



# POWER AND BOUNDARIES FOR CHURCH LEADERS

TAKING EXCELLENT CARE OF WHAT HAS BEEN  
ENTRUSTED TO US



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## PURPOSE

Tend a space where you're able to reflect upon the intersections of power, boundaries & your lived experiences as lay church leaders.

# **Why?**

**1. Ethical standards support ethical communities**

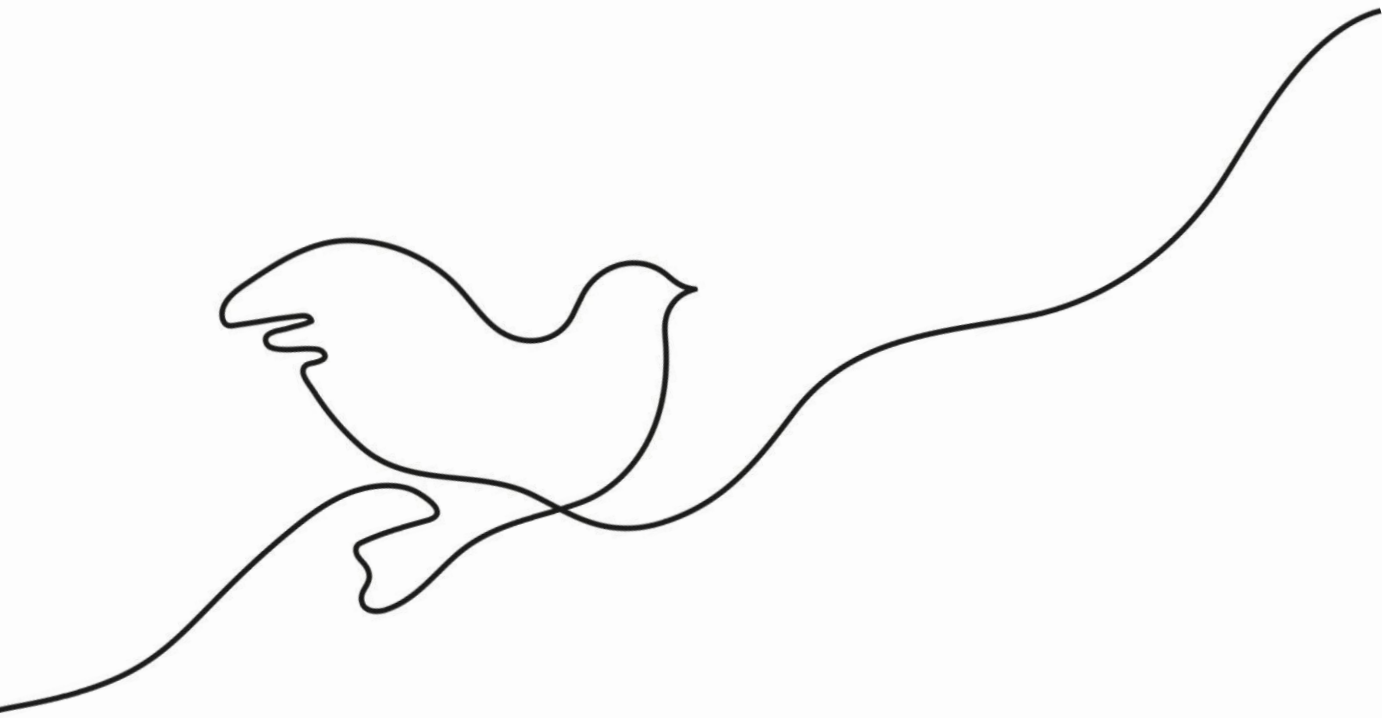
**2. Stewarding power and boundaries with wisdom strengthens the witness of the body of Christ.**

## **Chapter 4.**

### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

- \*C4.01.** The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world.

# RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES



In the healthiest groups, people speak and listen in about equal measure.

R = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others.

