

# *Partners in Ministry: Ethical Conduct for Congregations*



**Michigan District  
Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod  
2010**

## LETTER FROM PRESIDENT DAVIS



*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

A key part of Christian ethics is the call to love one another. Jesus said, “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*” (John 13:35).

“Ethic” has to do with character, habits, or principles lived out in a community. When people come together as a community, they develop a way of treating and relating to one another. It may be positive or negative, but the community will incorporate it as a way of life.

Of course in the Church, her congregations and among her workers, we want to develop biblical characteristics, habits and principles in our relationships with each other. “Love one another” is a foundation. So is doing things decently and in order because our God is a God of order.

To that end, a number of years ago statements about our life together in the LCMS and the Michigan District were developed regarding ethical conduct. This document is an outgrowth of that and has been prepared to assist congregations in examining the way we deal with our workers and with sister congregations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It is designed to underscore good practices when securing workers, living with workers, and dealing with workers as they retire or move on to other areas of ministry. It will also help us to develop policies that will assure that all are provided for in a biblical, caring, and professional way.

Compare this document with current practices. Talk together with leaders and workers. What changes should be made? What strengths are already present? Discuss them. Pray about them.

May our life together continue to be guided by that foundational Christian ethic: love.

We know the Word! “*We love because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19).

*...eyes on Jesus...*

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Rev. David A. Davis". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Rev. David A. Davis, President  
Michigan District of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod

# *Partners in Ministry: Ethical Conduct for Congregations*

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# I. THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

All baptized Christians are members of “The Body of Christ” and, therefore, also members of one another (Romans 12:5). As we gather in congregations around His Word and Sacraments, God gives each of us particular gifts to benefit all the members of His Body (Romans 12:6-8) and to bring the Gospel to the lost (Matthew 28:19-20).

To carry out this ministry of Word and Sacraments among us, God established the Office of the Holy Ministry. By extension, God also establishes, through the church, other offices as necessary to enable our congregations and schools to further this ministry (Acts 6:1-7). We read in Ephesians 4:11-12, “[God] gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” Through congregations, God calls individuals to serve in these various offices (Pastors, Teachers, DCEs, Deaconesses, etc), that people may be strengthened in the faith and equipped to live out that faith in their daily lives. We believe that the Holy Spirit is actively involved in the call process. Therefore, in thankful response to God, and in fulfillment of Christ’s will that we love one another, even as He loved us (John 13:34), members show their support for these church workers through respect, encouragement, gifts, and prayers, recognizing in them God’s blessings to us (Philippians 4:14-19; Hebrews 13:17).

The purpose of this document is to help congregations understand and relate to their professional church workers and other staff and to sister congregations in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod in ways that are healthy, God-pleasing, and beneficial to everyone, so that the work of the church may prosper to the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Conduct and relations within the church reflect the “already-not yet” existence of the church on earth – already justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, but not yet free of the influence of sin and the power of the devil. Under the cross of Christ, both forgiven and forgiving, congregations and their professional church workers are called to live lives controlled by the Spirit (Romans 8:1-17). “Partners in Ministry: Ethical Conduct for Congregations” is written in the present tense, depicting the lives of congregations and professional church workers controlled by the Spirit as sanctified servants of Jesus Christ.

# II. SEEKING A CHURCH WORKER

Ethical standards for congregations when calling or hiring a worker.

## A. THE POSITION

Congregations prepare and provide a specific position description that fully and completely explains the position, qualifications required, expected results, to whom the worker will report, salary and benefits details, etc. This process assists candidates in considering the position and confirms why the congregation desires to fill the position to enhance its ministry or operations.

B. CANDIDATES

Congregations establish and follow a consistent policy when seeking or soliciting applicants. For ecclesiastical workers, this includes following District guidelines and working with appropriate District representatives when obtaining call lists or submitting names for inclusion on a call list. For all other workers, this includes using consistent procedures when hiring to ensure fairness (e.g., posting of openings, advertising, interview process, criminal background checks, etc.).

