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# Revision of *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*: Summary of Survey Responses

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**Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in America**

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# Executive Summary

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# Executive Summary

## Key Findings

1. People taking the survey are generally satisfied with the document, asking for few changes.
2. A large proportion of survey participants are asking for a complete revision of the document's tone and language, which they feel is sexist, heteronormative, white-privileged, punitive and doesn't speak to the lives of the people the church most wishes to attract.
3. There are no guidelines for protecting rostered ministers from abuse and discrimination.
4. There should be clear guidelines for protecting vulnerable groups from discrimination and abuse.
5. There is a perception that the document gives bishops too much power over the personal lives of rostered ministers.
6. Participants would like to see more guidance for disciplinary processes.

**Key findings from a 2020 survey of ELCA rostered ministers, bishops, synod vice presidents, 2019 Churchwide Assembly voting members, and the general ELCA population to gather input on possible revisions to the document: *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*, conducted by ELCA Churchwide staff**



## Executive summary

# Key finding #1: People are generally satisfied with the document

When asked, “What do you like in the current document and would not want to see changed?” the largest proportion of the comments said something like “it’s good as it is,” or “it doesn’t really need many changes.” Participants like that it’s clear, brief, structured in a way that makes it easy to follow, and includes guidelines for discipline not only for rostered ministers, but also for congregations and their members.

Also, when asked, “Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?” about half of the comments could be summed up this way: “Nothing. The document doesn’t need any or many changes.” No other theme was as prominent as this one in the responses to this question.

Finally, when asked, “What, if anything, should be changed in the current document?,” though most of the responses were about the section on sexual matters, the second most frequent theme could be summarized as, “Nothing to change or add.”

It is also worth noting that some of the comments (not enough to warrant “key finding” status) suggest that there is a desire for an aspirational document to replace the *Vision and Expectation* document or alternatively, to add content to this document to make it more aspirational.



## Executive summary

### Key finding #2: There's a perception that the tone of the document is problematic.



Some are calling for major revisions to the whole document. Why? Because, while the tone of the document tries to be balanced between law and gospel, it still comes across to many people as punitive. They would like to see theological underpinnings that demonstrate grace. One rostered minister suggested “It needs to be a positive statement about expected behaviors, not just a statement of 'don'ts'.”

Some also say it is based on white-male privileged, patriarchal, heteronormative, and puritanical views about family, marriage, and sexuality, and on punitive views about debt, addiction, and criminal activity. Many respondents feel that it is dated and no longer relevant to our society and culture, and that it gives more power to those who are already privileged. Noted one seminary student: “Emerging ministers are terrified that they will be held to patriarchal, heteronormative, and white supremacist views of perfection (even if latent rather than overt).”

It should be noted that the tone can be changed but changing the church's position on human sexuality, for example, as set forth in the social statement would require a social statement revision process with the revision ultimately approved by the Churchwide Assembly.



## Executive summary

### Key finding #3: There are no guidelines for protecting rostered ministers from abuse and discrimination.



Survey participants are asking that the *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline* document be expanded to provide protections of rostered ministers from abuse and discrimination from their congregations, from other rostered ministers, from synod staff and bishops, and from churchwide staff, while also ensuring that claims of harassment are not used to stifle and cover up legitimate criticism, advocacy, or (most importantly) misconduct complaints about rostered leaders to the bishop or others.

Said one pastor: “I’ve personally experienced serious harassment by members of the congregation and was shocked to learn how prevalent this is outside of my personal experience.”

Another person’s comment also suggested that “this is not about disregarding the kind of financial trouble that congregations may find themselves in, but to address those instances when withholding a pastor’s income may be used as manipulation or weaponized, or even crass disregard for the wellbeing of pastor and family. Minority pastors are especially vulnerable to such harmful practices.”



## Executive summary

### Key finding #4: There should be clear guidelines for protecting vulnerable groups from discrimination and abuse.



Some survey participants argued passionately that while unintended, this document serves as “a gate-keeping tool to keep those in the margins from leadership in our church.”

Though other ELCA documents have clearly denounced white supremacy, racism and a variety of prejudices and forms of discrimination, this document provides the “teeth” to ensure that vulnerable groups within the church can trust that they will be welcomed instead of “othered.”

As one 2019 Churchwide Assembly voting member asserted: “As long as bigoted people are tolerated, marginalized people will NEVER be welcome or safe within the church. Ever. Naturally discipline in this area can begin with conversations and education, but stronger discipline will be necessary when the behavior persists or is particularly harmful.”





## Executive summary

**Key finding #5:** There is a perception that the document gives bishops too much power over the personal lives of rostered ministers.



Some of the survey participants argue that power is inadvertently being given to individuals that probably should not have it, and the places where it occurs may be subtle.

To illustrate, many rostered ministers complained about the provision requiring them to consult with their bishop prior to separating or divorcing a marriage partner. They felt that the bishop should not have the power to determine whether they could separate from an abusive spouse, for example.

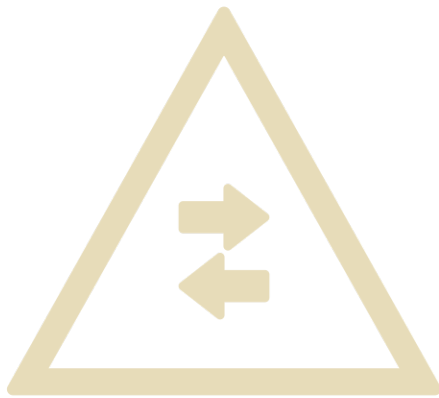
One bishop also pointed out: “As a juridical document it is understandable, but not helpful, to have so many ‘may’ vs ‘is’ declarations - giving a lot of latitude and power to bishops.”

The volume of comments about the power given to bishops demonstrates the need for clarification of the purpose of the document. The purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines* is “to enable clear and uniform application of the grounds for discipline of officers, rostered ministers, congregations, and members of congregations.”( CBCR 20.21). It defines the grounds for discipline but does not grant the power to discipline, set forth the process for discipline, or determine the appropriate discipline in a specific case.



## Executive summary

### Key finding #6: Participants would like to see more guidance for disciplinary processes.



Several respondents pointed out that there are plenty of definitions of unacceptable behaviors, but an unequal treatment across the document of guidelines for discipline. They believe it is left to the bishop (or some unnamed person or committee) to determine when a behavior warrants discipline, how that behavior is reported and to whom, and who decides the nature of the discipline. This places too much power and responsibility in the hands of bishops, they argue, and doesn't live up to the document's title.

Respondents would like to see more clarity around types of discipline, rather than just definitions of what are grounds for discipline. They believe that this document leaves it up to the individual to decide how severe an infraction is, and what the appropriate discipline would be.

This key finding suggests a need for more clear communications about the scope of the document and what it is intended to do (and not to do ).



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# Introduction



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## **Overview of the section**

- Purpose of the study
- How the study was conducted
- Who responded to the survey?

## Introduction

# Purpose of the Study

This report summarizes the input received from across the church during the summer of 2020.

This church's document *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline* describes the grounds for which discipline may be imposed according to the practice of this church. Chapter 20 of the ELCA Constitution calls for this document, stating that "the Committee on Appeals shall establish definitions and guidelines, subject to approval by the Church Council, to enable clear and uniform application of the grounds for discipline of officers, rostered ministers, congregations, and members of congregations." Its purpose is juridical: to assist in the processes of consultation, discipline and appeals. It does not set forth the high expectations this church has for all who participate in our life together.

It has been a number of years since *Definitions and Guidelines* was last substantively updated. The Committee on Appeals is conducting a review of this document with the intent to submit a revised version to the Church Council for approval in spring 2021. The committee sought input from across this church so the document can better provide clear and uniform application of the rules, protect people from harm and prevent impediments to the proclamation of the gospel.



## Introduction

# How the Study Was Conducted

In April of 2020, ELCA Committee on Appeals worked collaboratively with the Office of the Secretary and the Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation to design a research project to allow people across the church to provide feedback on the document *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*.

