

**Report and Recommendations on Vision and Expectations
to Conference of Bishops and Church Council**

The Rev. Phil Hirsch, Executive Director, Domestic Mission Unit

“Vision and Expectations” was approved by the ELCA Church Council in 1990 as a document written to describe the aspirational hopes the church had for its leaders. However, it has been and is still being misused as a juridical document used to judge current and aspiring rostered ministers. This has been and continues to be a source of great pain for many in the ELCA. Whenever someone says, “that was a violation of Vision and Expectations,” it conflates a document meant to lift up the hopes of the church for all Christians, especially leaders, to lead a godly life with a legal code of conduct for rostered ministers. This dual nature needs to end.

The ELCA must have standards for the discipline of rostered ministers; these standards are already in place in the document called “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline.” This constitutionally-required document should be distinguished from the aspirational document and recognized as the one to which leaders are held accountable. In the age of the ‘Me too movement’ and the broader church’s struggle to hold its clergy accountable, there is little dispute that this church needs clear disciplinary standards.

This disciplinary policy, “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline,” is being updated by the Committee on Appeals in accordance with the ELCA Constitution. The Committee on Appeals is following a two-part process. Part one, to be presented to Church Council in March 2020, contains non-substantive edits to bring “Definitions and Guidelines” into alignment with the constitutional changes to the rosters and with the updated laws on same-gender marriage. The second part is a more substantive review by the same Committee on Appeals based on the church’s social statements, social messages, and other teachings. This substantive review will begin after the Spring 2020 joint meeting with a view towards bringing a revised document to the Church Council in Spring 2021.

There is a strong desire in the ELCA to focus on faithfulness to Christ and the Gospel, grounded in the fullness of our understanding of the one Triune God, the scriptures, and our confessions.

There is also a desire in the ELCA for a writing that would help everyone, especially leaders, to live as “models of the godly life” as disciples of Jesus Christ. There are a variety of hopes expressed throughout the ELCA about what it means to live a godly life and what it means to be a church that is more welcoming, diverse, inclusive, and active in the world and continues to examine healthy sexuality from a Christian perspective.

After 600 written responses and almost as many in-person interactions at listening events around the church¹ in the last six months, it is the recommendation of the Executive Director for Domestic Mission that the ELCA would benefit from a moment to breathe and to heal from the hurt “Vision and Expectations” has caused.

Therefore, the following recommendations are being proposed:

1. That the Church Council repeal the document called “Vision and Expectations” and that it no longer be used in the ELCA for any purpose. “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline” will be referred to in candidacy and mobility as the grounds for discipline in the church.
2. That it be made clear that “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline,” as amended, remains in effect as the document that enables clear and uniform application of the grounds for discipline of officers, rostered ministers, congregations, and members of congregations in the ELCA, and all documents and manuals, including mobility and candidacy, will be updated by June 1, 2020 to reflect this.

3. That the ELCA have a season without an aspirational document of this sort as a pastoral act to give the church breathing space. Until then it will continue to rely on the aspirations that the church has established for its members and leaders including the promises made at baptism, confirmation, and ordination.
4. That the timeline for what comes next be extended beyond the Church Council's request for a draft in the fall of 2020. Instead, the purpose of such a writing would be discussed at the fall Conference of Bishops and Church Council meetings, with a view towards presenting a draft in Spring 2021 for consideration. The reason for doing this is to give the church time to reflect on the reasons and purpose for such a writing apart from its historic use and misuse.

More information is available at www.elca/rosteredlife

¹What we heard from more than 600 written responses and nearly as many in person listening:

1. There is strong desire to focus on faithfulness to Christ and the Gospel grounded in the fullness of our understanding of the one Triune God, scriptures and our confessions.
2. "Vision and Expectations" was and is still being misused as a juridical document and continues to be a source of great pain. Whenever you hear someone say "that was a violation of Vision and Expectations" it points to a conflation of a document meant to uphold the behavioral standards of the church and its aspirational desire for all Christians, especially leaders, to lead a godly life. This dual nature needs to end.
3. There is a clear need for "Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline" to keep our church safe. This document needs to be distinguished and recognized as the one by which leaders are held accountable.
4. There is a desire for a writing that would help everyone, especially leaders, to live a full and reflective life as a disciple of Jesus Christ who desires to be a "model of a godly life"
5. There were a variety of hopes expressed for a church that is more welcoming, diverse, inclusive, active in the world and to continue to examine healthy sexuality from a Christian perspective.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Would a repeal of “Vision and Expectations” mean there are no more rules for the conduct of rostered ministers?

A. No. The grounds for discipline are outlined in Chapter 20 of the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions (CBCR) of the ELCA and in “Definition and Guidelines for Discipline.” Because “Vision and Expectations” was never the constitutionally-identified basis for the grounds of discipline, no rules would be repealed by this action.

Q. Why does “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline” need to be updated?

A. Two reasons: (1) the language of “Definitions and Guidelines” is out of date with constitutional changes relating to the roster of Ministers of Word and Service and with changes in the law regarding same-gender marriage; and (2) the existing “Definitions and Guidelines” is ten years old and is overdue for a thorough review.

Q. What is the process for updating “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline”?

A. Constitutional provision 20.21 of the CBCR commits the drafting of “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline” to the Committee on Appeals, subject to approval of the Church Council. The Committee on Appeals is updating the document in two parts. Part one, to be presented to the Church Council in March 2020, reflects non-substantive edits to bring “Definitions and Guidelines” into alignment with the constitutional changes to the rosters and with the updated laws on same-gender marriage. The second part is a more substantive review by the Committee on Appeals based on the church’s social statements, social messages, and other teachings. This substantive review will begin after the March 2020 meeting with a view towards bringing a revised document to the Church Council in Spring 2021.

Q. Who is the Committee on Appeals?

A. The Committee on Appeals is elected by the Churchwide Assembly. Its current members are:

Mr. Murray Sagsveen, Chair	Ms. Lesley M. Houston
Rev. Fritz E. Fowler, Vice Chair	Rev. Linda M. Pedersen
Rev. Cheryl Meinschein Hausman, Secretary	Deacon Erin A. Power
Mr. Emanuel Alves	Mr. George Rahdert
Rev. Paul J. Blom	Rev. Christine A. Timm
Ms. Cheyenne C. Boykin	Rev. Paul A. Wollner

Q. When will we get to see what changes the Committee on Appeals will propose?

A. The proposed revisions will be posted publicly prior to their consideration by the Church Council.

Q. Will anyone outside the Committee on Appeals have input into the update?

A. Yes. The Committee of Appeals will provide a mechanism for the submission of comments and suggestions as part of its substantive review process.