E = use EMPATHETIC listening.

S = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles.

P = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak.

E = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions.

C = keep CONFIDENTIALITY.

T = TRUST ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong.

From The Kaleidoscope Institute

<https://www.kscopeinstitute.org/kitoolkit>

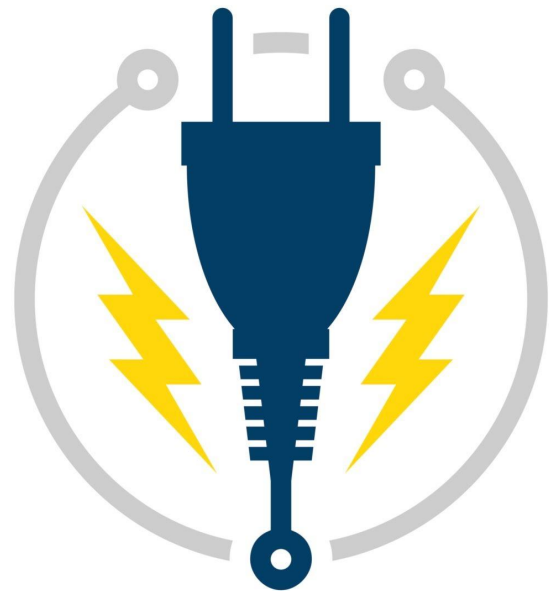


**You bring  
different lenses.**



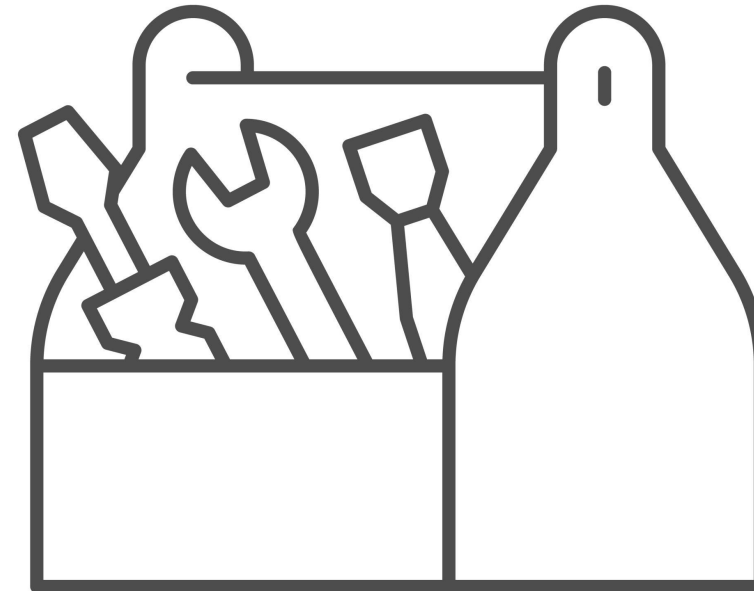
Goals for the time

# EMPOWER



Explore the topic in a way that relates to your lived experience as a church leader. Provide a theological framework for why this matters.

# EQUIP



Provide you with definitions & resources that can be part of your life toolkit and your toolkit in helping youth develop boundaries.

# EDUCATE



Educate in a way that prevents misconduct and the abuse of power.



context collapse

social cognition system

Introductions:

Name

Congregation

Two prompts

**1. What do you like about  
being a church council  
member?**

**2. What is hard about being  
a church council  
member?**

# THE IMPACT OF WRITING



# SCRIPTURAL AND THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING



# SCRIPTURAL AND THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

- Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets". - Matthew 22:37-40
- Small Catechism; explanation of 5th commandment: "We should fear and love God that we may not hurt nor harm our neighbor in their body, but help and befriend them in every bodily need [in every need and danger of life and body]."





**Caring about the wise  
use of power & the  
tending of boundaries  
is a way to care for our  
neighbor.**

And Jesus came and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth is given to me."