It was decided that we would invite all synod bishops and vice presidents, as well as a sample of about 1000 rostered ministers and a sample of about 300 2019 Churchwide Assembly members, to take a web-based survey. Care was taken to oversample known persons of color, who are often under-represented in survey research.

A short survey with three open-ended questions and a few demographic questions was designed in April/May and went live on May 15 (in English and made available through June 15). Emailed invitations were sent on May 19, and a reminder was sent on June 10. A link to the *Definitions and Guidelines* document was also placed in the introduction to the survey. Any and all outreach efforts, including listening sessions, town hall meetings, and publicizing the survey made by the Committee are not included in this report.

Additionally, the *Definitions and Guidelines* document, the survey and the invitation email were translated into Spanish in early June. The translated document was uploaded to the *Rostered Life* web page, and the link to the Spanish version of the survey was emailed to a listserv of Spanish-speaking Lutherans by Jennifer DeLeon, Director for Justice, Women of the ELCA. The deadline for responses for the Spanish version of the survey was extended a by a week (to June 22) due to its delayed release. Responses that were received in Spanish were translated into English and analyzed with the English “invited” responses.

Also, if a bishop or synod vice president responded using the web link, their responses were analyzed along with the “invited” responses. All other responses received via the weblink were analyzed as a separate group.

Via email, we invited the following to complete the survey online:

- 60 bishops for whom we had emails
- A sample of 962 rostered ministers
- 63 synod vice presidents
- A sample of 287 2019 CWA members

Additionally, the general ELCA population was invited to take the survey via a web link on the *Rostered Life* web page.

A total of 311 people completed the survey, for a response rate of 35 percent (response rate based on the invited sample only).



# Introduction

We asked a few questions to help us understand the demographic characteristics of those who have responded to the questions. We will use this information to determine how well different constituent groups are represented in these responses.

Though it was originally our intention to use this information to compare groups (which categories of people were more likely to share the same kinds of concerns? We decided against it for two reasons:

(1) We did not want this information to unfairly influence the committee's work of recommending edits to the document

(2) Given the timeframe and the small number of people in certain categories, doing such an analysis evenly was impossible.

The following pages show who participated in the survey. All 311 participants (those receiving email invitations and those who self-selected to participate via the weblink on Rostered Life) are analyzed together in this section of the report.

- **6 responses came from the Spanish language web link**
- **31 from the email to bishops;** response rate 52% (we sent 60, 46 opened, 31 completed)
- **99 from the email to a sample of 962 rostered ministers;** response rate 10% (we sent 962, 1 bounced back, 576 opened, 99 completed)
- **12 from the email to vice presidents;** response rate 19% (we sent 63, 2 bounced back, 47 opened, 12 completed)
- **41 from the email to 2019 CWA members;** response rate 14% (we sent 287, 2 bounced back, 197 opened, 41 completed)
- **122 from the English language weblink.**

## A word about the pitfalls of counting occurrences of themes:

It is always tempting to try to turn qualitative data (data that are made up entirely of words) into numbers, because somehow, our brains have been trained to count and categorize things. Isn't that what research is all about? Well.....yes and no.

Somehow, it leaves us with a false sense of security: if 30 people said something similar, it must be more important than the thing that only 10 people mentioned. But it's important to remember that if you had mentioned that same thing to the other 10, they might have agreed; they just didn't think of it on their own.

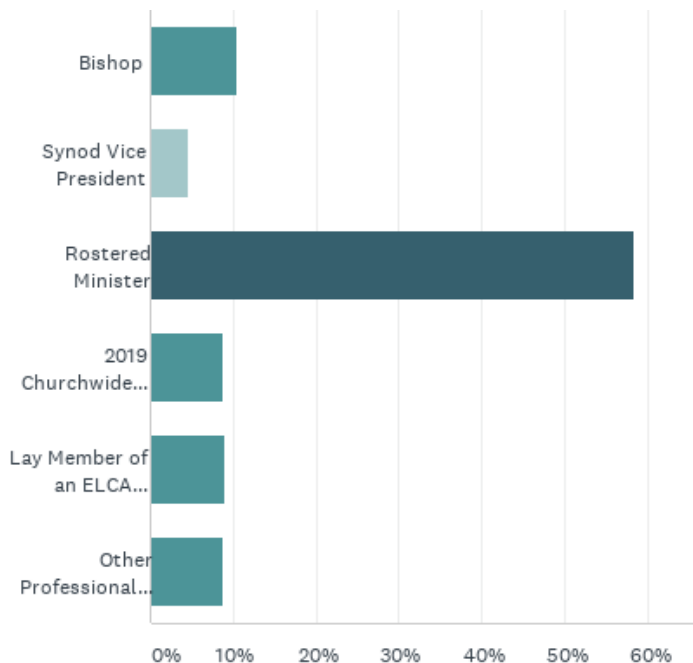
Therefore, note that any comment, even if only one person thought of it, is important, worth looking at, and may be very helpful to your work.



## Introduction

# Most of the responses (58%) were from Rostered Ministers

What is your role in the ELCA? (though multiple statuses may apply to you, please choose only one)



Role	# of Responses
Bishop	32
Synod Vice President	14
Rostered Minister	180
2019 CWA Member	27
Lay Member of an ELCA Congregation	28
Other Professional Role (please specify)	27

Answered: 308 Skipped: 3

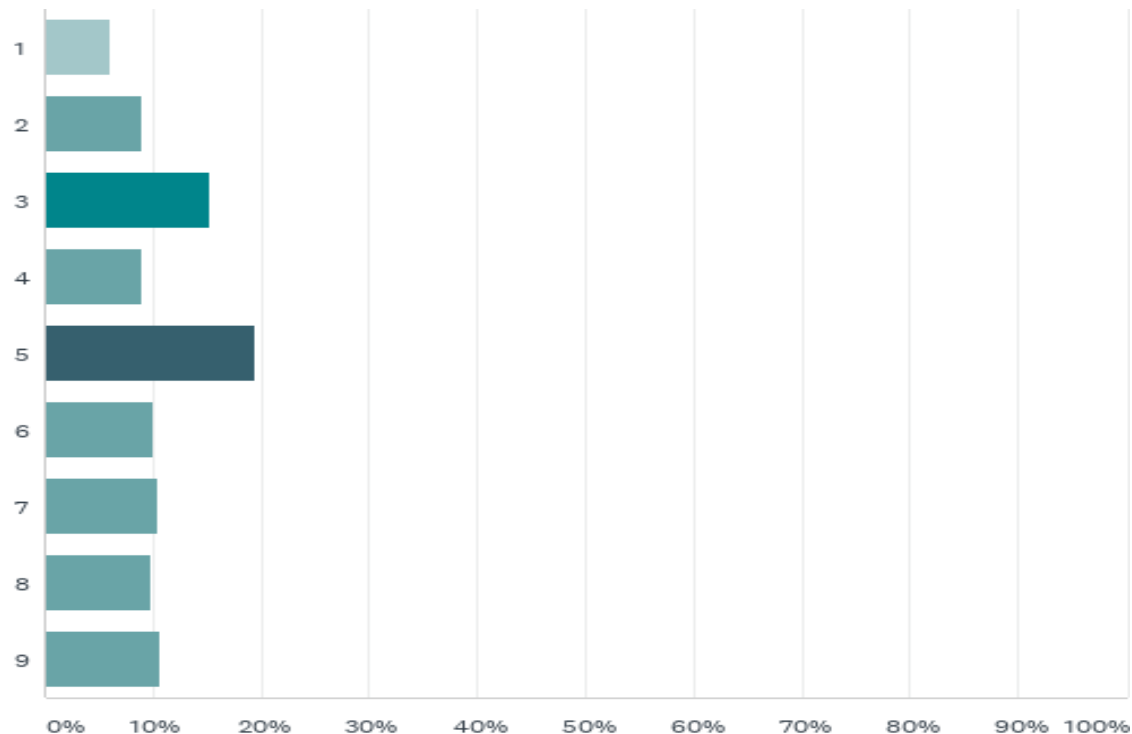
### “Other professional roles”

