

# Vision and Expectations

## Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

*"Vision and Expectations — Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" is a document which informs candidates for ordained ministry in this church, seminaries, congregations and candidacy committees regarding this church's vision for ordained ministry and the high expectations it places on those who serve in this way.*

*It should not be confused with "Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline." The latter is a juridical document that describes the grounds on which ordained ministers may be subject to the disciplinary process of this church.*

*This church has been called into mission in challenging times. It is important as we carry out this mission, that we remain faithful to the one who calls us into this work. "Vision and Expectations" makes clear that ordained ministry is a privilege granted by God through the call of the church. It is not an individual right.*

*If this church is to reach out with the gospel to all people, leaders must have a passion for evangelism, pastoral skills that have been refined in seminary and contextual settings, and personal character and integrity worthy of the office. This document outlines the importance of the ordained minister's faithfulness to this church's confession, leadership through faithful service and holy living, and faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It sets forth the marks of healthy leadership which are essential to being a vital church in mission in a pluralistic context.*

Bishop Mark S. Hanson

*Within the people of God and for the sake of the Gospel ministry entrusted to all believers, God has instituted the office of the ministry of Word and Sacrament. To carry out this ministry, this church calls and ordains qualified persons.*

*An ordained minister of this church shall be a person whose commitment to Christ, soundness of faith, aptness to preach, teach and witness, and whose educational qualifications have been examined and approved in the manner prescribed in the documents of this church; who has been properly called and ordained; who accepts and adheres to the Confession of Faith of this church; who is diligent and faithful in the exercise of the ministry; and whose life and conduct are above reproach. A minister shall comply with the constitution of this church.*

Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Ordained ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are called to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Together with the whole people of God they are part of the ministry of the baptized. Ordained ministers are called to be faithful to Jesus Christ, knowledgeable of the Word of God and the Confessions of this church, respectful of the people of God, and responsive to the needs of a changing world. They are called to give leadership to the congregations and other ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In this document the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seeks to state its vision and expectations for ordained ministers of this church. This document should not be understood as a juridical standard. Neither is it intended to suggest unrealistic or impossible expectations for those who serve on the roster of ordained ministers. Instead, it seeks to express the high value and importance that the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament has in the life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It is offered for those who are already on the roster of ordained ministers of this church as a statement of expectations and hopes for the shape of ordained ministry, as well as an invitation for reflection and consideration to those who seek to serve in the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The four questions that are addressed to candidates in the Rite of Ordination (Occasional Services, pp. 193-194) serve as the framework for this document. The liturgical rite itself is not the basis for this document, but the setting in which this church's understanding of its expectations for ordained ministers is described.

## **I. THE CALL TO ORDAINED MINISTRY**

*Before almighty God, to whom you must give account, and in the presence of this congregation, I ask: Will you assume this office, believing that the Church's call is God's call to the ministry of Word and Sacrament?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believes that the Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith" (Small Catechism, Article III). It is the Spirit that provides the church with those persons who are enabled by God to lead the church in carrying out the ministry and mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This church confesses that the office of ordained ministry, "the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments" (Augsburg Confession, Article V), has been instituted by God. Individuals are ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament because they have been called by God. This church believes that the call comes to individuals from God both personally and through the church.

Persons experience the call to ordained ministry through a variety of ways. Fundamental to each is the personal experience of God's justifying act in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the awareness of the gospel in one's life, and the response to that gospel, that lead some to seek to serve in the public ministry of the church. This call may include the example and encouragement of others, the personal assessment of an individual's own interests and abilities, and response to the needs of the world. In whatever way the call to seek ordination may come to an individual, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believes that such a sense of call must be tested over a period of time, shaped by theological study, and finally confirmed in the church's call to serve as a pastor. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the church to discern a person's gifts and abilities for ordained ministry.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America prepares and approves candidates for the ordained ministry by setting standards, by providing for theological education through the seminaries of this church, and by evaluating a person's qualifications for service by a Candidacy Committee. Upon approval for ordination, a person is eligible to receive a letter of call to serve in the ordained ministry of this church.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America therefore understands the call to the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament to mean that:

