

Code of Conduct
for Participants in Events, Meetings, and Other Gatherings
Of the Sierra Pacific Synod
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
*Adapted from the British Columbia Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church In Canada,
Code of Conduct*

This Code of Conduct does not supersede existing or future policies for Rostered Ministers including Policy 23-001 Policy Procedure for the Sierra Pacific Synod of the ELCA for Discipline of a Rostered Minister when a Complaint is Reported Adopted by the Synod Council April 15, 2023 (SC23.04.54.)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Sierra Pacific Synod are committed to being a church that welcomes all of God's people in a safe, healthy, and accepting environment.

Systemic and structural racism, discrimination, and harassment has been and continues to be experienced by women, indigenous peoples, racial and ethnic minorities, people of diverse faith communities, people of different abilities, people of different ages, and members of the LGBTQIA2S+ community. We recognize that the church and its members have exhibited such behaviors.

The ELCA Mission and Vision Values states:

"Each person is created in God's image. We respect this God-given right to dignity and, inspired by the life of Jesus, show love and compassion for all people. Through proclamation of the gospel, through worship and as servants of God working for healing and justice in the world, we uphold and seek to protect the dignity and human rights of all people."

Therefore, to uphold the dignity of all people we recognize the image of Christ in every person and serve that person as Christ himself. In meeting diverse people, we begin with a core sense of respect for the value of each person as a unique child of God.

To accomplish this, we offer this Code of Conduct for all Synod events including synod council meetings, conventions, study conferences and other meetings and events organized or co-hosted by the Synod or its representatives (Deans, etc).

Expected Behaviors by Participants of In Person or Virtual Events Organized by the Sierra Pacific Synod:

- Treat all persons fairly, with respect, courtesy, and dignity during events, including break and mealtimes.
- Be fair, respectful and courteous in any comments written or video postings made over social media platforms, emails or other technologies.
- Behave respectfully towards others and do not misuse personal or professional relationships.
- Be sensitive to cultural and social differences and practices, and careful in your use of language/gestures/body language that may be disrespectful or demeaning.
- Respect personal boundaries set by others. If someone indicates “No”, even without words, acknowledge/accept it.
- Speak with honesty, truth, and integrity.
- Commit to working with the process outlined, even if you are the subject of the incident.

Inappropriate Behaviors

Following in the steps of our Savior, we seek to care for all among us. Any behavior which harms the well being of another is not of Christ and is considered inappropriate. More specifically, but not limited to behaviors such as bullying, assault, harassment, sexual abuse, discrimination, or sexual harassment will not be tolerated.

Additional Guidelines

- Be transparent when endorsing an activity/business motion/opportunity through public disclosure of any real or perceived conflicts of interest.
- Maintain confidentiality of synod business or privileged conversations as required.
- Advocate for continual improvements to processes and systems for the benefit of all members of the Synod.

Implementation and Management

- For events with over twenty participants a minimum of two people, other than Synod staff or council, preferably of different genders and with an understanding of and sensitivity to diversity, are appointed by the event organizer/host before the start of the event to form the Incident Handling Committee (IHC). The IHC members will receive instructions from the event organizer on this Code of Conduct and the procedures to follow.
- For events of less than 20 participants the IHC committee will consist of one person. For regular conference events, a conference Dean or the site host may be assigned as the primary IHC.
- At the beginning of each event, the organizers shall remind all participants about the Code of Conduct and introduce the IHC. The attention of participants shall be drawn to the Code of Conduct principles and the commitment of our Synod to uphold them.
- Due to time and space constraints for online meetings, it may be impractical for an IHC to function the same as in person during the meeting. Participants shall be provided with an electronic copy of the Synod Code of Conduct prior to the meeting and be advised that, following the meeting, incident reports may be filed according to Procedures below. Digital modes of inappropriate behavior during and related to online meetings fall under the same guidelines as in person meetings and are not limited to room chat, but include email, messenger, etc.
- Events organized with a partnering organization shall follow this Code of Conduct Policy or a similar Code of Conduct Policy of the organization co-hosting the event.
- This Code of Conduct is encouraged for use by congregations and study groups, WELCA, etc within our Synod.

Procedure: In the event of a code of conduct violation the procedures to follow are in harmony with Matthew 18:15–17 and shall be followed.

In the case of dangerous behavior or emergencies, rely on common sense and refer directly to the police or call 911.

- An individual who experiences or witnesses a violation of the Code of Conduct should speak directly to the subject of the incident report in as timely a manner as possible, pointing out the violation and requesting that it stop/not be repeated.
- If there is no resolution, or if the complainant is not comfortable speaking directly to the subject of the incident report, the complainant (including a third-party complainant) should speak to a member of the IHC, who will outline with both parties the potential next steps, which may



include remediation, loss of voting and/or voice privilege for the immediate meeting, loss of attendance privilege for a set period of time, request to depart the premises, etc.

