

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA MANUAL RE DISCIPLINE OF ORDAINED MINISTERS

GUIDELINES RE GROUNDS FOR DISCIPLINE OF ORDAINED MINISTERS

These guidelines describe the suggested grounds for which ordained ministers may be subject to discipline according to the practice of ELCIC and the Synods. Their purpose is juridical: to assist in the processes of consultation, discipline, and appeals. These Guidelines are separate from various procedures and guidelines which may be established by ELCIC or a Synod to deal with matters such as alleged sexual abuse or harassment and which are intended to ensure compliance with civil law and to provide a pastoral response.

Grounds for discipline of ordained ministers are as follows:

1. **Preaching or teaching in conflict with the faith confessed by the ELCIC** shall be grounds for discipline of ordained ministers.
2. **Conduct unbecoming an ordained minister** shall be grounds for discipline of ordained ministers. Kinds of behaviour which are incompatible with the character of the ministerial function include:
 - a. **Conviction of a Criminal Offense**

Society has placed a high premium upon the role of law in regulating the rights and duties of individuals. This includes laws that define certain conduct as a criminal offense. The commission of an indictable offence, in the absence of some reasonable explanation for such conduct, is conduct unbecoming a minister and grounds for discipline.
 - b. **Membership in Organizations**

No ordained minister shall belong to any organization that in its documents, rites or practices contradicts the Gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - c. **Confidential Communications**

Ordained ministers shall respect a confidential confessional communication and may not disclose such communication, except with the express permission of the person involved, or where required by law, or in order to prevent the commission of a crime.
 - d. **Relationship to Family**

Ordained ministers, whether married or single, are expected to uphold Christian ideals of marriage in their public ministry as well as in private life.

An ordained minister's spouse and children are to be regarded by the minister with love, respect, and commitment.

Any departure from this normative behaviour shall be considered conduct unbecoming an ordained minister. Such departure might include any of the following:

- (i) Separation or divorce that occurs without consultation with the synodical bishop's office and without the ordained minister taking appropriate action on any agreement reached in such consultation. Each case of separation or divorce must be considered pastorally.
- (ii) Desertion or abandonment of spouse or children.
- (iii) Abuse of spouse or children.
- (iv) Repeated failure to meet legally determined family support obligations.

e. Sexual Matters

Adultery, promiscuity, the sexual abuse of another, or the misuse of counseling relationships for sexual favors or other advantage would constitute conduct unbecoming an ordained minister.

f. 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 failure to embark on an effective treatment program or to follow through on treatment and abide by the terms of such treatment and the consequent impairment of performance is conduct unbecoming an ordained minister.

g. Fiscal Responsibilities

Ordained ministers are expected to conduct their fiscal affairs in accordance with ethical and legal requirements. Among those fiscal activities which shall be considered conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office are:

- (i) indifference to or avoidance of legitimate and neglected personal debts.
- (ii) Embezzlement of money or improper appropriation of the property of others.
- (iii) Using the ministerial office improperly for personal financial advantage.

3. **Willful disregard or violation of the functions and standards established by ELCIC for the Office of Word and Sacrament** shall be grounds for discipline of ordained ministers. Such functions and standards are found in the Constitution, Article VII and the Administrative Bylaws, Part III.

4. **Willful disregard of the constitution, administrative bylaws or enactments of ELCIC or the Synods** shall be grounds for discipline of ordained ministers.