

# A RELATIONAL AGREEMENT OF THE PASTORS OF THE TEXAS-LOUISIANA GULF COAST SYNOD

## PREAMBLE

We ministers of the Gospel in the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in keeping with Scriptural and confessional principles, commit to the following ways of serving together, for the sake of the gospel.

## THE OFFICE OF MINISTRY

All baptized Christians are called to serve the world God loves in the name of Christ. Some also are called and ordained for the ministry of Word and Sacrament, an office given by God for the sake of the stewardship and leadership of Christ's Church. Lutherans agree that the ordained ministry of the Church is "basically one ministry centered in the proclamation of the Word of God and the administration of the Holy Sacraments." (*The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry*, Lutheran World Federation 1983).

## THE OFFICE OF THE PASTOR

As pastors of this church, we understand that it is our responsibility, according to the constitution for congregations (C9.03) to:

- preach the Word;
- administer the sacraments;
- conduct public worship;
- provide pastoral care; and
- speak publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, calling for justice and proclaiming God's love for the world.
- offer instruction, confirm, marry, visit the sick and distressed, and bury the dead;
- supervise all schools and organizations of this congregation;
- install regularly elected members of the Congregation Council; and
- with the council, administer discipline.
- strive to extend the Kingdom of God in the community, in the nation, and abroad;
- seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the ministry of the Gospel;
- impart knowledge of this church and its wider ministry through distribution of its periodicals and other publications; and
- endeavor to increase the support given by the congregation to the work of the churchwide organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and of the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod of the ELCA.

## PASTOR TO PASTOR

We will set an example for our congregations and communities of exemplary speech and conduct. This will begin with how we treat one another.

We will listen and respect one another.

We will build one another up and not tear each other down.

We will speak well of one another and cast one another's' actions in the best light in accordance

with Luther's understanding of the eighth commandment.

We will exercise confidentiality.

We will follow Mathew 18:15-17 at times of offense and speak directly to those who have offended us in a one-on-one conversation.

We will attend Conference meetings and seek ways to support each other.

We will give high priority to communications with our colleagues.

### **WHEN MEMBERS CHANGE CONGREGATIONS**

When members of other congregations in the synod worship with us, we will welcome them but not treat them as prospective members. Pastors 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 pastor. If they still want to transfer we will contact the congregation to request the transfer. In any case, if confirmation-age youth are involved in the transfer, communication with the current pastor to ensure a smooth transition in the confirmation program is recommended.

### **WHEN A PASTOR LEAVES A CONGREGATION**

We agree to establish and maintain healthy boundaries between ourselves and congregations we have previously served. We want to honor relationships forged during our ministries because doing so is central to our understanding of the Gospel, but we are also committed to protecting the integrity of the congregation's ministry and its present and future leadership. Accordingly, we agree to the following principles:

- If one of us resigns a call to a congregation, he or she will clearly communicate to the members of that congregation that she or he will no longer be available to members of that congregation to perform pastoral functions after the effective date of the resignation.
- Such functions include (but are not limited to) funerals, weddings, baptisms, and pastoral calls to sick persons at home or in a hospital.
- Once a new pastor has been called (or an interim pastor appointed), we will inform the successor pastor that we communicated our unavailability for future pastoral functions to members of the congregation prior to our departure.

### **WHEN A PASTOR RETIRES FROM A CONGREGATION**

Not infrequently a pastor who retires from a congregation will elect to continue residing in the same community. We believe that a pastor who makes such a decision should seriously consider transferring her or his membership to a nearby congregation. When that is impossible and impractical, the retired pastor who decides to remain a member of his or her former congregation is obligated to be especially diligent in maintaining healthy boundaries. It is recommended that the pastor absent him or herself for the minimum of a year from the installation of the new permanent pastor. If the new pastor approves of the former pastor returning, he or she shall refrain from taking

positions of leadership on committees or the Congregation Council, and from criticizing the decisions of lay or pastoral leaders.

## **GROWTH**

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 personal priority. We will support each other in carrying out the following commitments:

- We will attend to our spiritual lives, practicing daily prayer and devotions.
- We will read to stay current and intellectually alert.
- We will hone our craft as a pastor and sharpen our skills for the work of ministry.
- We will participate in continuing education opportunities.
- We will annually attend the annual Tri-Synodical Theological Conference and Synod Assembly to stay close to the life of the whole church.
- We will exercise and eat a healthy diet.
- We will take vacation and weekly days off.