- Matthew 28:18

## The Great Commission

Jesus went to see the disciples after he had been raised from the dead. They buzzed with excitement. "Is that you, Jesus?" "We're so glad to see you!" "Do you want something to eat?"

Jesus smiled. "Peace be with you!" he said. "I have things to tell you!" The disciples gathered close around Jesus, eager to listen to him.

Jesus began, "God has given me all the power in heaven and earth."

The disciples looked at each other and began chattering again. "Whoa!" "Wonderful!" "We knew it!" "Fantastic!" "What will you do first?"

"Wait!" Jesus said. "There's more!" The disciples listened

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carefully. "Go everywhere in the world and teach people about me. And remember, I will always be with you!"

Jesus returned to heaven. The happy disciples soon began the work Jesus had told them to do.

★ What would you have done if you were in the room when Jesus appeared to the disciples?



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# What is stewardship?

Taking excellent care of what has been  
entrusted to us

# What are boundaries?

Take a moment to write some of the things you already know about this topic.



The story of creation	
Boundaries are fundamental structures that establish and preserve identity.	Mahlberg and Nessian
Boundaries reveal where I end and you begin; they help me to keep being me without merging into you.	
Boundaries create the container within which your yes is authentic.	Adrienne Maree Brown
Boundaries are the structures which support the growth of the human and its appropriate intimacies and community.	Mahlberg and Nessian

<p>Boundaries aren't universally understood. Boundaries are profoundly contextual.</p>	
<p>Boundaries serve as doorways opening to wonderful experiences of love that are not otherwise possible. Only with the safety, mutual accountability and permission of love is free expression of our most creative selves possible</p>	<p>Mahlberg and Nessian</p>
<p>An often invisible line that defines what behaviors are acceptable for an individual and/or group.</p>	
<p>Boundaries are not neutral. Power dynamics, identity, and privilege shape how boundaries are set, respected, and challenged.</p>	

**What are some of the things  
life has already taught you  
about this topic?**

Take a moment to write some of the insights and lessons you've encountered along the way.