- Ordained ministers, called by God through the church, are accountable to the Word of God for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ;
- Ordained ministers are called by God through the church and are not self-chosen or self-appointed;
- Ordained ministers are called by God through the church for a ministry of servanthood, and not for the exercise of domination or coercive power; and
- Ordained ministry is a privilege granted by God through the call of the church and is not a right of the individual.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expects each of its ordained ministers to understand and accept the call to serve the church's ministry of Word and Sacrament as a call from God, and to believe that the Spirit sustains and upholds those who are ordained so they may fulfill their calling to the ordained ministry.

*Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross so that he might draw the whole world to himself: Grant that we who glory in his death for our salvation may also glory in his call to take up our cross and follow him; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.*

Prayer for Holy Cross Day, *Lutheran Book of Worship*

## **II. FAITHFULNESS TO THE CHURCH'S CONFESSION**

*The church in which you are to be ordained confesses that the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God and are the norm of its faith and life. We accept, teach, and confess the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds. We also acknowledge that the Lutheran Confessions are true witnesses and faithful expositions of the Holy Scriptures. Will you therefore preach and teach in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and these creeds and confessions?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

It is essential for an ordained minister to be able to understand and faithfully interpret the Scriptures and the Christian tradition. In this question the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America asks that its ordained ministers assume responsibility for upholding this church's doctrinal tradition through faithful preaching and teaching. All who have been ordained and who serve as pastors in this church are expected to accept and adhere to the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

### **Scripture, Creed and Confessions**

The Scriptures reveal God's redemptive actions, including the message of law and gospel,

judgment and mercy, "beginning with the Word in Creation, continuing in the history of Israel and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ" (ELCA Constitution, 2.02). Ordained ministers of this church are to confess and teach the authoritative and normative character of the Scriptures "as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life" (ELCA Constitution, 2.03). The ecumenical creeds are to be taught as true declarations of the faith of this church. The Lutheran Confessions are to be acknowledged as true witnesses and faithful expositions of the Holy Scriptures.

In identifying specific documents as normative for preaching and teaching, this church expects its ordained ministers to understand that the faith of the church is corporate, not individualistic; catholic, not sectarian; orthodox, not heretical. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expects that its ordained ministers teach nothing "that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church" (Conclusion to the Augsburg Confession).

### **Doctrinal Tradition**

Christians enter into the catholic faith through baptism in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ordained ministers of this church are called to continue in this catholic faith, preaching and teaching it within the doctrinal tradition of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Ordained ministers express this tradition when they are:

#### *Evangelical*

The gospel is the good news that the decisive turning point in human history occurred in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The evangelical witness is that in Christ, God has acted to bring forgiveness to sinners, liberation for the oppressed, reconciliation for the estranged, and the promise of salvation. It is the gospel that is the power of God to create and sustain the church for God's mission in the world. Ordained ministers of this church are expected to proclaim in word and deed God's saving gospel of justification by grace through faith, and so equip the baptized for their ministry in daily life.

#### *Faithful*

The church's Scriptures, creeds, and confessions identify the grounding and goals of the church's hope: Jesus Christ. The church expects its ordained ministers to be committed to Jesus who is the Christ, the Savior of the world, the Lord of the Church.

#### *Reforming*

The church's past is characterized not only by the faithful witness of the saints, but by sin, error, and the betrayal of its mission. The gospel frees the church for genuine repentance and confession, for renewal and reform. Ordained ministers are expected to acknowledge the church's past and present failures and to lead the church in its repentance and renewal.

#### *Pastoral*

Leadership in the church is to be shaped by Jesus' own ministry of serving. This church, therefore, expects its ordained ministers to resist the temptation to seek power over people whether by force or manipulation and, instead, to lead God's people as servants. Such servant leadership is not one of weakness or timidity, but of strength and boldness.