Assistant to the Bishop (1)  
 Serve on the Synod Candidacy Team! (1)  
 Synod Candidacy Committee Chair (1)  
 I am the consultant for the prevention of sexual misconduct (1)  
 Seminarian (candidate for Word and Service) (1)  
 Seminarian/Seminary student (3)  
 Intern for Word and Sacrament (3)  
 Executive Director of ELCA Ministry (1)  
 Awaiting Call (1)  
 Candidate for Rostered Ministry (4)  
 SAM - Vicar, Seminarian (1)  
 Distinguished Seminary Professor emerita (1)  
 SEPA Candidacy Committee Member  
 Vicar (1)  
 Synod Secretary (1)  
 Vicar, Intern, Candidate for Rostered Ministry of Word & Sacrament, Seminarian (1)  
 Full-Time Lay Leader in a Congregation (1)  
 Deacon Candidate (1)  
 Synod Counsel (1)

## Introduction

# All nine ELCA regions are represented in the responses

What is your ELCA Region?



Region	# of responses
1	19
2	28
3	47
4	28
5	60
6	31
7	32
8	30
9	33

Answered: 308

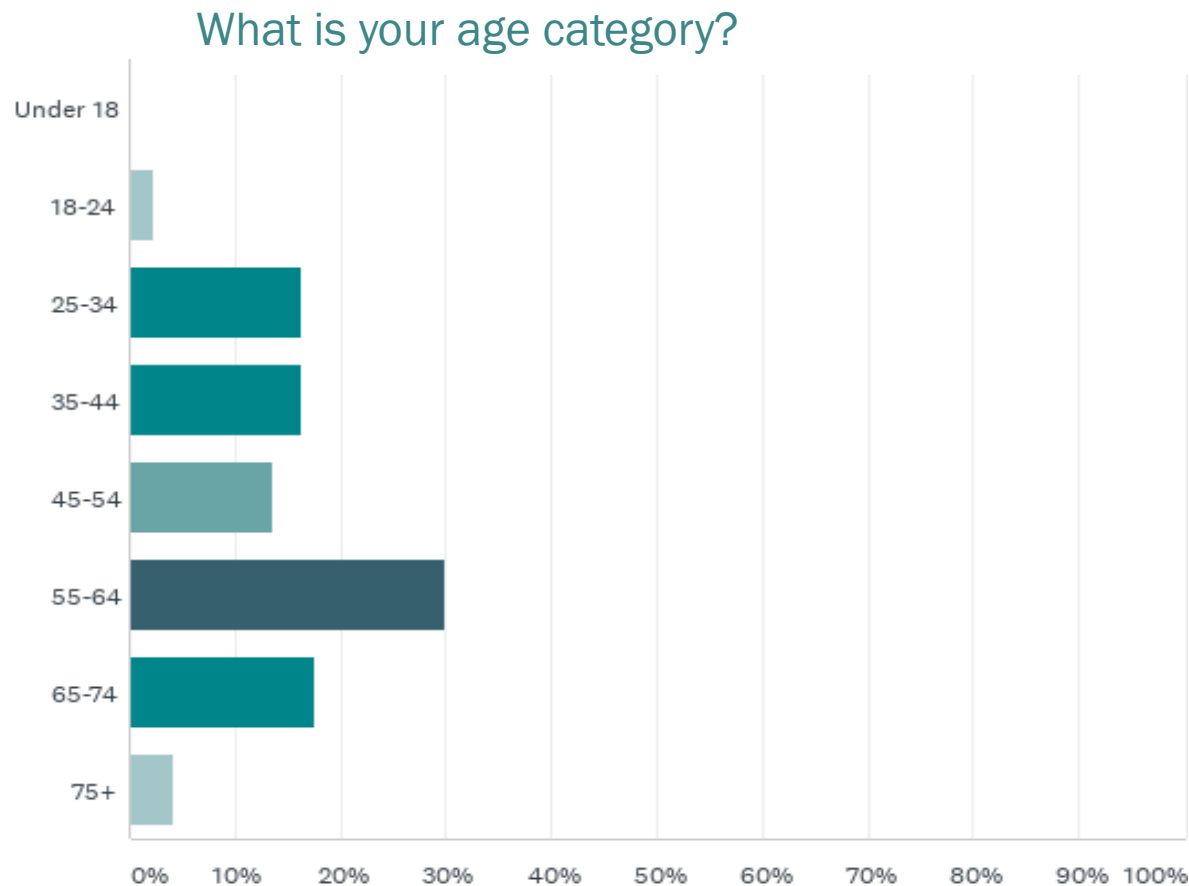
Skipped: 3





## Introduction

# Age distribution among participants is about as expected



Number of responses	
18-24	7
25-34	50
35-44	50
45-54	42
55-64	92
65-74	54
75+	13

Answered: 308 Skipped: 3

Note: Those under age 18 were not invited to take the survey.

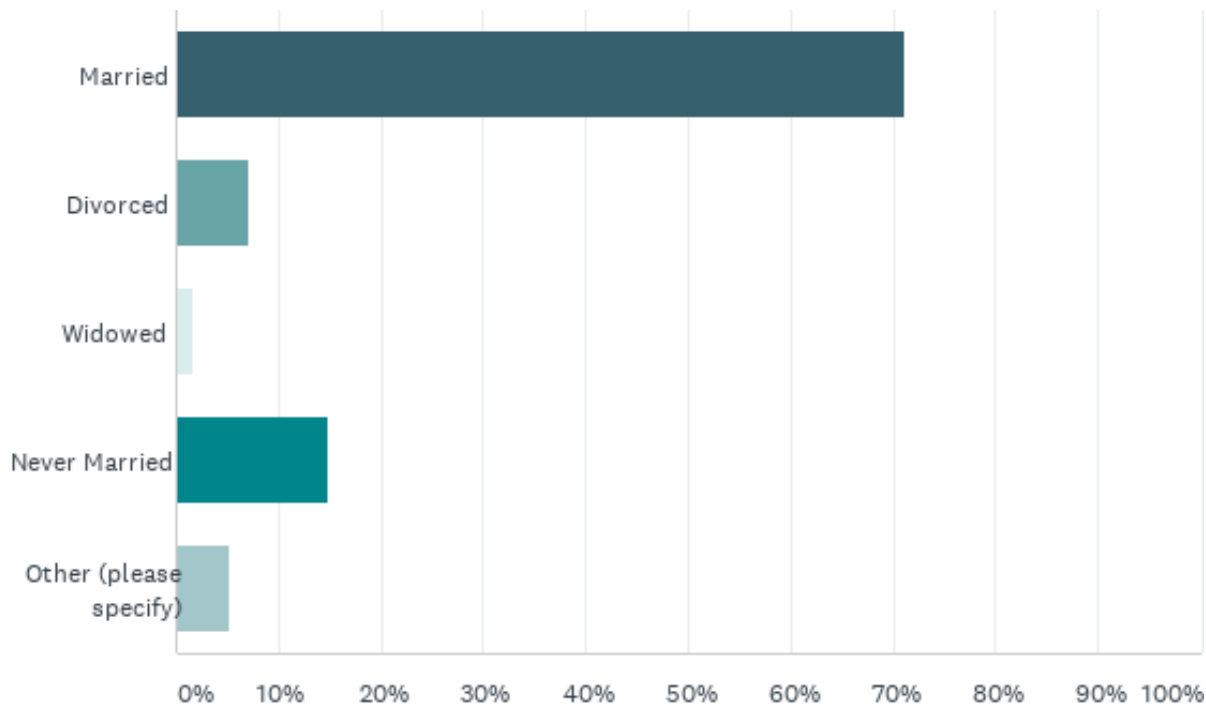


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## Introduction

# Seventy-one percent of participants in the study are married

What is your marital status?