# What is power?

The ability to influence the thinking and behavior of other people

# Stereotypes about power

**MONEY**  
i\$  
**POWER**

**KNOWLEDGE**  
IS  
**POWER**



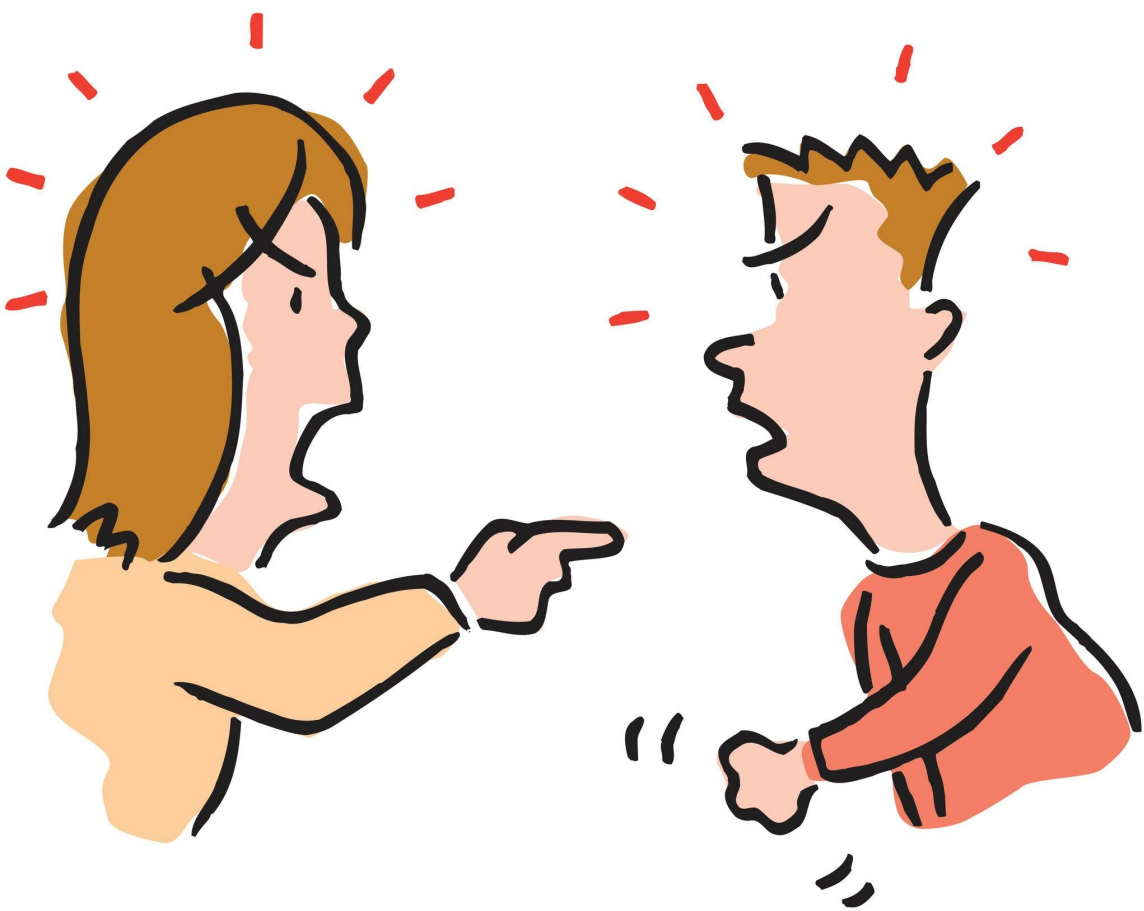
Power-Hungry!

**DRUNK**  
**WITH POWER**

Here, let me help you unpack from  
that power trip you  
just went on.