### *Ecumenical*

The church is called to "maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). This church expects its ordained ministers to manifest the unity given to the people of God by leading the church in that common witness to the gospel that expresses the unity which the Spirit gives. Ordained ministers are encouraged to participate in ecumenical activities, including prayer and worship, and to witness to the "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all" (Ephesians 4:5 and 6).

### *Ethical*

The church witnesses to the gospel not only in its proclamation but also by how it lives and acts. The church expects its ordained ministers to lead and teach the church through example by lives that give expression to the gospel. Ordained ministers are called to represent in their personal lives the new life that is given to all Christians in baptism, and to be examples of a life that is consistent with the gospel.

*Almighty God, through your Son Jesus Christ you gave the holy apostles many gifts and commanded them to feed your flock. Inspire all pastors to proclaim your Word diligently and your people to receive it willingly, that finally we may receive the crown of eternal glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Installation of a Pastor, *Occasional Services*

## **III. THE ORDAINED MINISTER AS PERSON AND EXAMPLE**

*Will you be diligent in your study of the Holy Scriptures and in your use of the means of grace? Will you pray for God's people, nourish them with the Word and Holy Sacraments, and lead them by your own example in faithful service and holy living?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

The ordained minister is called with all Christians to "lead a life worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27). It is Christ's own self-giving on the cross that is the example for Christian life for all believers.

Because ordained ministers are also recipients of God's gracious gift in Christ Jesus, they are called to use their gifts and abilities to enable others to understand themselves as recipients of that same grace and to live as God's people in the world. In their life and conduct ordained ministers are to witness to the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. Therefore, ordained ministers will seek to use their gifts in lives worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Ordained ministers fulfill the calling of the pastoral office not only by what they do in carrying out certain tasks, but also in who they are. They both officially proclaim and in their person witness to the gospel of Christ. Pastoral identity is not one of moral or spiritual perfection. It is, instead, the living out of the good news that one is justified by God's grace and thus called to live out that grace in daily life. The ordained minister is not simply a professional trained in skills to perform a task, but is one sent by the church to lead the community of faith through the ministry of Word and Sacrament. The ordained minister enables and equips others in their lives as Christians and for their ministry in the world by

faithful preaching of the Word of God, through the administration of the sacraments, and by example.

Pastoral identity carries with it expectations and accountabilities that are determined by the whole church and not simply by a given congregation, synod, institution, or agency served by the ordained minister.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has high expectations for those who serve within the ordained ministry of this church. It does so because it recognizes that when offense is given by an ordained minister, the witness of the gospel may be impaired and the ability to carry out public ministry is threatened.

Yet sin and brokenness is a reality in the lives of all persons, including those who serve as ordained ministers. It is crucial for us all to remember that repentance and forgiveness are to be daily realities in the life of every baptized Christian. Neither perfection nor self-righteousness is asked of the ordained ministers of this church. When there is failure in the lives of those who serve in this office, this church seeks to provide counsel and understanding. When there are repentance and forgiveness, this church rejoices. Indeed, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believes that God not only calls but sustains those who are set aside for the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament. It is with this recognition that this church can affirm that those who are set apart to the office of Word and Sacrament are to seek to embody those characteristics which are consistent with the pastoral office.

The ordained minister is to nourish the people of God through the Word and sacraments. In order to do this, the ordained minister needs to develop and nurture a sound knowledge of the Scriptures, both intellectually and devotionally. The ordained minister will seek regular opportunities for personal participation in the means of grace, including the renewal of baptismal grace in individual confession and absolution, and to celebrate and receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, thus receiving God's renewing, sustaining, empowering Spirit both personally and in the practice of ministry.

The ordained minister engages in daily prayer and encourages others in the practice of regular prayer.