Number of responses	
Married	217
Divorced	22
Widowed	5
Never Married	45
Other	16

Answered: 305 Skipped: 6

“Other” responses included comments such as “Why?”(2), in second marriage (4), same-sex partner (1), engaged/betrothed (2), virgin (1), partnered (1), legally married and platonic (1), long-term domestic partnership (1), N/A (1).

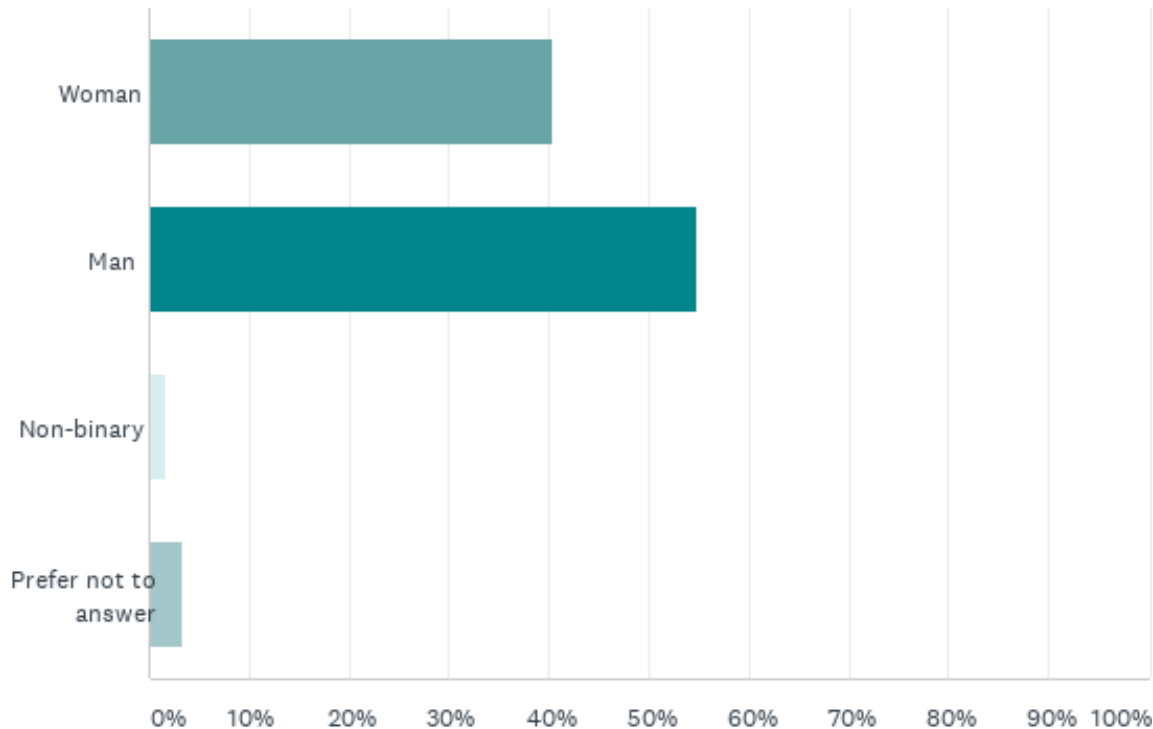


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## Introduction

# Fifty-five percent of participants in the study are men

What is your gender?



Number of responses	
Woman	123
Man	167
Non-binary	5
Prefer not to answer	10

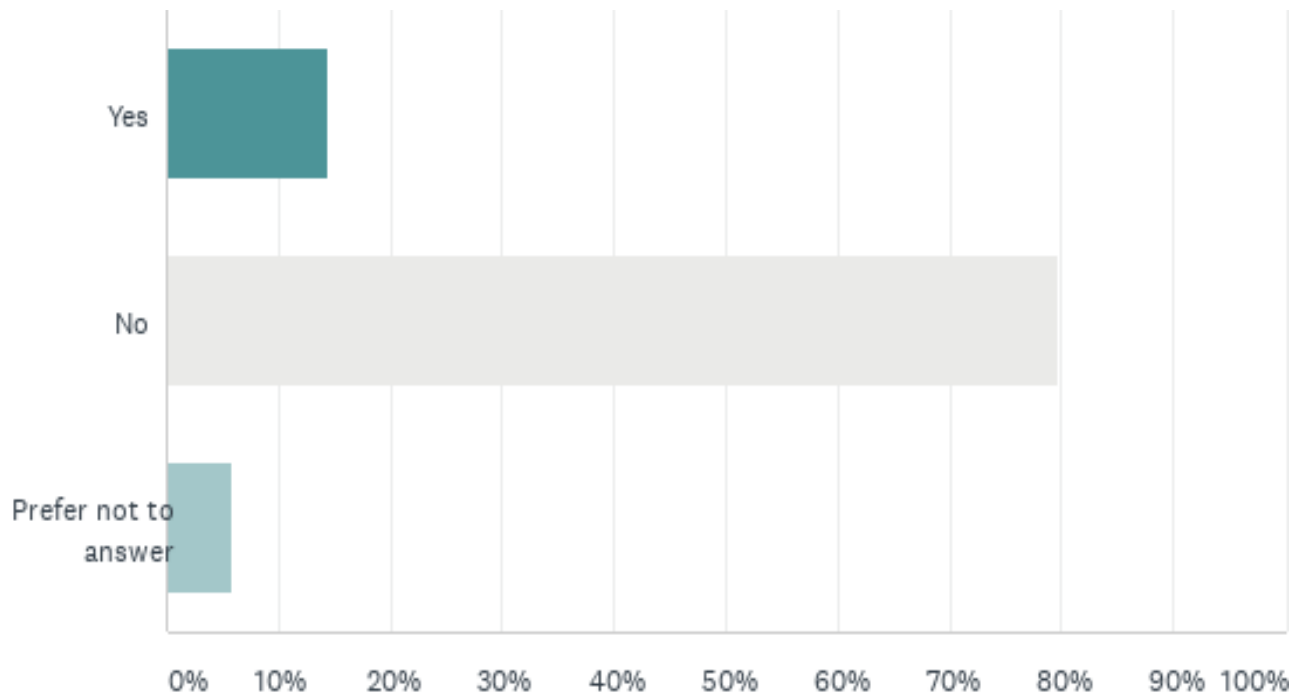
Answered: 305 Skipped: 6



## Introduction

# Fifteen percent of participants in the study identify as LGBTQIA+

Do you identify as LGBTQIA+?