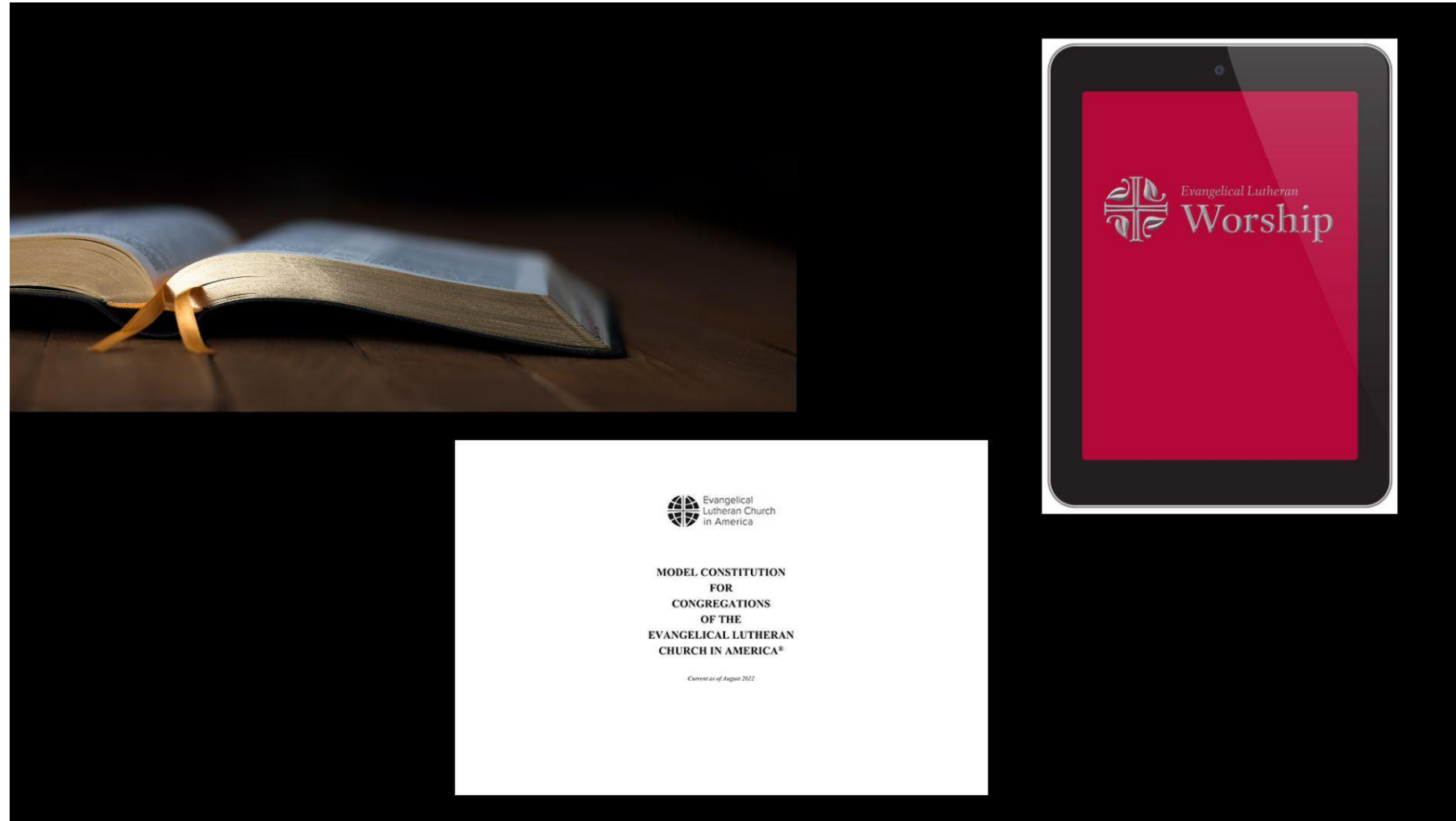


someecards  
user card

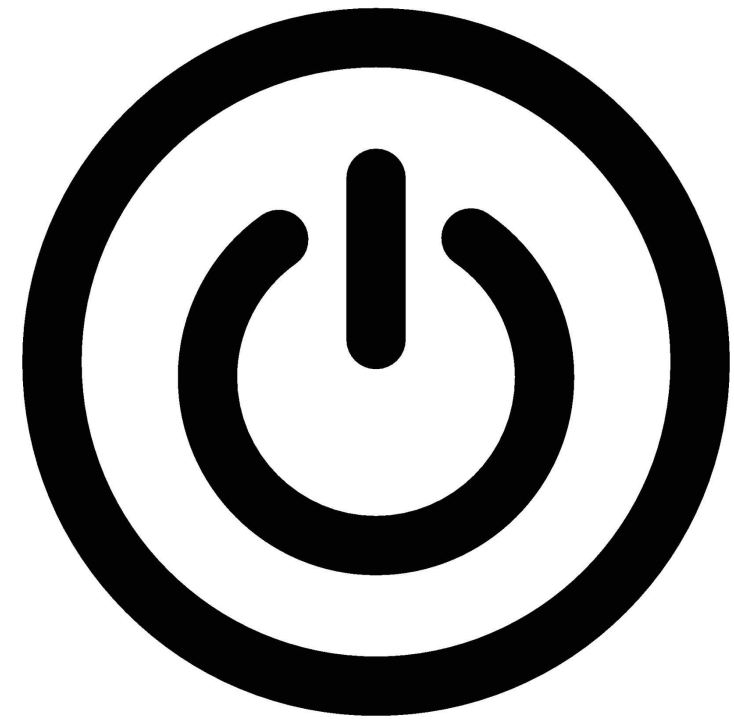


**Power is not  
inherently good or  
bad. It is instead an  
active force that can  
oppress or liberate.**

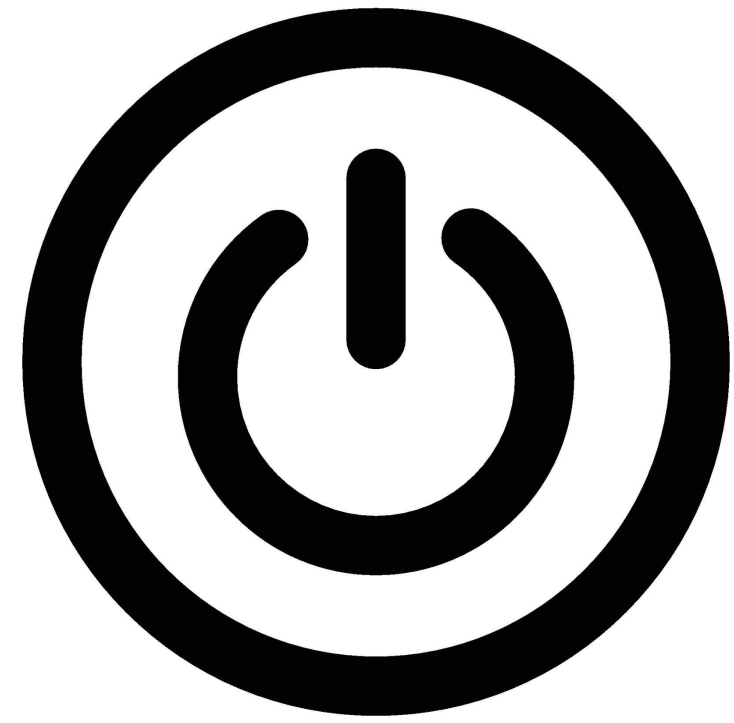




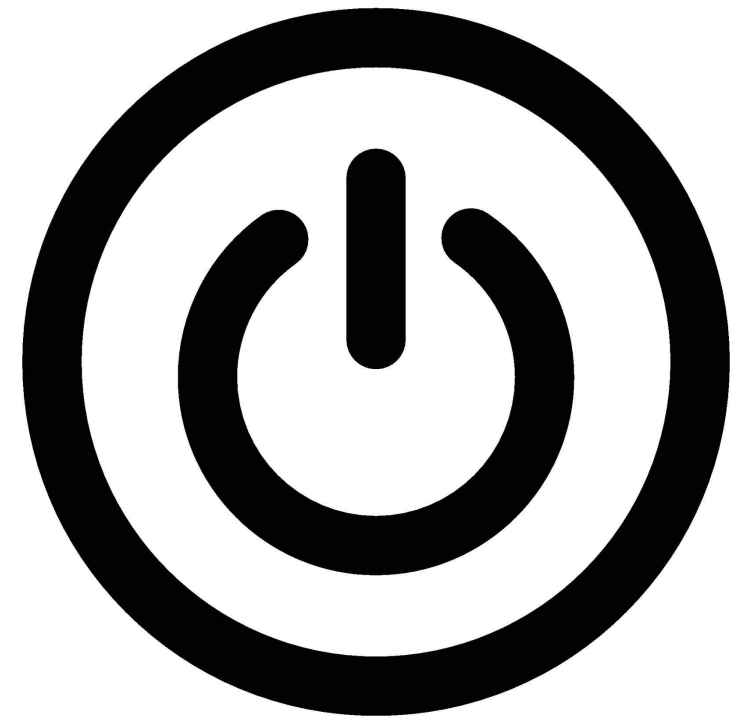
**power is  
everywhere!**



**formal power**  
**and**  
**informal power**



# **Power in a Council Meeting**



# **Council Covenants & Standards of Behavior**

**Chapter 12.**  
**CONGREGATION COUNCIL**

- C12.04.** The Congregation Council shall have general oversight of the life and activities of this congregation, and in particular its worship life, to the end that everything be done in accordance with the Word of God and the faith and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The duties of the Congregation Council shall include the following:
- a. To lead this congregation in stating its mission, to do long-range planning, to set goals and priorities, and to evaluate its activities in light of its mission and goals.
  - b. To seek to involve all members of this congregation in worship, learning, witness, service, and support.
  - c. To oversee and provide for the administration of this congregation to enable it to fulfill its functions and perform its mission.