The ordained minister must be a member of a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As a member of such a community of faith, the ordained minister is an integral part of a community in which mutual support is given and in which care, forgiveness, and healing occur.

The ordained minister supports not only the work of the congregation, but also the synodical and churchwide ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This church expects its ordained ministers to work in a collegial relationship with one another and to share in mutual accountability with those in positions of leadership and oversight in this church. The ordained ministers of this church are to seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the ministry of the gospel and strive to extend the Kingdom of God in the community.

The ordained minister is concerned for the whole person and provides for the care of those troubled with spiritual or emotional problems. This church expects that its ordained ministers

will honor and respect privileged communication, particularly within the context of individual confession and absolution, and will not disclose such communication except with the express permission of the person who has confided it or if the person is perceived to intend great harm to self or others. The ordained minister recognizes the importance of life-long growth in learning. Such growth is intended to renew, extend, and deepen insight into the Scriptures and the doctrinal teaching of the church, and to enable one to respond to the insights and challenges of the world with greater awareness and a more faithful confession. In an increasingly complex and educated society, the development of an informed intellect and professional skills is crucial to competent ordained ministry. This church expects of its ordained ministers regular and disciplined time for personal study, study in the company of others, participation in programs of continuing education, and periodic times for extended study. Congregations and other entities of this church are expected to provide the ordained minister the time and assistance with the financial resources needed for such study.

The ordained minister needs to be an example of self-care, as well as caring for others. The significant demands of time and effort within the office of ordained ministry can lead one to neglect proper nutrition, exercise, and time for recreation. The congregation, or whatever agency or institution the ordained minister serves, should respect the need for the ordained minister to have adequate time for self-care. Caring for self also includes seeking counseling and/or medical care when there is evidence of physical or mental illness, substance abuse, eating disorders, or relational problems.

The ordained minister is expected to be fiscally responsible and is to be a faithful steward of time, talents, and possessions. The ordained minister is to be an example to the community of generous giving.

The ordained minister is to be an example of holy living, so that the ordained minister's life does not become an impediment to the hearing of the gospel or a scandal to the community of faith. The qualities of such a life include the following:

#### *Responsibility to family*

Ordained ministers, whether married or single, are expected to uphold an understanding of marriage in their public ministry as well as in private life that is biblically informed and consistent with the teachings of this church. Spouse and children, if any, are to be regarded with love, respect, and commitment. Within the family, forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, and mutual care are to be expressed. It is also expected that ordained ministers maintain responsible relationships with their parents and other immediate relatives.

#### *Separation, Divorce and Remarriage*

Ordained ministers are expected to keep their marriage inviolate until death, to cultivate love and respect for their spouse, and to seek marital counseling when it is needed. It is recognized that due to human sin and brokenness, in some cases the marital relationship may have to be dissolved. Should an ordained minister and spouse seek to divorce, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought. Similarly, should an ordained minister decide to marry following a divorce, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought.

#### *Sexual conduct*

The expectations of this church regarding the sexual conduct of its ordained ministers are

grounded in the understanding that human sexuality is a gift from God and that ordained ministers are to live in such a way as to honor this gift. Ordained ministers are expected to reject sexual promiscuity, the manipulation of others for purposes of sexual gratification, and all attempts of sexual seduction and sexual harassment, including taking physical or emotional advantage of others. Single ordained ministers are expected to live a chaste life. Married ordained ministers are expected to live in fidelity to their spouses, giving expression to sexual intimacy within a marriage relationship that is mutual, chaste, and faithful. Ordained ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships.

*Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turn us from the old life of sin. Grant that we who are reborn to new life in him may live in righteousness and holiness all our days, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*  
Prayer for Renewal, *Lutheran Book of Worship*

#### **IV. FAITHFUL WITNESS**

*Will you give faithful witness to the world, that God's love may be known in all that you do?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

The charge to witness to the world is given to the church today as it was to the apostles of the early church. The content of that witness is God's revelation in Jesus Christ: God's creative self-disclosure as the Word made flesh; Jesus Christ victorious over death for the salvation of God's people; and the promise of everlasting life. The testimony of these acts of God's grace and forgiveness is expressed in both word and deed by ordained ministers through compassion, hospitality, patience, and forgiveness; through seeking peace and justice for all people; through care for God's creation; and through sharing one's faith through preaching, teaching, and personal witness. This witness is characterized by:

##### *Evangelism*

The apostolic witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ is at the heart of the church's mission. It is the proclamation of the message of salvation in Jesus Christ and reconciliation with God. This gospel is proclaimed through preaching the Word and administration of the Sacraments. Through its ordained ministers, this church affirms the critically important task of communicating this evangelical word to the world.

##### *Compassion*

Christians are called by God to participate in compassionate care for those in need. This church expects its ordained ministers to follow the example of Jesus and to lead the church in compassionate care of the suffering.

##### *Confession*

Ordained ministers are expected to enter into the church's act of confessing the Christian faith in our world. The church is called to such a confession because its present existence lies between the advent of God's Kingdom in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ and the promised certain consummation of the eschatological kingdom. This confession places this church and its ordained ministers in the struggle against sin, death, and the devil.

### *Hospitality*

Just as Jesus received sinners and ate with them, the church is called to welcome the stranger and to open its life to those who are "outside" and alienated. This church expects its ordained ministers to be models of appropriate hospitality in their personal lives, to preside at the Eucharistic table where God welcomes sinners, and to lead the church in its witness to divine hospitality.

### *Peacemaking*

The culmination of God's eschatological salvation will be the overcoming of every enmity and the reconciliation of the whole creation. Yet even in the present time, God's peace is a reality. This church expects its ordained ministers to be witnesses to and instruments of God's peace and reconciliation for the world.

### *Justice*

The church is to witness to God's call for justice in every aspect of life, including testimony against injustice and oppression, whether personal or systemic. This church expects its ordained ministers to be committed to justice in the life of the church, in society, and in the world.

### *Stewardship of the Earth*

The people of God are called to the care and redemption of all that God has made. In our time this includes the need to speak on behalf of this earth, its environment and natural resources, and its inhabitants. This church expects that its ordained ministers will be exemplary stewards of the earth's resources, and that they will lead this church in the stewardship of God's creation.

### *Trustworthiness*

It is essential in the life of the ordained minister that one be trustworthy. It is a quality that allows the people of God to entrust leadership within the community of faith and to commit to the ordained minister the responsibilities of faithful preaching, responsible teaching, and confidentiality in individual confession and counseling.

*Almighty God, you sent your Son to proclaim your kingdom and to teach with authority. Anoint us with the power of your Spirit, that we, too, may bring good news to the afflicted, bind up the brokenhearted, and proclaim liberty to the captive; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Prayer for the Third Sunday after Epiphany, Lutheran Book of Worship*

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America affirms that "the Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world" (ELCA Constitution, 4.01).

This church expects its ordained ministers to honor and equip the baptized for their ministry in the world. Such a ministry involves giving leadership in the church's witness to the world, exhibiting awareness of the global challenges of a multicultural, diverse society, and enabling the members of this church, through the faithful teaching and preaching of the Word of God and the administration of the sacraments, for their ministry in daily life.

At the same time the ordained ministers of this church can know that they are regarded as servants of Christ and messengers of the good news of God's salvation in Christ. As such they are honored for the ministry they bring to this church. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America prays for the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to those who serve this church in the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament.

*Almighty and merciful God, you built your Church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and you instituted the office of holy ministry so that the apostolic and prophetic Word might be heard throughout the ages. Grant that those who are ordained may exercise their ministry faithfully in the power of your Spirit; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

Service of Ordination, *Occasional Services*

The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in its October 1990 meeting, adopted *Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* as a statement of this church and authorized its distribution to the congregations, ordained ministers, candidacy committees and seminaries of this church.