	# of responses
Yes	44
No	242
Prefer not to answer	18

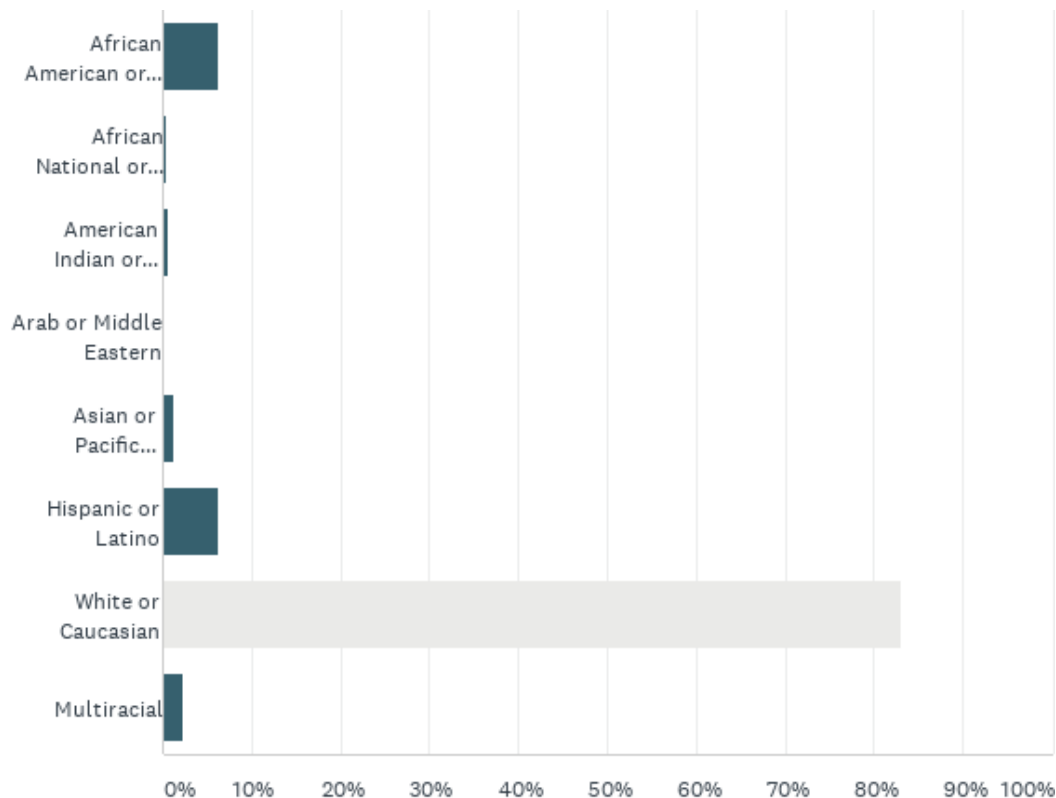
Answered: 304 Skipped: 7



## Introduction

# Seventeen percent of participants in the study identify as people of color

Which of the following best describes you?



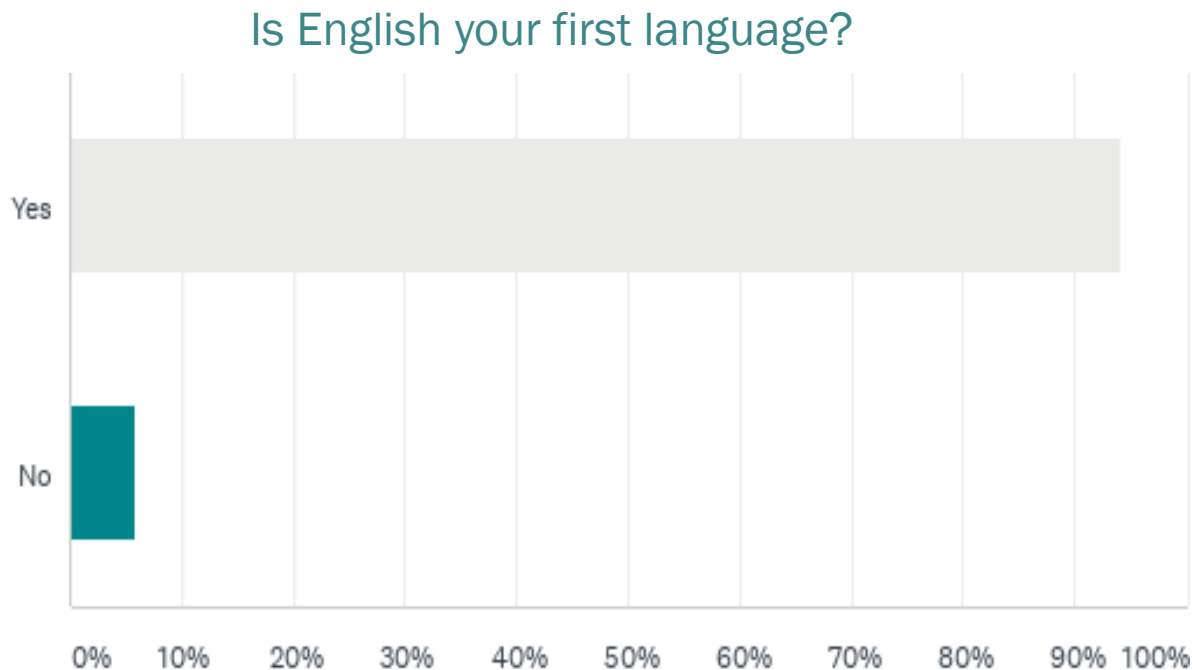
Participants describe themselves as.....	# of responses
African American or Black	19
African National or African Caribbean	1
American Indian or Alaska Native	2
Arab or Middle Eastern	0
Asian or Pacific Islander	4
Hispanic or Latino	19
White or Caucasian	253
Multiracial	7

Answered: 305 Skipped: 6



## Introduction

Six percent of participants in the study speak something besides English as their primary language



Primary language	# of responses
Español/Spanish	12
Indonesian	1
Korean	1
Vietnamese	1
Swahili	1
German	1
Kpelle or Lorma from Liberia-West African Kwaa language	1

Answered: 305 Skipped: 6



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Question 1: What do you like in the current document and would not want to see changed?



## Question #1: What do you like in the current document and would not want to see changed?

### Themes with the most responses

Participants shared 61 different things that they like about the document. Of those, six top themes emerged, and are listed here. A list of all the Question 1 themes appears on the next pages.

Theme	Number of comments from “invited” responses (189 participants)	Number of comments from web link responses (122 participants)	Total combined number of comments
1. Good overall: they like most of what’s in the document	22	25	47
2. Clarity: clear descriptions of unacceptable behavior	29	16	46
3. Brevity: people appreciate that the document is short	23	6	29
4. Covers everyone: congregations, members and rostered ministers	21	8	29
5. RM section A: expectations of preaching in accordance with the faith	8	12	20
6. Structure: the document is clear and easy to follow	14	4	18



## Question #1: What do you like in the current document and would not want to see changed?

All themes from the question 1 responses are summarized here (in parentheses: number of comments from “invited” responses /number of comments from web link responses/combined total):

- Good overall (22/25/47)
- Clarity (29/16/46)
- Brevity (23/6/29)
- Covers everyone (21/8/29)
- RM section A (8/12/20)
- Structure (14/4/18)
- RM section B.2 (7/9/16)
- Broad scope (11/4/15)
- The introduction (10/1/11/15)
- Member section (10/4/14)
- RM section B.5 (8/6/14)
- Don't change much of it (4/10/14)
- Leaves room for context (8/4/12)
- Goal of keeping people from harm (7/5/12)
- RM section B.1 (8/3/11)
- Emphasizes counseling, admonition and correction (7/4/11)
- Accountability (6/5/11)
- RM section B.3 (6/5/11)
- RM section B.7 (5/5/10)
- Addresses variety of behaviors, not only sex/private behavior (7/2/9)
- RM section B.4 (6/2/8)
- Congregations section (5/3/8)
- Readable (5/3/8)
- Needs total overhaul (3/4/7)
- RM section B.6 (3/4/7)
- Begins with gospel (4/1/5)
- The whole RM section (3/2/5)

(continued on next page)

## Question #1: What do you like in the current document and would not want to see changed?

### All themes, page 2:

- RM section B except B5 (1/3/4)
- RM section C (3/1/4)
- RM section D (3/1/4)
- The definitions (3/0/3)
- Non-aspirational (3/0/3)
- Only 4 categories of behavior subject to discipline (3/0/3)
- Don't know (2/1/3)
- Pragmatic (2/1/3)
- RM section B.9 (2/1/3)
- RM section B.8 (2/0/2)
- RMs are our spiritual and ethical leaders (2/0/2)
- Tone is suitable (1/1/2)
- A threshold beyond "annoyance" to require disciplinary measures (1/0/1)
- Calling out harassment and hate crimes (1/0/1)
- Conduct "incompatible with the character of the ministerial office" (1/0/1)
- Declaration sentences (1/0/1)
- Gotten away from heteronormativity (1/0/1)
- Guidelines (1/0/1)
- Member section A (1/0/1)
- Member section B (1/0/1)
- Member section C (1/0/1)
- Member section D (1/0/1)
- Reconciliation language important (1/0/1)
- References to the constitution (1/0/1)
- Relational, financial, and well-being (1/0/1)
- Some of RM section B (1/0/1)
- Use of "may" throughout (1/0/1)
- Use of "willful" important (1/0/1)
- Examples are specific (0/1/1)
- Grateful for this discussion (0/1/1)
- This document is necessary (0/1/1)

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Question 2: Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?