  - d. To maintain supportive relationships with the rostered minister(s) and staff and help them annually to evaluate the fulfillment of their calling or employment.
  - e. To be examples individually and corporately of the style of life and ministry expected of all baptized persons.
  - f. To promote a congregational climate of peace and goodwill and, as differences and conflicts arise, to endeavor to foster mutual understanding.
  - g. To arrange for pastoral service during the sickness or absence of the pastor.
  - h. To emphasize support of the synod and churchwide organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as well as cooperation with other congregations, both Lutheran and non-Lutheran, subject to established policies of the synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
  - i. To recommend and encourage the use of program resources produced or approved by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
  - j. To seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the ministry of the Gospel.



## A BEHAVIORAL COVENANT OF LEADERSHIP

AT  
FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH  
BATTLE LAKE, MINNESOTA

### Our Promise to God

We promise to pray, alone and together, to thank God and to ask God's help in our lives and in our work for our Church, and we promise to listen to God's answer to us.

### Our Promise to Our Church Family

We promise to demonstrate our leadership and commitment to our Church by our example.

We promise to support our pastor and staff so that their efforts can be most productive.

We promise to try to discover what is best for our Church as a whole, not what may be best for us or for some small group.

### Our Promises to Each Other on the Church Council

We promise to respect and care for each other.

We promise to treat our time on the Council as an opportunity to make an important gift to our Church.

We promise to listen with an open, nonjudgmental mind to the words and ideas of the others in our Church and on the Council.

We promise to discuss, debate and disagree openly, in Council meetings, expressing ourselves as clearly and honestly as possible, so that we are certain that the Council understands our point of view.

We promise to support the final decision of the Council whether it reflects our view or not.

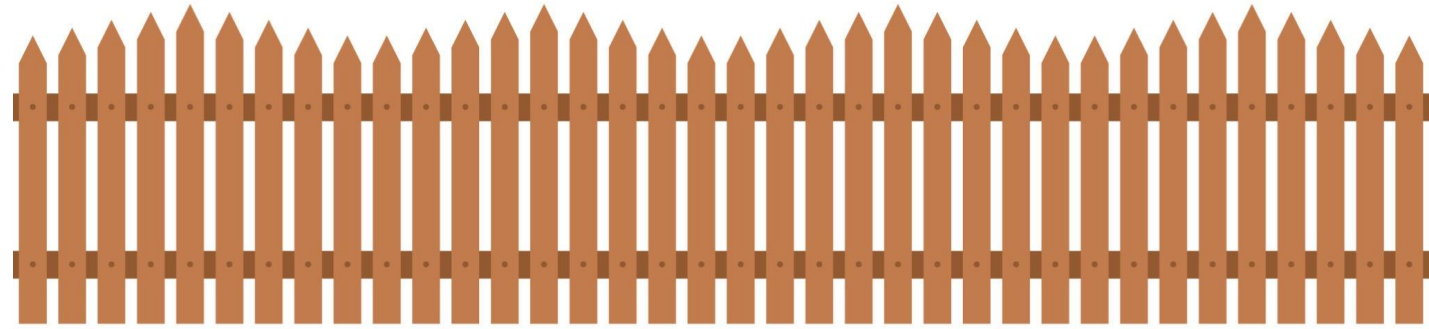
We promise to respect confidentiality regarding council decisions, personal matters & sensitive issues.

We promise to not act individually in representing council decisions.

Anyone not abiding by this covenant can be removed from the council by the Executive Council Committee.

# REFLECTION

When have you experienced the wise use of power in the life of the church?

