



Southwestern Texas Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

“Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.”

1 Peter 5:1-3

May 5, 2020

Beloved Leaders of the Southwestern Texas Synod:

As you may know, we have been working within our synod over the past several years to increase the health and safety of our congregations and leaders in several ways:

- Providing [Healthy Congregations Workshops](#) for congregations in transition and others interested in increasing their leadership skills.
- Offering regular [Boundary Training](#) for all rostered leaders and Synod Authorized Ministers (SAMs)
- Providing congregations discounted access to [Safe Gatherings](#), which provides online training in abuse prevention, particularly for the most vulnerable in our communities.
- Ensuring there are [ethical agreements](#) in place as pastors leave congregations, for the sake of the future ministry of the congregation.
- Having an updated [synod policy on Sexual Misconduct](#) for clearly identifying what qualifies as misconduct, as well as how to report it and the process by which it will be investigated/resolved.
- Giving [guidelines to retired pastors, deacons and SAMs](#) on how to function within the congregations of which they are members for the sake of that congregation's ministry.

In spite of these efforts, inappropriate behavior persists. There have been several removals/resignations from the roster in the last two years, which have caused significant pain to multiple congregations and people within the territory of our synod with lasting results.

In order to continue to strengthen the boundaries and accountability that make for healthier churches, we are also implementing the following:

- All persons who will be or have been authorized to serve as Synod Authorized Ministers are required to have a background check.
- All rostered persons and SAMs serving under contract with a congregation will be required to certify that they have taken boundary training in the last three years in order to serve in a congregation. [Online boundary training](#) is now available.
- As part of all transitional ministry covenants, Pastors and SAMs will need to answer the following questions that are currently asked on Rostered Minister Profile forms:
 - Have you ever engaged in, been accused of, charged with, or convicted of illegal



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conduct or a crime, including conduct resulting in suspension or revocation of your driver's license?

- Do you have any addictive behavior, including a history of drug, alcohol, or pornographic addictions that might interfere with your ability to serve or continue serving as a rostered minister?
- Have you ever engaged in, been accused of, investigated for, sued, or charged with sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, substance abuse, child or spousal neglect or abuse, or financial improprieties?
- While in candidacy or on the roster, have you ever engaged in, been accused of, investigated for, charged with, or disciplined for any conduct prescribed in [Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline](#)?
- I understand that I am responsible for informing my bishop regarding any current or future circumstance that might subject me to discipline according to Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline.
- Have you ever engaged in any behavior or been involved in any situations that, if they became known to the church, might seriously damage your ability to begin or continue in ministry?

Healthy boundaries and healthy leaders make for a healthy church. We appreciate your compliance with the existing and new processes and policies for the safeguarding of our people.

In Christ,



Bishop Sue Briner



Carl Teinert