



ELCA Council Adopts Significant Revisions to Ministry Policies

The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) adopted a series of historic and sweeping revisions to ministry policy documents April 10, the result of months of extensive writing, comment and review by hundreds of leaders and members following the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

The Church Council is the ELCA's board of directors and serves as the interim legislative authority of the church between churchwide assemblies.

The changes were called for by the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, which directed that policy documents be revised to make it possible for eligible Lutherans in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationships to serve as ELCA clergy and professional lay leaders. The assembly directed that revised policies recognize the convictions of those who believe the ELCA should not allow such service. The assembly also adopted a social statement on human sexuality.

The council adopted revisions to two documents that spell out the church's behavioral expectations of ELCA professional leaders - "Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the ELCA" and "Vision and Expectations: Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses and Diaconal Ministers in the ELCA." The council also adopted revisions to a document that specifies grounds for discipline of professional leaders, "Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline," and it adopted revisions to the "ELCA Candidacy Manual," used by regional committees to help guide candidates seeking to become professional leaders in the ELCA.

The revised policies are effective immediately, said David D. Swartling, ELCA secretary.

Prior to voting, the Rev. A. Donald Main, Lancaster, Pa., chair of the ELCA Committee on Appeals, which led the effort to revise Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline, told the council that the document had not been revised since 1993. New sections address matters such as integrity, and substance abuse and addiction, he said.

The Committee on Appeals also "considered each and every word, constantly testing different language so as to be clear and concise as possible, and remain faithful to our charge and to the social statement and ministry policies recommended and adopted by our assembly," Main added.

The two Vision and Expectations documents and the Candidacy Manual are "tools in the service of God's

mission through the ELCA, primarily to assist us in that work of calling forth and supporting faithful, wise and courageous leaders," said Rev. Stanley N. Olson, executive director, ELCA Vocation and Education. The Vision and Expectations documents were most recently revised in the early 1990s, and the Candidacy Manual was revised in the past few years, he said.

"We have not attempted to spell out every possible situation and to give definitive direction for every possible situation," he told the council. "There are broad principles in these documents, and there are guidelines with some details." Olson added the documents call for the ELCA to trust established processes and its leaders who have responsibility for oversight and decision-making.



Get it Online

- Final revised text of these documents are online at www.ELCA.org/ministrypolicies

ELCA Affirms 41 Congregational 'New Starts'

Starting new congregations is a top priority for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). For 2010 the denomination has affirmed 41 "new starts" across the United States.

"These new starts represent what America is becoming, as 23 (of the 41 new starts) are among immigrant populations," said the Rev. Stephen P. Bouman, executive director, ELCA Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission (EOCM).

Bouman said the 41 new starts are a sign of "hope for our beloved church" in the Easter season. "In the Resurrection of Jesus, all things are possible," he said.

Of the 41 new starts 12 are "worshiping communities" authorized by the ELCA's 65 synods. These are communities with ministry potential, according to the Rev. Mary C. Frances, assistant director for new evangelizing congregations, EOCM.

Lay African immigrants initiated six of the 41 new starts. These leaders are seeking to become clergy, but "we are not waiting until they become ordained," said Rev. Gemechis D. Buba, director for African National ministries, EOCM.



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