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## Question #2: Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?

### Themes with the most responses

Participants shared 93 different things that they would like to see added to the document. Of those, 11 top themes emerged, and are listed here and explored in more detail on the following pages. The themes have been rank ordered based on the total number of comments containing each theme.

Theme	Number of comments from “invited” responses (189 participants)	Number of comments from web link responses (122 participants)	Total combined number of comments
1. Nothing: The document doesn’t need any or many changes	39	11	50
2. Social media: List expectations for online behavior and speech	20	9	29
3. Protection for vulnerable groups: Specify appropriate measures of discipline for any who discriminate against, harass or otherwise abuse the very people the ELCA hopes to attract	16	13	29
4. More direction: Spell out how discipline should be decided, by whom and how/when/where to report	17	10	27
5. Cultural relevance: Update it to align with today’s society, especially regarding sexuality, marriage and family	16	8	24

(continued on next page)

**Question #2: Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?**

Themes with the most responses, p. 2

Theme	Number of comments from “invited” responses (189 participants)	Number of comments from web link responses (122 participants)	Total combined number of comments
6. Protection for pastors: Congregational leaders should not be subjected to harassment, abuse or discrimination	7	4	11
7. Expectations: List expectations rather than only focusing on what people should not do	9	2	11
8. Hate groups: RM section B.8 should include hate groups and be edited so that its intentions are clearer	4	5	9
9. Abuse of power: Prohibit intimidation and abuse of power, and restrictions to ease imbalance of power	5	3	8
10. Sexual harassment: Spell out explicitly sexual harassment, unwanted sexual advances, sexual abuse	5	2	7
11. Previous parish: Make interference in a previous parish grounds for discipline	6	0	6

## Question #2: Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?

### Theme #1: Nothing: The document doesn't need any or many changes

#### See also Question #3 theme 2

This was the most frequently occurring theme among the “invited” responses, and the second most frequently occurring among the web link responses.

Keep in mind that, when you add up all those who had something to add, they far outnumber these 50 who felt the document needs few or no changes. Representative comments from the 50 who said something about this include:

- “From my perspective, as one ordained over 30 years, I feel it covers everything. However, I wonder what millennials would add or subtract.”
- “I believe it addresses everything.”
- “Nothing comes to mind.”
- “At this time I do not think the document needs anything more to be added.”
- “It looks comprehensive.”
- “It covers everything that comes to my mind.”

## Question #2: Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?

### Theme #2: Social media: List expectations for online behavior and speech

This was the second most frequently occurring theme among the “invited” responses and the fourth most frequently occurring among the web link responses.

Representative comments from the 29 who said something about this include:

- *“Given the extensive use of social media by ministers, it may be helpful to name inappropriate use of social media as potential grounds for discipline. I realize this would need to be defined.”*
- *“There is nothing about social media in the document, not in regard to social media practice but the image/impression posts can give for both congregations and leaders.”*
- *“B.3. could be expanded to include professional presentation in social media. If something of this sort is added, care will need to be taken to identify exactly what behavior is grounds for discipline, but I would think it could include posting pictures or using language that is racist, demeaning, suggestive, bullying or otherwise inflammatory.”*
- *“On page 2, part B, number 5 (Sexual matters), it would be good to add: “To use personal social media to promote pornography or sexual content chats.”*
- *“In our current context online behavior and speech may need to be addressed - e.g. using Luther’s explanation of the 8th Commandment among other texts to guide What is considered appropriate from Rostered Ministers.”*

## Question #2: Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?

Theme #3: Protection for vulnerable groups: Specify appropriate measures of discipline for any who discriminate against, harass or otherwise abuse the very people the ELCA hopes to attract

This was tied for the fourth most frequently occurring theme among the “invited” responses and was the most frequently occurring theme among the web link responses.

Representative comments from the 29 who said something about this include:

- *“There is currently nothing explicitly stating that racism and other forms of discrimination is grounds for discipline.”*
- *“The document does [not] address the how racism and sexism are lived out in the church and the exercise of the office - what are the grounds of discipline for language and behavior that is racist and sexist?”*
- *“Add a section under member discipline to say that members may not discriminate in the process of calling a pastor or staff member based on race, gender, sexual orientation, physical limitations, age, etc., or say or do things that lead to discrimination against staff, members, or others in doing the ministry of the church.”*
- *“Some mention should be made re obvious persecution of people of color who may want to have active membership in the church.”*
- *“As racism and sexism and gender issues become more divisive, they need to be more explicitly addressed.”*



## Question #2: Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?

### Theme #4: More direction: Spell out how discipline should be decided, by whom and how/when/where to report

This was the third most frequently occurring theme among both the “invited” responses and web link responses.

Representative comments from the 27 who said something about this include:

- *“The opening paragraph says, “...this church embraces disciplinary processes of counseling, admonition, and correction, with the objective of forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing” but there is no indication in this document of how that gets carried out.”*
- *“Should there be a table of disciplines that may be imposed? This can help in consistency across the Church and give decision makers guidance that will help match the infraction to the remedy.”*
- *“I think that there should be more individuals dealing with punishment than just the bishops. Maybe a committee or council. That way it is not just one person's decision. But the decision of a group of fully informed peers.”*
- *“If the document is meant “to assist in the processes of consultation, discipline, and appeals,” then would it be helpful to include what a disciplinary procedure looks like, how the appeals process works, etc.?”*
- *“I'm not sure that I saw guidelines for synods and churches for due process and procedures for administering a disciplinary process using the guidance of Matthew 18. A process is crucial to a fair and just disciplinary situation.”*
- *“It needs to spell out where/how to report a complaint against one’s bishop.”*



## Question #2: Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?

## Theme #5: Cultural relevance: Update it to align with today's society, especially regarding sexuality, marriage and family

See also Question #3 themes 1, 4, and 6

This was tied for the fourth most frequently occurring theme among the “invited” responses and was fifth among the web link responses.

Though there is some overlap with some of the other themes, this one merited its own theme because some comments seemed to tie them all together. A few representative comments from the 25 who said something about this include:

- *“It is woefully out of date when it comes to current understanding about sexuality and gender identity. It uses language that is of previous generations. What is ‘chaste’?”*
- *“It needs to become culturally relevant. It needs to possess ... language that encourages totally healthy leaders.”*
- *“Our changing understanding of what gender and race is. This could affect the description of marriage and family.”*
- *“Does marriage and spouse need to be defined?”*
- *“... some careful consideration might be made updating dated language like “casual sexual relationship” or “promiscuity” and using more updated language about “sexual harassment” and direct restrictions regarding imbalance of power and workplace relationships.”*
- *“...not sure how you ‘manage’ oversight of chastity and abstinence – with the definition of marriage changing and folks getting married later...maybe something more along the lines of honoring close relationships one might enter into – with dignity and respect.”*

## Question #2: Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?

### Theme #6: Protection for pastors: Congregational leaders should not be subjected to harassment, abuse or discrimination

This was the sixth most frequently occurring theme among the “invited” responses and seventh among web link responses.

Representative comments from the 11 who said something about this include:

- *“Abuse of a rostered minister by a congregation member should be grounds for discipline.”*
- *“There is nothing in the document that protects rostered ministers from harassment and abuse from congregation members or whole congregations. This is a real issue that happens very often in our Synod, specifically with our female clergy.”*
- *“...we need to add a clause to prohibit any harassing or microaggressive behavior directed towards ministers who are women, people of color, or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or beyond. The disciplining of people who commit microaggressions need not be expulsory, but it must be serious and ensure that the church becomes a place where congregants or ministers need to suffer from dehumanizing behavior that directly contradicts our belief that we are all made and redeemed in the image of God.”*
- *And this one from a white RM who is a man: “I’ve personally experienced serious harassment by members of the congregation and was shocked to learn how prevalent this is outside of my personal experience.”*



## Question #2: Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?

### Theme #7: Expectations: List expectations rather than only focusing on what people should not do

This was the fifth most frequently occurring theme among the “invited” responses and ninth among the web link responses.

