Southeast Michigan Synod Sexual Misconduct Policy At-A-Glance

What is Sexual Misconduct?

In this context, sexual misconduct is criminal or non-criminal activity in which a Rostered Minister or Licensed Lay Minister (RM/LLM) engages in any sexual or romantic behavior with a parishioner, client, employee, co-worker, volunteer, or, if married, any person other than one's own spouse. This includes, but is not limited to, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, and sexual abuse. The definitions of each of these terms are on Page 2 of the full Sexual Misconduct Policy Document, available, located on the Synod Website under Congregational Resources.

INITIAL REPORT

What happens if I report a complaint?

If the complaint is against a Rostered Minister or Licensed Lay Minister of this synod, please contact the Bishop or an Assistant to the Bishop.

Rev. Don Kreiss, Bishop	d.kreiss@semisynod.com	248.535.4211 c
Rev. Jen Kiefer	j.kiefer@semisynod.com	734.883.5218 c
Mr. C.J. Clark	cj.clark@semisynod.com	231.670.6946 c
Ms. Robin McCants	r.mccants@semisynod.com	313.618.9809 c
Ms. Beth Fisher	b.fisher@semisynod.com	248.763.9685 c

The Bishop, accompanied by an Assistant to the Bishop or other Bishop's designee, will then conduct an interview with the complainant, and appoint a contact person from the SEMI Synod to keep in touch, inform the complainant of significant developments, and be available to respond to the complainant's concerns about the process.

If the complainant feels uncomfortable about contacting someone in the Bishop's office, they may contact a member of the SEMI Synod Discipline Committee listed below:

SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN SYNOD DISCIPLINE COMMITTEE
2025-2027

Name	Term Ending	Contact Information
ALSUP, Pat 27207 Charles Drive Southfield, MI 48076	2031	alsupp0917@sbcglobal.net (C) 248.752.3346
BODE, Pastor Matthew Zion Lutheran Church 143 Albany Ferndale, MI 48220	2031	(C) 313.492.8348 mdbode76@gmail.com

BROOKS, Joyce	2027	(C) 313.348.0025 chuckjoyce@aol.com
CHANDLER, Roland 15650 Fordham Detroit, MI 48205	2031	(H) 313.580.2042 splitpeoples@yahoo.com
FOGLE, PASTOR Jim Celebration Lutheran Church 39375 Joy Road Westland, MI	2029	(C) 734.658.3026 (H) 734.469.4190 revfogle@hotmail.com
MURRAY, Alex 9188 Cooper Ridge Dr. Davison, MI 48423	2029	(C) 810.287.1278 (H) 810.412.4127 alsylmurray@charter.net
MUZZIN, Pastor Susanna Amazing Grace Lutheran Church 29860 Dequindre Warren, MI 48092	2029	(C) 248.312.8194 (W) 586.751.7750 pastorsusannaaglc@gmail.com
NIEMAN, Pastor Colleen	2027	(C) 586.243.2783 cfsk@aol.com
RUSSELL, Brent 12685 Highland Road Hartland, MI 48353	2027	419.360.6855 brussell@ameritech.net
WENSKAY, Roxanne 1260 Whitmore Road Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304	2029	(C) 248.505.3455 wenskayrox@outlook.com
WERNER, Pastor Emily 335 Old Creek Drive Saline, MI	2031	(C) 616.745.4737 emwerner80@gmail.com

If the complaint is against the Bishop or someone in the Bishop's office, please contact the Consultant for the Prevention of Sexual Misconduct for the ELCA or the Office of the Secretary of the ELCA.

Consultant for the Prevention of Sexual Misconduct in the ELCA

Kendra Stea
Email via secure form
773-380-2568

Office of the Secretary of the ELCA

Secretary Pastor Lucille "CeCee" Mills
(773) 380-2800

If the alleged victim is a child or an "adult at risk of harm," law enforcement must and will be notified.

If the allegation involves a crime against an adult who is not "at risk of harm," the survivor will decide whether to report that crime to law enforcement.

If there is a related criminal investigation, the Synod's own process may be delayed while law enforcement does its work. The outcome of a related civil or criminal legal proceeding does not necessarily dictate the outcome of the church's disciplinary process.

If the complainant is a survivor, the Bishop will recommend pastoral counseling and support options. Because the Bishop's office will be involved in the investigation, the Bishop's office cannot provide that support directly.

After the initial interview, the Bishop's office will review the evidence. If the complaint is credible, the Bishop's office will conduct a thorough, timely, and confidential investigation. This may include:

- Further conversation with the complainant
- Conversation with the accused RM/LLM
- Review of records
- Interviews of former bishops, colleagues, former assistants to the bishop, ministers in past congregations, other Rostered Ministers who followed the accused RM/LLM in their call, etc.
- Interviews with other witnesses

What if I am accused of sexual misconduct?

The Bishop, together with designated witness, will notify the accused RM/LLM.

