



Boundaries Education Policy

Approved by the Virginia Synod Council
September 2026



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

BOUNDARIES EDUCATION

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 central to ministry. Healthy relationships depend upon clear and respectful boundaries. Rostered ministers, especially, need thoughtful and consistent education 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 boundaries education for all rostered ministers.

1. Confession

Virginia Synod Boundaries Education 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 us 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 Education

The Virginia Synod – in cooperation and collaboration with the other synods of ELCA Region 9 – will develop annual boundaries education that includes racial and gender justice.

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)

3. Virginia Synod Requirements for Boundaries Education

The Virginia Synod Office of the Bishop will make its rostered ministers, commissioned lay ministers, synod council, and congregations aware of the synod’s mandatory requirement, beginning in January 2020, that all rostered ministers participate in boundaries education each year.

The Virginia Synod Office of the Bishop will make rostered ministers aware that failure to attend such education will adversely impact the roster minister's eligibility for future calls in the Virginia Synod and in Region 9, 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 Office of the Bishop will make commissioned lay ministers aware that failure to attend such education will adversely impact the commissioned lay minister’s eligibility for future synod authorized ministry appointments in the Virginia Synod and inclusion on the pulpit supply list.

The Virginia Synod Office of the Bishop 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 basic boundaries education. 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 basic boundaries education, will have one year from the date of transfer to complete a basic boundaries education 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 Office of the Bishop will inform those individuals of the Synod Council’s Statement of Policy requirements regarding boundaries education.

The Virginia Synod Office of the Bishop will maintain an official record of all individuals’ compliance status with the Boundaries Education Policy. 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 Education Policy, will be submitted to the Office of the Bishop. Notices stating non-compliance will be sent to the rostered minister or individual and/or to the rostered minister’s or individual's council president, lead pastor, supervisor, or institution. The Lay Ministry Academy Team leaders will also receive non-compliance notices for commissioned lay ministers.

Finally, the bishop and the bishop's staff will continue to utilize educational opportunities that are available to them. The Virginia Synod Office of the Bishop recognizes that society generally and churches particularly have much to learn about setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries in a complex and intersectional world. As the Office of Bishop's understanding of the complex nature of relationships in the world evolves, its Statement of Policy and educational efforts will continue to adapt.

4. ELCA Region 9 Bishops' Relational Agreement for Boundaries, Candidacy, and Call Process (Updated March 2026)

REGION 9 BISHOPS' RELATIONAL AGREEMENT
for boundaries, candidacy and call process

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, candidates, and synod authorized ministers (SAMS) that are female, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and persons of color (POC). Together, we will work to create a culture of change in our region through deepening trust and relationships, creating authentic avenues for reporting, responding, training, advocacy and care.

1. All rostered ministers in Region 9 are expected to be current on annual boundary training. Records of up- to-date boundary 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 annual boundary training. The Candidacy committees will:
 - a. expect all of our candidates to participate in annual boundary training during their candidacy process.
 - b. require a signed FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) release form from all candidates that gives the bishop and their designee permission to discuss the candidate's performance with seminary faculty.
3. Region 9 candidates (interns/vicars) will be held to the same standard as all rostered ministers. The process we will follow for candidates (interns/vicars) with boundary violations will be:
 - a. if/when a report of a boundary violation is made against a candidate (intern/vicar), 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 the decision regarding the candidate's status.
 - d. bishops will be fully transparent with one another about issues concerning candidates from their synods.
- 4. Region 9 SAMS will be held to the same standard as all rostered ministers.
 - a. SAMS will attend annual boundary training.
 - b. If a boundary is reported to the bishop, the bishop and designee will initiate an investigation into the allegation.
 - c. The bishop will then make the decision what steps will take place with that SAM and their ministry placement.
- 5. Because the church is the Body of Christ, grounded in the gospel, boundary training is framed in the covenant promises of baptism and vows of ordination. Therefore, each synod commits to establish clear objectives, outcomes, and pedagogy for boundary training within their respective synod. These trainings will be shared throughout the region, so that, rostered ministers, candidates, and SAMS may attend other gatherings and trainings, if not able to attend one in their synod within Region 9. The annual general boundaries training will include racial and gender justice.
- 6. We are committed to providing pastoral care, counseling, coaching, spiritual direction, mental health services, etc., for our rostered ministers, candidates, and SAMS.
- 7. The bishops commit to finding new ways to raise the profile of rostered ministers who are women and/or POC and/or LGBTQIA+ as leaders in the synod and in congregations, including:
 - a. Intentionally inviting rostered ministers who are women and/or POC and/or LGBTQIA+ in mock interviews in synods in which mock interviews are used
 - b. encouraging the use of rostered ministers who are women/POC/LGBTQIA+ as supply preachers and interim pastors
 - c. regularly inviting rostered ministers who are women/POC/LGBTQIA+ to preach at synod gatherings, especially synod assembly
 - d. striving for gender, racial, and sexual orientation/gender identity parity in appointments as deans and other public leadership roles.
 - e. identifying, encouraging, and fostering the leadership gifts of rostered ministers who are women/POC/LGBTQIA+ for congregational and synodical leadership roles.
- 8. The bishops agree to work together through the sharing of resources to improve the pay equity for rostered ministers who are women/POC/LGBTQIA+.

This agreement was signed by the Bishops of Synods in Region 9 on March 4, 2026.

9A, Virginia Synod—Bishop Phyllis Milton 9B, NC Synod—Bishop Emily Hartner

9C, SC Synod—Bishop Ginny Aebischer

9D, Southeastern Synod – Bishop Kevin Strickland

9F, Caribbean Synod—Bishop Vivian Davilla

9E, Florida-Bahamas Synod—Bishop Pedro Suarez

This policy has been interpreted for application to commissioned lay ministers of the Virginia Synod in the Virginia Synod Commissioned Lay Ministry Handbook.