

# Retired Pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Ordained ministers may retire upon attainment of age 60, or after 30 years on the roster of ordained ministers of this church or one of its predecessor bodies, or upon disability, and continue to be listed on the roster of ordained ministers of this church, upon endorsement by the synodical bishop, by action of the Synod Council in the synod in which the ordained minister is listed on the roster. The policies and procedures for granting retired status or for designation of disability on the roster of ordained ministers shall be developed by the Division for Ministry, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council.  
(Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ bylaw 7.41.17. Retirement .] )

Persons who have served within the ordained ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and who have determined that they will enter retirement are not only to be honored for their past service but are seen as important resources for ministry within the life of this church. To enter this new phase of one's life is always a significant milestone. It is a transition and another important state of life for every retired person. It is true also for the retired pastor (and spouse if the pastor is so blessed).

The following statement is a guideline for retired pastors, the congregations they served, and synodical bishops in understanding the new status of a retired pastor. It is intended to affirm the past ministry of retired pastors, to give directions which seek to avoid some pitfalls that can present themselves to the retired pastor, and to point to new arenas of service and support.

## 1. Roster of Ordained Ministers

A retired pastor is on the roster of the synod in which last under call or in which the pastor resides. The retired pastor remains accountable

to the synodical bishop where rostered. A retired pastor must be a member of an ELCA congregation in order to remain on the roster of ordained ministers and remains subject to the standards for ordained ministers of this church.

## II. Congregational Membership

A retired pastor should not remain a member of the congregation served at the time of retirement. Transferring one's membership to another congregation allows the successor pastor to assume pastoral leadership more readily. It also provides an opportunity for the retired pastor to enter fully into the life of a different congregation with clarity about the pastor's retired role.

## III. Pastoral Service

At the time of retirement a pastor is no longer pastor of a congregation and therefore must discontinue the functions of the pastoral office in the congregation unless specifically authorized to do so.

The service of retired pastors is governed by the *Constitution for Synods* [S14.14.}, which describes the role of ordained ministers in congregations in which they do not serve: "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"(S14.14 *in the Constitution for Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*).

## IV. Interim Ministry

One area of potential service for the retired pastor is interim ministry. Many retired pastors provide valuable and needed ministry to

congregations in time of transition following the resignation of a pastor. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America invites retired pastors to consider this important arena of ministry.

A retired pastor may serve as an interim pastor during a time of pastoral vacancy only by the authorization of the synodical bishop. Retired pastors who wish to serve under call in an interim ministry must return to the active roster of ordained ministers.

## **V. Compensation**

Retirement benefits provided by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America through the Board of Pension, combined with Social Security benefits, are intended to provide adequate compensation to pastors in retirement. Therefore, there shall be no financial commitment by a congregation or agency to retired pastors or their spouses.

A retired pastor who is authorized to serve (not under call) in a congregation for a stated period of time and for pastoral services may be compensated according to compensation practices within the synod.

The title of Pastor Emeritus has no official standing and carries with it no compensation or authorization for service or for other responsibilities.

## **VI. Consultation with Synodical Bishop**

As part of the bishop's pastoral care of retired pastors, a synodical bishop or a member of the bishop's staff is encouraged to meet with a pastor at the retirement to discuss these guidelines, the pastor's new retired status and its implications.

*Adopted by the Church Council  
as policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
under churchwide bylaw 7.41.17.  
November 13, 1998*

(Retired. Pol)