who are not yet disciples.
 - 6. Maintains proper credentials/certification and licensure.
- B. In his/her **relationship with students**, the Lutheran teacher:
 - 1. Works in the best interest of the child.
 - 2. Demonstrates fair and impartial grading.
 - 3. Shows no favoritism, but demonstrates love and concern for all students.
 - 4. Creates a positive and safe learning environment.
 - 5. Respects the integrity of all students.
 - 6. Reports any suspected abuse to proper authorities.
 - 7. Fosters positive and respectful interaction with students.
 - 8. Disciplines in God-pleasing ways.
 - 9. Avoids the acceptance of money for additional tutoring of own students unless Board policy allows otherwise.
- C. In his/her **relationship with parents**, the Lutheran teacher:
 - 1. Treats all parents with respect.
 - 2. Is approachable and accessible.
 - 3. Communicates appropriate concerns.
 - 4. Assists with training each child.

VI. END NOTES

¹ Eyer, Richard C., *Holy People, Holy Lives, Law and Gospel in Bioethics*, (St. Louis: CPH, 2000), 69. Quoted from his chapter titled “Law and Gospel Foundations for Ethics.”

² Benne, Robert, “Lutheran Ethics”. *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stimmé, Ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 12.

³ Luther, Martin, *Luther’s Small Catechism*, (St. Louis: CPH, 1986), 22.

⁴ *Lutheran Worship*, page 206.

⁵ *Lutheran Worship Agenda*, 211, 212.

⁶ LCMS Council of Presidents, “Guidelines for Dealing with Marital Crisis Involving Separation and Divorce.”

⁷ *Lutheran Worship Agenda*, 211, 212.

VII. LISTING OF COMMITTEE

Mr. John E. Brandt

Mr. Thomas Jaffke

Dr. George M. Locke

Mr. Keith A. Minda

Mrs. Susan E. Palka

Rev. Philip G. Quardokus

Rev. Luther A. Werth

President C. William Hoesman



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