

PRESS RELEASE

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ELCA Region 9 bishops sign “Bishops’ Relational Agreement”

In a significant action of cross-synodical collaboration, the six bishops of Region 9 of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have adopted and agreed to live into a “Bishops’ Relational Agreement for Boundaries, Candidacy, and Call Process.”

Several recent events brought attention to issues of women in ministry which propelled this regional collaboration.

In her recent book, *Holy Mischief*, author Dr. Mindy Makant, deacon, lifts voices of women. “Women are longing for the day when they are not received as consolation prizes simply for being women. After interviewing 85 female clergy across the southern U.S., I can say that this is one of the greatest desires and one of the causes of the greatest hurts. Female clergy are still more often than not seen as less than their male counterparts. They are taken less seriously, and they are paid less money. Women are tired of being treated as less than.”

In 2018, the North Carolina Synod released “Seriously?,” a video of pastors who are men reading statements made to pastors who are women. With over a million views, the video sparked discussion and reminded us once again that we still have significant work to be done to transform the landscape for women who are leaders in this church. People of all genders are realizing their roles in the ongoing reformation of this church.

Just this past August, at the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, the social statement, “*Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*,” passed with 97.03 percent support for this teaching that names patriarchy as a sin and advocates for a church – and world – marked by gender equity.

As the Spirit moved through these events and through the ongoing leadership of the rostered women of their synods, a Women’s Core Team brought the bishops of Region 9 together to use their position and the power afforded to them to address systemic issues facing rostered ministers who are women. The agreement begins by lifting up commitment to reformation.

Committed to always reforming for the health of leaders, vitality of congregations, and the flourishing of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we agree to work together as a region to address systemic issues facing rostered ministers who are women. Together, we will work to create a culture change in our region through deepening trust and relationship – creating authentic avenues for reporting, responding, training, advocacy and care.

The Rev. Bob Humphrey, bishop of the Virginia Synod, says, “The women who serve as rostered ministers in this church are remarkably gifted leaders. I am deeply grateful for and daily

inspired by the work and vision of the Region 9 Women in Ministry Core Team, including our shared commitment to equity, education, and justice represented in the relational agreement.”

The agreement includes an overhaul of the current approach to boundaries in each of the six synods, including establishing clear objectives, outcomes, and pedagogy to be used throughout the region. Additionally, the document expands this work to include gender justice and racial justice, as well as topics like intersectionality, micro/macroaggressions, and power. The agreement makes clear the ways synods across the region will operate in the same ways regarding boundary violations and participation in boundary training.

Knowing the power of having women in visible leadership roles, the bishops commit to finding new ways to raise the profile of rostered ministers, including regularly inviting rostered ministers who are women to preach at synodical gatherings, especially synod assembly, as well as striving for gender parity in appointments as deans and other public leadership roles.

The bishops will begin addressing issues of pay equity to benefit all leaders through the intentional use of a Region 9 Financial Worksheet that will now be part of the call process and filled out by congregations prior to receiving names for consideration. Using the worksheet will mitigate financial offers that are affected by the intersection of race, gender, and age.

The “Bishops’ Relational Agreement for Boundaries, Candidacy, and Call Process” is a dynamic document that will be reviewed, adapted, and affirmed annually. The bishops of Region 9 are committed to finding ways to walk alongside all rostered ministers so that the whole community might flourish.

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This work has been the partnership of a Region 9 Women’s Core Team and the bishops of Region 9. The bishops of Region 9 are: the Rev. Idalia Negrón Caamaño (Caribbean), the Rev. Pedro Suárez (Florida-Bahamas), the Rev. Kevin Strickland (Southeastern), the Rev. Herman Yoos (South Carolina), the Rev. Tim Smith (North Carolina), and the Rev. Robert F. Humphrey (Virginia). The Region 9 Women’s Core Team members are: Nereida Kercado (Director for Evangelical Mission, Caribbean), Bishop Idalia Negrón Caamaño (Caribbean), Deacon Connie Schmucker (Assistant to the Bishop, Florida-Bahamas), the Rev. Karen Boda (Assistant to the Bishop, Southeastern), the Rev. Ginny Aebischer (Assistant to the Bishop, South Carolina), the Rev. Lucille “CeCee” Mills (Associate Director for Evangelical Mission, North Carolina), the Rev. Danielle DeNise (Director for Evangelical Mission, North Carolina), the Rev. Sara Ilderton (Assistant to the Bishop, North Carolina), Deacon Tammy Jones West (Assistant to the Bishop, North Carolina), Ms. Catherine Fink (North Carolina), Dr. Mindy Makant, deacon (Lenoir-Rhyne University, North Carolina), the Rev. Kelly Bayer Derrick (Assistant to the Bishop, Virginia), the Rev. Dr. Mary Shore (Rector/Dean of LTSS), and the Rev. Ruth Hamilton (Region 9 Candidacy Manager).

The complete “Bishops’ Relational Agreement for Boundaries, Candidacy, and Call Process” is available [here](#). [\[link to the BRA on each synod’s site\]](#).

[“Seriously?” video](#)

[“Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action”](#)