C. RECEIPT OF CANDIDATE INFORMATION

Congregations carefully guard all information and materials received from or about an applicant and hold this information in strict confidence. This includes information obtained at any phase of the process (e.g., application, references, criminal background checks, interview notes, performance reviews from prior employers or from District, etc.).

D. INTERVIEW PROCESS

Congregations conduct any interview process consistently and professionally, remembering it is the candidate's discretion to submit to an interview. When interviewing more than one candidate, congregations apply the same guidelines throughout the interview process to promote fairness (e.g., consistent length of interview, same questions, similar settings, etc.). Inquiries and visits outside of the authorized review process do not occur. Congregations establish policies in advance of a vacancy to facilitate consistency and fairness when a vacancy occurs.

E. HONEST AND FORTHRIGHT COMMUNICATION

Congregations provide honest and forthright information and responses about the position and general matters relating to a congregation. This means providing information about the anticipated term of the position, the requirement for additional training, work environment, how the position will enhance the congregation's ministry, impending departures or changes relating to other staff, why the last person in this position left (if applicable), and any other general issues or problems affecting the congregation (membership, personnel, or financial). Congregations fully explain the review process and timetable to be followed in issuing a call or hiring a worker and promptly respond to a candidate's inquiries during his/her deliberations.

F. TIMING AND PROXIMITY CONSIDERATIONS

Congregations are mindful of the effects of calling or hiring a worker from another congregation as it relates to (i) geographical proximity (e.g., a nearby church where members might "follow" a worker because of an established relationship) and (ii) timing (e.g., another congregation that is in a vacancy period that risks the loss of additional staff). Congregations promptly inform a candidate if he/she is no longer being considered.

G. DISCLOSING CANDIDATE INFORMATION

During and after the process, congregations hold all information obtained from or about candidates in strict confidence. Candidate information is not discussed or disclosed to outside entities (e.g., other congregations) or the congregation's membership except in established settings when candidates are being reviewed by committees or voters assemblies. Information is not discussed or disclosed with individual congregation members (i.e., gossip) other than as part of a legitimate review function. When the process is complete, information obtained about all candidates is shredded or disposed of in a manner that ensures this confidentiality.



H. CALL OR OFFER ACCEPTED

Upon acceptance of a call or offer, congregations assist the new worker in all phases of his/her relocation. Congregations consider forming a welcoming committee, covering moving expenses, providing insight and assistance relating to the housing market and schools, assisting with family needs such as employment for a spouse to ensure a smooth transition and make the church worker and his/her family feel welcome.

I. PRAYER

Congregations prayerfully consider applicants and workers during all phases of a call or hiring process.

### III. LIFE TOGETHER: PART I - CARE FOR WORKERS

Congregations work to enhance the environment of their professional church workers and all other staff, for this benefits the whole congregation (Hebrews 13:17b).

A. WORK ENVIRONMENT

To promote a healthy and pleasing atmosphere for all workers, the congregation:

1. Treats all staff members equally and fairly, considering their duties, expectations, and responsibilities in recognizing each of them as God's unique creation, with special gifts and needs.
2. Takes timely and appropriate action when necessary to help maintain staff morale.
3. Periodically reviews office environment and equipment to make sure everything is up to date, safe, clean, and operational.
4. Has a workable plan to provide substitutes to assume the duties of any staff member in an emergency without disruption of the congregation's ministry.
5. Analyze the effects of placing spouses of staff members in situations involving a "conflict of interest" through placement in elected/appointed positions of authority within a congregation's structure.

B. PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

To aid the church worker's growth in his/her respective duties, the congregation:

1. Authorizes the appropriate person to evaluate the worker's performance at regular intervals.
2. Conducts these evaluations in an objective and orderly fashion, in order to help the worker understand and fulfill his/her duties.
3. Periodically reviews and/or updates job descriptions for each position to accurately reflect the needs and expectations of the congregation.
4. Invites the current worker's input in any reworking of his/her job description.
5. Reissues the call or contract as the congregation's needs or expectations for the position change from the original call or contract.
6. Allows sufficient budget and in-service days to enable workers to ensure professional growth.
7. Makes use of the latest training tools available.
8. Reviews individual training needs with the worker at least annually.
9. Encourages its professional church workers to regularly meet with their respective peer groups for learning, support, and the exchange of ideas.