The Bishop will:

- Request a response, possibly in writing
- Assure the accused RM/LLM that they have a full and fair opportunity to contest the accusations
- Explain the process
- Answer the RM/LLM's questions about the process
- Discourage the RM/LLM from having any contact with the complainant, either directly or indirectly
- Express care and concern for the RM/LLM, the RM/LLM's family, and the affected congregation; however, under no circumstances will any employee of the Synod function as advocate, pastor, or counselor to the RM/LLM or the RM/LLM's family.
- Invite the RM/LLM to contact an advocate. The Synod will assist the RM/LLM in finding one, and the RM/LLM may also decline to use an advocate.
- Appoint a contact person to keep the RM/LLM informed and answer any questions about the process.

Pending information disclosed during the investigation, these are the options open to the Bishop:

- Taking no further action at this time
- Pursuing further investigation
- Requesting the RM/LLM to undergo a psycho-diagnostic evaluation
- Seeking a resolution by consulting directly with the parties
- Requesting the congregation to take some action
- Reporting to legal authorities
- Convening a consultation or advisory panel
- Initiating the formal disciplinary process
- Requesting that the RM/LLM resign from their call
- Requesting that the RM/LLM resign from the roster

Depending upon the circumstances, there may be other options as well. Under our ELCA polity, the bishop cannot force a minister to resign. Only the ELCA Disciplinary Process can remove a RM/LLM from their call involuntarily.

NEXT STEPS

What happens if the investigation shows sexual misconduct has occurred?

A Consultation or Advisory Panel may be convened; or a formal Disciplinary Process may be initiated with ELCA Churchwide offices.

What is a Consultation or Advisory Panel?

A consultation or advisory panel is a small group of rostered ministers and laypersons asked to recommend a course of action to the bishop. They may do their own investigation. If possible, the panel will try to resolve the conflict through recommendations that are pastoral, and that will eliminate the need for disciplinary proceedings, as long as those recommendations are accepted by everyone involved. If that isn't possible, the panel will advise the Bishop as to whether the disciplinary process should be initiated.

How does an official Disciplinary Process work?

Disciplinary proceedings are the formal process by which the ELCA determines if a RM/LLM is guilty of the charges and, if so, what the penalty should be. The rules, as well as the rights of the accused, accuser, and witnesses, are determined by Chapter 20 of the ELCA's Constitution.

Here is a brief summary of how the process for a full disciplinary hearing works:

- The Bishop will initiate official proceedings against the accused RM/LLM by:
    - Filing written charges that describe the accused offense
    - Detailing the facts supporting the charge
    - Describing any other circumstances concerning the alleged misconduct
- A 12-person committee will hold a hearing, resembling a court trial, on the charges. The committee is comprised of:

    - Six people from a panel elected by the SEMI Synod
    - Six people from a panel elected by Churchwide
- The Bishop will present testimony and other evidence in support of the charges
- The RM/LLM will present testimony and other evidence in opposition to the charges
- The Committee will decide whether the charges are true, and what discipline should be imposed. This may include:
    - Private censure and admonition
    - Suspension from the roster of the ELCA for a designated period of time, or until the RM/LLM complies with specified conditions
    - Removal from the ELCA roster
- The Committee's decision is usually made about 4 months after charges are filed
- There is an appeals process via the Churchwide Committee on Appeals

Typically, the Bishop will not initiate formal disciplinary proceedings unless the complainant and/or survivor agree to be a witness against the RM/LLM, but that is not always the case.

Alternative process

If the Bishop is not seeking removal or suspension for more than three months, an alternative, less formal process may be used, with only six members on the hearing committee. The committee still decides whether the charges are true and what discipline should be imposed.

DISCLOSURE

Except in unusual circumstances, the Synod will disclose all serious allegations of sexual misconduct by RM/LLMs.

In these situations, the Bishop or Bishop's designee will disclose sexual misconduct:

- The RM/LLM admits to committing sexual misconduct
- The RM/LLM resigns their call from the roster of the ELCA after being accused of sexual misconduct
- The RM/LLM is placed on leave of absence or temporarily suspended in response to an allegation of sexual misconduct
- The RM/LLM is suspended or removed from the roster as a result of formal disciplinary proceedings
- Secular legal proceedings (civil or criminal) are initiated against the RM/LLM

The Bishop or Bishop's designee will disclose RM/LLM sexual misconduct to:

- The ministership of the RM/LLM's congregation
- The members of the RM/LLM's present congregation
- To synods where the RM/LLM was previously rostered
- To other RM/LLMs within the Cluster or the entire Synod

In some situations, wider disclosure to previous congregations, to the entire Synod, or to the news media may be made as well.

The following details may be disclosed:

- The fact that the RM/LLM has been accused of, has admitted to, has been found guilty of committing sexual misconduct, or has resigned
- The gender of the survivor;
- If the survivor was an adult or a minor at the time of the misconduct
- If the survivor was a member of the RM/LLM's congregation or a person to whom the RM/LLM was providing pastoral care.
- If the RM/LLM has denied the allegations

Disclosure should never include the name of the survivor (and/or complainant) or facts from which they could be readily identified.