

**EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
CENTRAL STATES SYNOD**



Pastoral Ethics: Pastors Relating to Previously Served Parishes

When a pastor accepts a call to a congregation, a sacred covenant is established between that pastor and the people of God in that place. In order that the ministry might be strong and effective, it is important for that relationship to be strengthened and nurtured until God calls that pastor to another sector of ministry. When a pastor resigns, that call – that covenant – ends. How does a pastor relate appropriately to members of congregations where one has previously served? We offer the following suggestions, with the hope that it will give guidance so that good choices are made which do not negatively impact the ministry of the people of God.

1. It is your responsibility as a former pastor to decline invitations to conduct pastoral acts in any former parish. It is important that you do not pass the burden of such decisions back to the pastor who currently holds that call. As professional people, we commit ourselves to act responsibly in these matters. For the sake of the church and the ongoing ministry of the congregation, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” When we do that, our relating to members of previous parishes can be used by God to build up the body of Christ.
2. It is your responsibility as a former pastor to be supportive of your successor, even when that is difficult to do. The responsibility for the success of the current pastor is also your responsibility. If it is not possible for you to be supportive of that pastor’s ministry, it is extremely important that you cut off contact with members of that congregation, in order not to become a hindrance to its ministry.
3. While the above statements are addressed to pastors, spouses of pastors must consider the same factors, and also respect the recommendations made above. Spouses share a pastoral identity and, as a result, can become hindrances as easily as a pastor can.

This policy on pastoral ethics is shared for the sake of the Church and the ongoing ministry of the congregation, to enable us to act wisely in difficult circumstances. It is provided to help rostered leaders and congregations understand S14.14 of the Synod Constitution:

S14.14 Ordained ministers shall respect the integrity of the ministry of congregations which they do not serve and shall not exercise ministerial functions therein unless invited to do so by the pastor, or if there is no duly called pastor, then by the interim pastor in consultation with the Congregation Council.

*Adopted by the Central States Synod Council Executive Committee
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