C. RESOURCES

To ensure that adequate resources are available to do the work of ministry, the congregation:

1. Is in agreement with the staff on the ministry plan and the resources required, and provides sufficient funds in the budget to support it.
2. Regularly reviews ministry plans and needs, and adequately prepares for future budget requirements.
3. Communicates to its members and staff, in a timely manner, any changes in ministry plans and the impact of those changes.
4. Includes a contingency line item in the budget, allocating a specific amount annually.
5. Provides adequate liability coverage for the church and staff to cover counseling and other activities.
6. Provides resources for workers to stay current with the ever-changing legal aspects of society.

D. COMPENSATION

The congregation has an established Compensation Policy covering all workers by:

1. Following published District compensation guidelines for all professional church workers.
2. Utilizing local pay scales and paying fair wages for all other workers, for “the laborer is worthy of his hire.”
3. Establishing compensation guidelines for work required above and beyond normal duties or job expectations.
4. Budgeting funds to cover counseling or other professional help for the professional church worker.
5. Establishing compensation guidelines for situations in which a worker leaves his/her position.
6. Providing sufficient vacation time and appropriate work schedules for each worker, depending on his/her work status and level of experience.
7. Professional church worker compensation decisions should always include discussions related to retirement planning and pension programs.

## IV. LIFE TOGETHER: PART II - SUPPORT FOR WORKERS

A. SPIRITUAL GROWTH

To allow for the spiritual growth of church workers, the congregation:

1. Encourages all workers to take time each day for prayer and devotions.
2. Provides funding to all workers for the purchase of resources to aid in their personal study of God’s Word and growth in their relationship to the Lord.
3. Expects workers to be regularly involved in corporate worship and Bible study.

B. SUPPORT FOR HEALTHY FAMILY LIFE

To help foster positive and healthy family lives among the workers, the congregation:

1. Has a written policy providing adequate vacation time and/or appropriate work schedule for its workers, and encourages the members to respect those times.
2. Provides fair and adequate salaries.
3. Provide funding for workers and spouses to attend conferences that support healthy family life.
4. Prohibits expecting the church worker's spouse or family to be "unpaid employees" of the congregation.
5. Shows care and support for workers during times of illness, tragedy, distress, and dysfunction. When appropriate, encourages the worker to seek professional help, and provides the means to do so.
6. Shows appreciation for workers and has a uniform policy concerning congregation-wide celebrations of significant anniversaries for years of service, etc.
7. Encourages workers to balance their family life with their professional responsibilities.

C. EMPLOYING MORE THAN ONE FAMILY MEMBER ON STAFF

To avoid potential misunderstandings or conflicts, the congregation:

1. Has clear job descriptions and lines of accountability in place for each worker.
2. Is above board in the calling or hiring process to avoid the appearance of manipulation by the worker to get a family member on staff.
3. Pays the same wage and benefit package to the spouse or family member that it would anyone else in that same position.
4. Uses caution in placing family members in staff positions which give the appearance of nepotism or monopolizing control of the ministry.

D. DISPUTE RESOLUTION

When disputes involving staff members arise, the congregation:

1. Follows our Lord's direction in Matthew 18 in a spirit of love and humility, with individuals first speaking with the church worker directly rather than complaining to other members of the congregation.
2. Involves those overseeing the worker, with the worker present, if the conflict remains unresolved.
3. Seeks, in the case of professional church workers, additional help from the Circuit Counselor, Congregation Ministry Facilitators and, lastly, the District President, to resolve the conflict. With other hired staff, the congregation's constitution or hiring policies manual is followed. The congregation deals fairly and in Christian love with all workers.
4. Absolutely avoids holding secret meetings or telephone or anonymous letter-writing and petition campaigns against the worker in question.
5. Refers, in cases of severe disputes between a professional church worker and the congregation, to the Synod's Handbook (Bylaw 1.10), which provides guidance on the proper procedures for resolving such disputes.



