



Roster File Guidelines

Advice for Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Use a Three-Part Folder to Maintain and Retain Documents on Rostered Ministers:

1. Permanent roster documents
2. Temporary documents
3. Permanent historical documents

Respect for Information on Rostered Ministers

To practice good record keeping, bishops and synod staff are encouraged to use these guidelines for the retention of documents in the files of rostered ministers.

Ownership

Information that is retained in hard copy or electronic formats is the property of the synod; it is not the property of the synod bishop or the synod staff members to remove, retain personally, or destroy at will. Synod staff members are the custodians of the documents they retain. **Roster files are not personnel files. The person whose name is on a file does not own it and has no right to see what is in it.** The synod may choose to share anything in that file with the person, but may also choose to keep the entire contents confidential. They may do so on a comprehensive policy basis or on a case-by-case basis.

Privacy

Only persons committed to privacy should have access to these documents on a need-to-know basis. Access to the roster files is reserved for the bishop of the synod, or a designated synod staff person, the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and legal counsel.

Needs

Balancing different needs is important in any records retention policy: There is the need to keep all relevant and important documents; there is also the need not to accumulate irrelevant material. Any of the following entities may be required to

substantiate past policies, practices, and actions in many different settings: individuals, synod or churchwide offices, congregations, or other employing entities.

Consistency

Bishops or members of the synod staff are frequently called upon to use good judgment in the retention and disposition of individual documents. A pattern of consistency in the care of records is essential. Any records retention policy has validity, once accepted as policy by the organization, only if it is uniformly practiced. It should be neither selectively implemented nor disregarded at the discretion of the custodians of the records. Policies must not be modified or disregarded solely because of possible claims or litigation.

To make the task of maintaining and retaining documents on rostered ministers more efficient, a three-part folder is recommended:

1. Permanent Core Documents of the Roster File

These documents comprise the permanent core rostered minister file.

- Family information (marriage, divorce, children);
- Letters of call;
- Letters of acceptance;
- Letters of termination;
- Letters regarding the performance of a rostered minister. If such letters either warrant or do not warrant the bishop's attention, they should be acknowledged and retained in the roster file. A record of what action, if any, was taken regarding the issue must be retained.
- Personal correspondence (including letters and email) between the rostered minister and the bishop or synod staff member. Exception: don't retain "housekeeping" correspondence: change of email, change of address, invitations to events, etc.
- Correspondence and documentation on matters that could result in disciplinary action or that relate to misconduct allegations or serious concerns about conduct;
- Report of ordination;
- Report of consecration/commissioning;
- Rostered minister's reports to the bishop;
- Mobility forms – if necessary, print to PDF for inclusion in core file;
- Performance evaluations;
- Letters of recommendation;
- Medical or psychological diagnostic reports may be subject to confidentiality requirements. They should be retained if they relate to fitness for service or disability status;
- Resignation letters;
- Transfer forms;
- Misconduct training certification;
- Letter notifying reinstatement denied;

- Synod-generated forms or applications used for administrative matters pertaining to the rostered minister.

2. Temporary Documents

These documents have temporary value and may be destroyed as soon as they are no longer useful, they have reached the end of their required retention, or the requested change was processed (e.g. email, address, etc.)

- Housekeeping correspondence: change of email, change of address, invitations to celebratory events, services;
- Changes submitted to the churchwide organization;
- Contractual arrangements, including grants or sponsorships, represent vital records while the contractual agreement is in effect. **They are to be retained for seven years after the expiration of the agreement.**
- Transcripts of academic records are private and should be purged after initial placement or after satisfactory completion of a graduate program for which leave time or money has been provided.

3. Permanent Biographical Documents

These documents are historical in nature and are retained as part of a historical, biographical file for the rostered minister. Eventually this file will be placed in the synod archives in which the minister was rostered at the time of their death. These documents are **NOT** part of the minister's core roster file.

- News releases, honors, bulletins for installations, anniversaries, retirement, and funerals;
- Manuscripts and sermons;
- Photographs, identified by name, location, and date;
- Questionnaires answered by the individual, including subjective essays describing the minister's understanding of vocation;
- Educational and professional history, resumes;
- Certificate of ordination or consecration;
- Anniversary certificates.

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Constitutional Provisions for Special Circumstances

Files for persons removed from the roster

“When a minister of Word and Sacrament resigns or is removed from that roster of this church, the roster record shall be retained by the secretary of this church. . .” (churchwide bylaw 7.41.09.). A parallel provision exists for ministers of Word and Service (7.71.06.). Upon notification of the individual’s death, the file is to be sent to the archives of the synod in which the person was last listed on the roster.

Files for persons who resign from the roster

In keeping with [ELCA churchwide bylaws](#) (7.41.09.) and (7.71.06.), note that the roster records for those persons who resign from the roster are to be retained by the secretary of this church. A record of the location of the file should be kept in the synod office for retrieval of the file in the event of an application for reinstatement. Upon notification of the individual’s death, the file is to be sent to the archives of the synod in which the person was last listed on the roster.

Files for rostered ministers who resign during disciplinary hearing

When the resignation of a Minister of Word and Sacrament or a Minister of Word and Service occurs during a disciplinary investigation, but before written charges are filed, the synod bishop shall decide to what extent a record of the matter should be preserved. When the resignation of a rostered minister occurs after the written charges have been brought, a copy of the charges is to be forwarded to the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for retention as provided by ELCA churchwide bylaw (20.21.07.).

Records of the proceedings of the discipline hearing committee

If the charges were not sustained and a disciplinary hearing action was not imposed, documentary and physical evidence presented at the hearing should be returned to the party that presented the same and the balance of the material is to be destroyed. If the discipline hearing committee sustained the charges and imposed disciplinary action, (a) documentary and physical evidence shall be returned to the party that presented it; (b) the written charges, the written decision of the discipline hearing committee, and the certification or other proof that notice was given to the accused ordained minister or congregation is to be delivered to the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to be held as provided in ELCA churchwide bylaw (20.21.07.). All other material is to be destroyed.

Candidacy Records

Care of Information on Persons Who are Candidates for the Rosters of the ELCA

For information on management of synod candidacy files, please consult the *Candidacy Manual of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*. A downloadable copy is available on the ELCA's web site: elca.org.

For information on management of churchwide organization candidacy files, please consult the *Records Retention Schedule for Programmatic Units of the ELCA Churchwide Organization*. A downloadable copy is available on the ELCA's intranet.