



GOD'S GRACE TRANSFORMS AND CONNECTS US
• TO LEARN • TO LOVE • TO LEAD •

Southwestern Texas Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven – Ecclesiastes 3:1

To all Rostered Ministers, SAMs and former SAMs

Dear friends in Christ:

I pray that you are having a blessed season of Epiphany. I wanted to write to you about a matter that has been raised to me in various ways over the last few months – it has become a pattern or theme that I feel is important to be addressed.

Our synod is a very popular place to retire. Of the 269 pastors in our synod, 163 of them are on the retired roster, which represents over 60%. In addition, we have a number of trained lay people who have previously served faithfully as Synodically Authorized Ministers (SAMs) in the past. You who are retired come with many gifts; some of you are serving congregations on a contract/transitional basis; others are serving in various leadership roles throughout the synod and I am thankful for your service. As our retired pastors and former SAMs join congregations, they can be very helpful in many ways; filling in occasionally for the pastor, leading Bible studies, and so on.

At the same time, having retired pastors and former SAMs in a congregation can also prove to be a challenge for the called pastor. It can be difficult for retired folks, who are used to being in leadership roles, to change their position to be that of a “pew sitter.” Over time, they may become opinionated that the way the pastor does things is not the way they should be done. Sometimes they are vocal about this with other church members. This can be very divisive for a congregation and hurtful to the called pastor, because the title of pastor, even a retired one, or former SAM, carries more power with it than a lay person within the congregation. This also applies to the spouses of our retired clergy.

I would ask all of our retired pastors/former SAMs to be mindful of this dynamic, and to take the initiative to regularly ask the pastor of your congregation how you (and your spouse, if applicable) can be helpful, and how you might also need to step back for the sake of the congregation. For those retired pastors/former SAMs who are still members of the congregation you retired from, this is even more critical. I would also recommend that retired pastors/former SAMs use caution when thinking of accepting any formal leadership positions in the congregations of which you are a part, because of the issue, again, with the unequal power dynamics that exist by virtue of your titles. Finally, if you as a retired pastor or former SAM object to something the called pastor has said or done, please go to the called pastor and talk about it directly with her or him in a charitable manner; do not talk about it with others.

Our shared goal is to have thriving congregations who are sharing the good news in Word and deed. Thank you in advance for your attention to this vital matter. If you have any questions, or need any assistance in conveying this information to other leaders in your congregations, please let me know.

In Christ,

Bishop Sue

P.S. For another helpful document on Pastoral Ethics when leaving/retiring from a congregation, click [here](#).