E. CONFIDENTIALITY

Because church workers may deal with information of a confidential nature, the congregation:

1. Avoids divulging confidential or personal information shared by the worker to individuals or boards without the worker's permission.
2. Does not demand that workers divulge information shared with them confidentially.
3. Protects the worker's personnel files and other private information from unauthorized access.

F. COMMUNITY LIFE

The worker's involvement in the larger community can have positive effects for the worker and congregation. Therefore, the congregation:

1. Supports its workers' involvement in the community, as long as it does not compromise God's Word and the work of the church.
2. Addresses negative comments from members who feel that the worker should be involved only in congregational life.
3. Is willing to resolve with the worker any real problems arising from his/her involvement in the community that cause their work or witness in the congregation to suffer.

## V. WHEN A CHURCH WORKER LEAVES

Congregations conduct themselves in an ethical manner when a church worker leaves. The congregation:

- A. Publicly announces the departure of a worker in a timely and appropriate manner.
- B. Appropriately recognizes the worker's service and gives proper honor to his/her family.
- C. Keeps confidential any sensitive matters and issues surrounding the worker's departure, disclosing only what is necessary, remembering the Biblical injunction to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). In obedience to the Eighth Commandment, we do not "slander him or hurt his reputation . . . but put the best construction on everything."
- D. Meets any appropriate obligations to the family of the worker (in cases such as the death of the worker, disability, or divorce).
- E. Gives adequate and proper compensation to the worker who is asked to leave, leaves due to a disabling illness or injury, or leaves as a result of reduction of staff.
- F. Gives adequate advance notice to the worker in cases of reduction of staff to allow him/her sufficient time to seek a position elsewhere. The truthful reasons for the reduction in staff are communicated to the worker.
- G. Creates appropriate procedures to respond to the departure of a worker (such as retirement, removal, accepting a call, disability, or death).

## VI. RELATING TO CONGREGATIONS, DISTRICT, AND SYNOD

“Synod” implies a coming together of groups of people. Because the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod has a rich tradition of “walking together,” Michigan District congregations show love, concern, and respect for one another, District, and Synod.

The congregation:

- A. Prays for leaders of Synod, District, and neighboring congregations during worship services.
- B. Follows the Eighth Commandment when talking about church leaders at the local, District, and Synodical level.
- C. Communicates and works with neighboring congregational leaders about opportunities and challenges to Kingdom growth in the circuit.
- D. Celebrates in prayer, word, and actions the successes of neighboring congregations and their leaders.
- E. Provides financial support for the mission and ministry of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, channeling gifts for the mission and ministry of Synod through the District Office.
- F. Avoids calling workers from neighboring congregations.
- G. Considers the impact and uses caution before calling more than one professional worker from any one congregation.
- H. Does not pursue members from neighboring sister congregations, and considers the impact and uses caution before granting or accepting transfers.
- I. Honors the church discipline exercised by sister congregations.
- J. Seeks assistance from District officials with expertise in areas of congregational interest.

## VII. RESOURCES

From the Michigan District Web Site: [www.michigandistrict.org](http://www.michigandistrict.org)

Business Resources for your congregation  
Compilation of Employment Posters  
LCMS Congregational Treasurer's Manual  
Michigan Supplement  
Michigan District Compensation Guide  
Call Documents – Commissioned  
Call Documents – Ordained

From the LCMS Web Site: [www.lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org)

Resources – Congregations  
Personnel Manual Prototype  
Employment Resource Manual  
Taxes and Ministers Brochure  
LCMS Congregational Treasurer's Manual  
Performance Appraisal  
Job Descriptions  
Concordia Plans Services

Rubrics Governing Call and Placement Procedures

## VIII. LISTING OF COMMITTEE

Rev. Gary Beck

Mr. Bruce Braun

Dr. Perry Bresemann

Mr. William Kaiser

Rev. Ken Lueke

Mr. James Saalfeld

President C. William Hoesman



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