Representative comments from the 11 who said something about this include:

- *“Put in writing normative expectations (continuing education, Synod Assembly attendance, no plagiarism, visitation, etc.).”*
- *“Requirement that rostered leaders be diligent in caring for mental and physical health issues.”*
- *“Rostered leaders should be asked to affirm the Social Statements of the Church as well.”*
- *“I believe each baptismal promise should have some reference (peace and justice in all the world). In particular, is rostered leader actively working to dismantle racism and sexism. Also, modeling generosity and equity in financial stewardship.”*
- *“A conversation about stewardship of creation on par with other ethical and moral definitions.”*
- *“What about environmental stewardship and responsibility? Will the church take a stand on the use of harmful materials such as Styrofoam? Uplift and endorse best practices for recycling? Threaten to punish churches who do not promote creation preservation? “*



## Question #2: Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?

Theme #8: Hate groups: RM section B.8 should include hate groups and be edited so that its intentions are clearer

See also Question  
#3 theme 7

This was the ninth most frequently occurring theme among the “invited” responses and tied for sixth among web link responses.

Representative comments from the 9 who said something about this include:

- “Section B.8. might include organizations that should be banned: those promoting racism, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, white supremacy, classism, colonialism or Anglo-European hegemony, etc.”
- “I was confused about what type of organizations would be prohibited. I would like to see recognized hate groups included (Southern Poverty Law Center) as grounds for discipline.”
- “Section B.8 should be updated to include membership in White Supremacist organizations, examples include Identity Evropa, The Proud Boys, The Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nation, Volksfront, The National Socialist Movement, Creativity Alliance, etc.”
- “Definitions and Guidelines needs to include a clear condemnation of white supremacy, and white supremacist groups – there is nothing in our formal polity that forbids people from being part of white nationalist organizations, like we forbid Freemasonry. We need to condemn white supremacy, and a rostered leader should not be able to hold loyalty both to Jesus (a brown man executed by the state) and to white supremacy. “
- “We must state clearly that membership or participation in white supremacist or other hate groups is not acceptable for ELCA rostered ministers.”



## Question #2: Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?

### Theme #9: Abuse of power: Prohibit intimidation and abuse of power, and restrictions to ease imbalance of power

This was the eighth most frequently occurring theme among both the “invited” and web link responses.

Representative comments from the 8 who said something about this include:

- *“Abuse of power and sexual abuse in the church by rostered leaders. It does not explicitly talk about this within the sexual misconduct portion, instead the focus is on infidelity and abstinence which is not the overall problem.”*
- *“...more updated language about "sexual harassment" and direct restrictions regarding imbalance of power and workplace relationships.”*
- *“...if anything needs to be in this document, it is the abuse of privilege and power that it should center upon. The purpose of the document should be changed from keeping those on the margins out to how we can protect our people and leaders, especially those not in the most privileged set.”*
- *“[Add] a section that prohibits intimidation and abuse of power.”*
- *“And a section that prohibits intimidation and abuse of power.”*
- *“Abuse of spiritual authority should be addressed.”*

## Question #2: Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?

### Theme #10: Sexual harassment: Spell out explicitly sexual harassment, unwanted sexual advances, sexual abuse

This was the eighth most frequently occurring theme among the “invited” responses and ninth among web link responses.

Representative comments from the 7 who said something about this include:

- *“Much more about sexual harassment and abusive relationships with people in the congregation that might be sexual and/or emotional.”*
- *“I was in an unhealthy relationship with a pastor. I talked with a professional counselor who called the behavior abusive and harassing. I sought help from our Bishop who said since he was not sexually abusive, nor chemically dependent, nor stealing money from the church, nothing could be done. The harassment continued for months and nobody did anything to stop it. When we stay silent, we make circumstances okay. I would like to see rostered leaders be held to standards that says all abuse is not acceptable.”*
- *“Updated /extended language on: sexual harassment in rostered minister section, inappropriate emotional connections, emotional affairs, virtual / internet sexual behavior, unwanted emotional / sexual advances.”*
- *“Is emotional misconduct by rostered ministers sufficiently defined and covered?”*



## Question #2: Given the purpose of *Definitions and Guidelines*, what, if anything, needs to be in the document that is not already addressed?

### Theme #11: Previous parish: Make interference in a previous parish grounds for discipline

This was the seventh most frequently occurring theme among the “invited” responses but did not appear among the web link responses.

Representative comments from the 6 who said something about this include:

- *“A big problem with pastoral conduct is interference in the ministry of other congregations - especially conducting weddings, funerals etc., in former churches that the pastor has served, this should be addressed because it is detrimental to the current pastor and their ministry and disciplinary action to stop it needs to be acted upon by the bishops of synods when they are made aware of it and not just dismiss it.”*
- *“The inappropriate intervention of retired rostered ministers in the call process and other issues in congregations.”*
- *“I would like to see it more flushed out and addressed about clergy friendships with church members after they leave a call. I think we need a churchwide policy on this, especially since younger clergy are now serving in older congregations. I have seen on multiple occasions former pastors still being involved in an unhealthy way that undermines the current pastor. This needs to not be a synod -based decision but churchwide due to the mobility of clergy today.”*





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Question 3: What, if anything, should be changed in the current document?



### Question #3: What, if anything, should be changed in the current document?

## Themes with the most responses

Participants shared 87 different things that they would like to see changed in the document. Of those, 9 top themes emerged, and are listed here and explored in more detail on the following pages. The themes have been rank ordered based on the total number of comments containing each theme.

Theme	Number of comments from “invited” responses (189 participants)	Number of comments from web link responses (122 participants)	Total combined number of comments
1. Change the tone of the section on sexual matters to reflect faithfulness, mutuality and respect	42	50	92
2. Nothing to add/change	37	11	48
3. Re-evaluate the requirement of a consultation with one’s bishop before divorce or separation	22	11	33
4. Redefine the ideals for being in relationships; hetero marriage is not for everyone	11	5	16

### Question #3: What, if anything, should be changed in the current document?

## Themes with the most responses, p. 2

Theme	Number of comments from “invited” responses (189 participants)	Number of comments from web link responses (122 participants)	Total combined number of comments
5. Ministers of Word and Service should also be liable for confidentiality in communications	9	5	14
6. The way that family is defined in RM section 4B also needs to be updated to reflect today’s culture	4	10	14
7. Rework the RM section on “Membership in Certain Organizations”	7	4	11
8. Rework the introduction to reflect that V & E will provide aspirational language not found here, or provide aspirational language here	2	7	9
9. Rework the RM section B9 on felonies, for several issues articulated in the comments	5	4	9

### Question #3: What, if anything, should be changed in the current document?

## Theme #1: Change the tone of the section on sexual matters to reflect faithfulness, mutuality and respect

This was by far the most frequently occurring theme among both the “invited” and web link responses.

#### Representative comments from the 92 who said something about this include:

- “The language in the Sexual Matters section reads rather negatively. There is a different tone here than in the social statement Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust.”
- “I would like to see us change our language around relationships and sexuality. The sanctity of marriage, chastity, decency, and fidelity are no guarantee of right relationships and express particular cultural norms that are not inherent to our confession of faith. Language of respect and consent is far more reflective of our Christian obligation to one another. I am also much more concerned with sexual relationships between rostered leaders and congregation members than I am about consenting sexual relationships with non-members outside of the bounds of legal marriage. I would like to see this reflected in the document.”
- “As a denomination, we need to continue to develop a more realistic sex ethic—one that takes scripture and tradition seriously, but also reflects that sex is an individual and cultural expression that evolves through time and place...How can we begin to express a sex ethic that puts mutual concern (love for neighbor) as its centerpiece?”