- If the complainant decides to begin a formal incident report process, the complainant should fill out the Incident Report Form available at the event. The Incident Report Form is also available on the Synod website: www.spselca.org
- In online events, the IHC shall notify the gathering how they can be reached in real time during the event in order to allow members to advocate for themselves in a timely way.
- If the subject of an incident report is a member of the IHC, they shall recuse themselves from any participation in the incident report handling process. If the subject of the incident report is the sole member of the IHC, the complainant should speak to the organizer of the event.
- If the subject of the incident report is a rostered member of the ELCA or full communion partner of the ELCA, the IHC shall consult with the bishop, or if the bishop is the subject of the incident, they shall consult with the synod vice president.
- During the event the complainant should hand or transmit electronically the completed Incident Report Form to a member of the IHC.
- After the event, the complainant should email the Incident Report Form to the contact person from the IHC identified at the event. Incidents may be reported up to 60 days following the completion of an event organized by the Synod.
- For the complainant, pastoral care and support should be made available. In cases where the complainant wishes to consider reporting the incident to the relevant legal and/or ecclesial authorities, they shall be offered support and assistance in considering such a report.
- If the complainant decides to pursue legal action against the subject of the incident, it shall be done by the complainant independent of the Synod but does not void Synod responsibility for care and concern along with appropriate ecclesial action.
- For the subject of the incident, pastoral care and support should be made available. The IHC may remove the subject of the incident from the meeting or from positions where the offense could be repeated if the IHC determines it is reasonable to do so.
- All incidents will be carefully investigated in a time-sensitive manner. Wherever possible, the IHC will meet privately and separately with the subject of the incident and the complainant. Incident Reports will be dealt with in a confidential manner.

Working Definitions (**Working draft* - Definitions currently Adapted from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Code of Conduct)

Bullying: Bullying is the use of force or coercion to abuse, humiliate or intimidate others. The behavior can be habitual and involve an imbalance of social or physical power. It can include verbal harassment/assault or threat, physical assault or coercion and may be directed repeatedly towards particular victims, perhaps on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexuality, or ability.

Complainant: The person making an Incident Report of a violation of the Code of Conduct. This may include a third party, someone who has witnessed a violation.

Incident Handling Committee (IHC): The individuals appointed at an event organized by the Sierra Pacific Synod to receive and review incident reports.

Discrimination: Discrimination means exclusion of, treatment of, or action against an individual based on social status, race, ethnicity, color, religion, gender including gender identity and gender expression, sexual orientation, age, marital status, national origin, political affiliation or disability.

Event organizer: Usually a Synod Office Staff Person.

LGBTQIAA2S+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual or Agender, Allied, Two- Spirit (For some indigenous people) .

Harassment: Harassment means any unwelcome comment or behavior that is offensive, demeaning, humiliating, derogatory, or any other inappropriate behavior that fails to respect the dignity of an individual.

Sexual harassment: Sexual harassment means any unwelcome sexual advance, comment, expressed or implied sexual demand, touch, joke, gesture, or any other communication or conduct of a sexual nature, whether verbal, written or visual, by any person to another individual. Sexual harassment may be directed at members of any gender and includes harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Sexual abuse: Sexual abuse is actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, including inappropriate touching, by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

Subject of Incident: The person about whom a complaint is made for violating the Code of Conduct.

Zero tolerance: The principle and practice of not tolerating any instance of sexual abuse, harassment, bullying and discrimination in all of our meetings and conferences and applying a clear procedure for breaches or violations.

Guidelines for Members of the Incident Handling Committee (IHC)

- Individuals or groups of individuals may come to you with concerns about how to handle a violation of the Code of Conduct. Your initial response is to listen to the complainant or to arrange a mutually agreeable time and place for a meeting. Such meetings should be conducted in private but in a public space.
- Initial options for dealing with a complaint are:
 - a. To encourage the complainant to speak directly to the subject of the complaint.
 - b. To be willing to go with the complainant to speak directly to the subject of the complaint.
 - c. To encourage the complainant to fill in a Confidential Incident Form, and then to speak in private with the subject of complaint.
- Exercise caring discretion to help the complainant choose which avenue to pursue.
- In cases involving known or possible criminal behavior the matter should be reported by the complainant directly to the police.
- This is a team effort. Use the other IHC team member(s) as a sounding board. Either one or two IHC team members will speak to the subject of the incident.
- Provide pastoral care and support to both the complainant and the subject of complaint. With the permission of the complainant or the subject of complaint you may ask others at the event to provide pastoral care or support.
- Keep written notes of the actions taken and submit them, along with the original incident form to the event organizer for confidential management.

Drafted: May 31, 2023

Reviewed by the Synod Council Executive committee as a working draft.