



FAITHFUL + BOLD + SERVING

Virginia Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

**Virginia Synod ELCA
Statement of Policy and Protocol
Regarding Boundaries Training
for Rostered Ministers**

Approved by the Virginia Synod Council
January 2020



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

BOUNDARIES TRAINING

The church should be a safe place where people can worship, learn, work, love, and receive care. As children of God and followers of Jesus, each of us is a part of the body of Christ and individually members of it. For the sake of God's mission and ministry in and through the Virginia Synod, this Synod is committed to the formation of healthy leaders and to the nurturing of vital congregations.

Relationships are important for ministry. Healthy relationships depend upon clear and respectful boundaries. Rostered ministers, especially, need thoughtful and consistent training around boundaries because of the variety of their relationships. Boundaries are the understandings that help to provide safe spaces for ministry. Of particular importance are boundaries related to professional ethics, finances, use of social media, the prevention of sexual misconduct, boundaries concerning gender and harassment, and boundaries concerning racial justice.

Rooted in the gospel command to love God and to love our neighbor, this synod covenants to provide education and boundaries training for all rostered ministers.

1. Confession

Virginia Synod Boundaries Training is grounded in confession – both a confession of sin and a confession of faith. When we confess our sin, God who is faithful and just, forgives our sin, heals us, and frees to live in Christ and for our neighbor. When we confess our faith, we state boldly the truth of the triune God who justifies us all by grace for Christ's sake.

Boundaries violations are sin, both individual and systemic:

“Sin is not expressed just in individual acts. Sin is also expressed in organizations and institutions...[fostering] attitudes and actions that distort relationships, violate God's law, and result in injustice. They are social sins that involve and affect individuals, families, communities, nations, religions, and cultures.... Because [social sin] is invisible, we are often unaware that everyone participates in some measure, sometimes in obvious and intentional ways and sometimes in subtle and unconscious ways. We may hold attitudes and beliefs and support laws, policies, and practices that harm even ourselves. This is the power of systemic sin.

In our liturgy, we name this systemic reality in the confession: ‘We are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.’ Once we understand our own participation in this systemic harm, we can identify it as sin, confess it, and, through the grace and strength of God, begin to act differently.” (ELCA Faith, Sexism, and Justice Social Statement [2019], lines 926-937)

2. Intersectional Boundaries Training

Boundaries training in the Virginia Synod “will include an expanded boundaries conversation to include racial and gender justice” (ELCA Region 9 Bishops' Relational Agreement). This expansive

boundaries training is necessary to name and address the sin of complicated, multifaceted, and intersectional forms of discrimination, oppression, and injustice many people face.

Systemic injustice results in multiple marginalizations: “In addition to sex and gender, the experiences of individuals and groups are shaped and complicated by intersecting factors. These include race, ethnicity, national origin, nationality (including American Indian and Alaska Native), religious identity, immigration status, sexuality, marital status, economic means, age, ability, embodied experiences, and education. This reality is known as intersectionality.” (ELCA Faith, Sexism, and Justice Social Statement [2019], lines 91-94)

The Virginia Synod – in cooperation and collaboration with the other synods of ELCA Region 9 – will develop a three-year rotation for boundaries training, beginning in 2020.

3. Virginia Synod requirements for Boundaries Training

The Virginia Synod will make its rostered ministers and congregations aware of the Synod’s mandatory requirement, effective January 2020, that all rostered ministers participate in the three-year rotation for boundaries training (i.e. participation in boundaries training each year).

The Virginia Synod will make rostered ministers aware that failure to attend such training will adversely impact the roster minister's eligibility for future calls, interim appointments, pulpit supply, and/or other positions of pastoral/church leadership in a local congregation, related agency, institution, or the synod.

The Virginia synod also will inform interns, students serving a congregation as part of their seminary education, and those approved candidates awaiting call, who are serving in our synod, of the need to complete a basic Boundaries Training. Those rostered ministers who have received a call or who are retired and officially transferred into the Virginia Synod from another synod/denominational judicatory, and who are not current with a basic Boundaries Training, will have one year from the date of transfer to complete a basic Boundaries Training acceptable to the Virginia Synod. Upon learning the names of rostered ministers who have returned to the Virginia Synod and/or moved to Virginia from another synod, the synod will inform those individuals of the Synod Council’s Statement of Policy requirements regarding Boundaries Training.

The synod office will maintain an official record of all individuals’ compliance status with Boundaries Training. When necessary, the names of those rostered ministers and individuals who are actively serving as stated above, and who are not in compliance with Boundaries Training attendance, will be submitted to the synod council president and/or vice-president. Certified letters noting non-compliance will be sent to the rostered minister or individual, and to the rostered minister’s or individual's congregation/pastor/institution.

Finally, the bishop and the bishop's staff will continue to take advantage of educational opportunities that are available to them. The Synod recognizes that society generally and

churches particularly have much to learn about rostered minister sexual misconduct. As the Synod's understanding of this problem changes, its Statement of Policy and educational efforts will change as well.

4. ELCA Region 9 Bishops' Relational Agreement for Boundaries, Candidacy, and Call Process

In July 2019, the bishops of the synods of Region 9 of the ELCA (Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Southeastern, Florida-Bahamas, Caribbean) agreed to a Region 9 Bishops' Relational Agreement for boundaries, candidacy, and call process. This Agreement begins: "Committed to always reforming for the health of leaders, vitality of congregations, and the flourishing of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we agree to work together as a region to address systemic issues facing rostered ministers who are women. Together, we will work to create a culture change in our region through deepening trust and relationship – creating authentic avenues for reporting, responding, training, advocacy and care."

The Bishops' Relational Agreement informs the Virginia Synod protocol for boundaries training and commits the Virginia Synod to the following:

1. All rostered ministers in Region 9 are expected to be current on boundaries training. Records of up-to-date boundaries training will be required in order to:
 - a. activate an RMP
 - b. transfer into a synod
 - c. be available for any call or appointment, including interim work
 - d. serve as a synod-recommended supply preacher
2. All candidates for rostered ministry in Region 9 are expected to be current on boundaries training. Candidacy committees will:
 - a. expect all of our candidates to participate in boundaries training during their candidacy process.
 - b. require a signed FERPA release from all candidates that gives the bishop and their designee permission to discuss the candidate's performance with seminary faculty.
3. Region 9 candidates will be held to the same standard as all rostered ministers. The process we will follow for candidates with boundaries violations will be:
 - a. if/when a report of a boundaries violation is made against a candidate, the bishop from the candidate's home synod will initiate an investigation into the allegation.
 - b. the bishop (or their designee) will share the results of the investigation with the candidacy committee and make a recommendation to the candidacy committee regarding the candidate's status.
 - c. the candidacy committee will make a decision regarding the candidate's status.
 - d. bishops will be fully transparent with one another about issues concerning candidates from their synods.

4. Because the church is the Body of Christ, grounded in the gospel, boundaries training is framed in the covenant promises of baptism and vows of ordination. Therefore, we commit as a region to establish clear objectives, outcomes, and pedagogy for boundaries training across the region. The training will include an expanded boundaries conversation to include racial and gender justice. We will pay particular attention to a variety of vehicles and congregational resources.
 - a. The synods of Region 9 will appoint a diverse Boundaries Training Team to create a more robust three-year boundaries training rotation.
 - b. The intention is to have Boundaries Training every year.