## Question #3: What, if anything, should be changed in the current document?

### Theme #2: Nothing to add/change

This was the second most frequently occurring theme among both the “invited” and the web link responses.

Representative comments from the 48 who said something about this include:

- “It's very well written.”
- “As it pertains to the 'regular' situation needing discipline I see it as adequate.”
- “I believe that it covers everything.”
- “I do not recommend any changes.”
- “So far I did not see anything that needs to change or reworded or deleted at this time.”
- “The document is clear enough.”

### Question #3: What, if anything, should be changed in the current document?

## Theme #3: Re-evaluate the requirement of a consultation with one's bishop before divorce or separation

This was the third most frequently occurring theme among both the “invited” and the web link responses (though it tied for third among the web link responses with theme #6).

Representative comments from the 33 who said something about this include:

- “Why must divorce come with “consultation from the bishop.” Informing the bishop sure, but consultation seems like it should be reserved for a therapist, not the person with say in one's future career moves.”
- “I believe the rule about going to the bishop about divorce and getting their consent is very oppressive and outdated. While I do believe we should be willing and able to go to our bishops for their pastoral care and guidance, there are instances where the bishop cannot be trusted in their judgement and discernment. This gives the bishops too much power and removes the agency of the ministers.”
- “I worry about giving bishops power to influence divorce proceedings. Bishops are human and can do serious damage with the power they have. Having access to divorce is crucial, particularly in cases of abuse. I would strongly suggest not creating a barrier to this legal decision, which can be life-saving. Bad behavior that can happen during divorce seems to be covered in other sections.”



### Question #3: What, if anything, should be changed in the current document?

## Theme #4: Redefine the ideals for being in relationships; hetero marriage is not for everyone

This was the fourth most frequently occurring theme among the “invited” responses and was tied for the fifth most frequently occurring among the web link responses.

#### Representative comments from the 16 who said something about this include:

- “I would like to see room for cohabitation outside of marriage where it is a committed relationship progressing toward marriage. This is in part practical (living expenses are high), and in part compassionate (we trust this is not promiscuity and the individuals are acting in the best interest of the other). And it is also in part biblical. Jesus' own parents were not married when he was born, but there is no doubt they were living an honorable and committed relationship.”
- “While I certainly believe that a minister is called to uphold their vows and promises as a spouse, parent, and family member, the language of this passage needs a dramatic update. For one, because of the discrimination LGBTQ people continue to face, we need to directly affirm that the marriages of LGBTQ people and ministers are valid, holy, and sanctified, as are their families. For another, we also need to use more inclusive language when describing family situations, as ministers might find themselves in family systems that are not recognized by documentation but are just as holy.”
- “First it talks about the sanctity of marriage even though for Lutherans marriage is not a sacrament. Also, for a church that claims to be Reconciling in Christ, and which is open to sexual and gender minorities, there is a rejection of this openness when we force a community to conform to their marriage parameters.”

### Question #3: What, if anything, should be changed in the current document?

## Theme #5: Ministers of Word and Service should also be liable for confidentiality in communications

This was the fifth most frequently occurring theme among both the “invited” and the web link responses (though the fifth most frequent theme among web link responses was a tie with theme #4).

#### Representative comments from the 14 who said something about this include:

- “The matter of confidentiality needs to be nuanced. The existing text gives the impression that every conversation with a Minister of Word and Sacrament is equally confidential; this is not the case, either as a matter of law or of pastoral best-practices. (And why are deacons exempted from this expectation? They should not be.)”
- “Are deacons not held to the same standards of confidential communication? Why the emphasis on ‘Word and Sacrament’ only?”
- “Given that this document is for rostered ministers the confidentiality piece (B1) should also include Word and Service ministers also. If this speaks to the confessional booth then that needs to be stated.”
- “Word and Service ministers should be accountable for confidential communications.”



### Question #3: What, if anything, should be changed in the current document?

## Theme #6: The way that family is defined in RM section 4B also needs to be updated to reflect today's culture

This was the ninth most frequently occurring theme among the “invited” responses and was tied for the third most frequently occurring among the web link responses.

Representative comments from the 14 who said something about this include:

- “The definition of family is very... narrow. More frequently, people are working to create families of their own choosing. The church's ideals surrounding marriage, family, and relationship have the potential to do severe damage, especially towards currently single rostered ministers. Assimilation into the cisgender, heterosexual, allosexual norm that the church currently holds to is also damaging to the LGBTQIA+ ministers in our community.”
- “I would like to see a broadened understanding of what 'family' is and the unacceptable situations in which rostered ministers would be disciplined under that broadened understanding.”
- “There needs to be recognition that the idea of family has evolved over time and continues to evolve.”
- “The phrase "sanctity of marriage" has been used broadly [sic] to uphold heteronormativity and preclude LGBTQIA+ couples from marrying. Simply using this language shows that the drafters of this document have not invited a great enough diversity of LGBTQIA+ folk into its creation.”



### Question #3: What, if anything, should be changed in the current document?

## Theme #7: Rework the RM section on “membership in certain organizations”

This was the sixth most frequently occurring theme among both the “invited” and the web link responses (though it was tied for sixth among the web link responses).

Representative comments from the 11 who said something about this include:

- “I have never known which organization "claims to possess in its teaching and ceremonies that which the Lord has given solely to the Church." If you mean masons, just say masons. Or if you mean I can't be a Mormon or start a cult, that's fine, but I need examples.”
- “If you/ELCA are going to indict the Masonic Lodges, then it ought to be clearly stated. Such is already on the Candidacy Information Form.”
- “If another subsection naming white supremacy is not created, it should be listed here specifically. This section should also include all hate groups”
- “B.8 "Any organization other than the Church which claims to possess in its teaching and ceremonies that which the Lord has given solely to the Church" I have no idea what this means, or how it would be determined or applied.”



### Question #3: What, if anything, should be changed in the current document?

## Theme #8: Rework the introduction to reflect that V & E will provide aspirational language not found here

This was the eleventh most frequently occurring theme among the “invited” responses, and the fourth most frequently occurring among the web link responses.

Representative comments from the 9 who said something about this include:

- “While these kinds of documents are important for healthy functioning of the church and must be in line with other guiding documents of the church (constitution and social statements), it really is only good as a juridical document. It is not aspirational, or a space for conversation in and among our rostered ministers and candidates for the kind of leaders we might strive to be for the sake of the world. I yearn for such a space that welcomes, empowers, challenges and keeps us accountable.”
- “...more aspirational language than legalistic or perhaps an addendum or preface that speaks to the qualities of life for which we strive.”
- “We also make reference to the documents that outline our high expectations. If we don't develop an aspirational document, that will need to change.”



### Question #3: What, if anything, should be changed in the current document?

## Theme #9: Rework the RM section B9 on felonies, for several issues articulated in the comments

This was tied for the eighth most frequently occurring theme among the “invited” responses and was the sixth most frequently occurring among the web link responses (tied with another theme among the web link responses).

#### Representative comments from the 9 who said something about this include:

- “Section B.9 should acknowledge the vastly disparate treatment of people of color in the criminal justice system and repent of this systemic racism.”
- “...it seems unfair to prevent people convicted of felonies from being pastors. To me this seems like a barrier to personal growth, and also unjust in situations where the law may be wrong (e.g. overcriminalization of black and brown people).”
- “We can apparently commit felonies to ‘protest or to test a perceived unjust law or as an expression of civil disobedience’...Felonies include crimes like murder, arson, repeated drug offenses, fraud, kidnapping, larceny, and perjury...How could a pastor commit a felony and expect to maintain credentials?...There needs to be some serious clarity about how a pastor could commit such harm to another person and not be subject to discipline. If we cannot provide that, then we must remove the phrase, “but may not be grounds for discipline in those instances where the violation of the law was to protest or to test a perceived unjust law or as an expression of civil disobedience.”
- “Some of the best ministers in our church body are formerly incarcerated persons. The committee needs to consider how this language excludes or condemns these persons and how it may be expanded.”