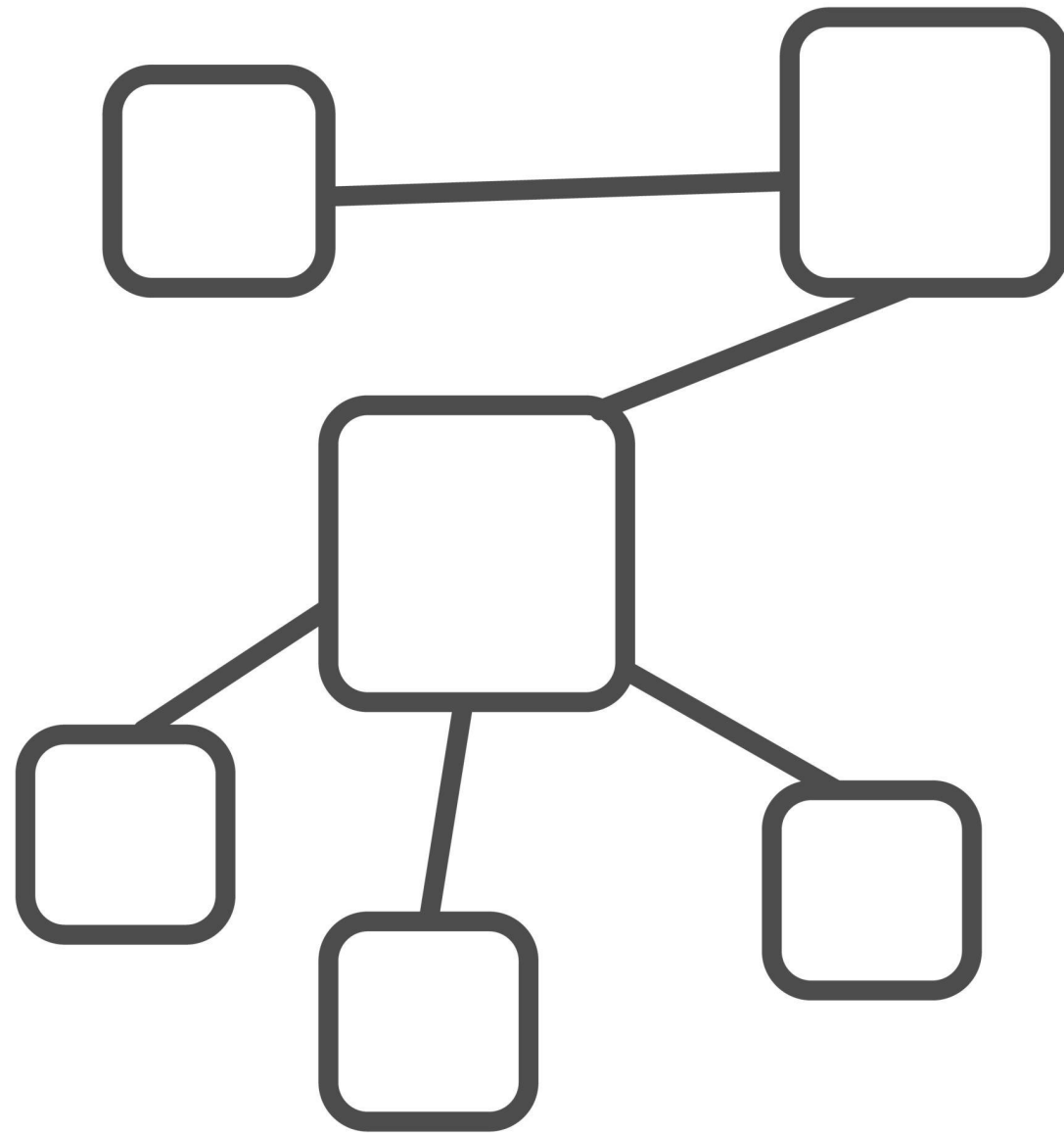


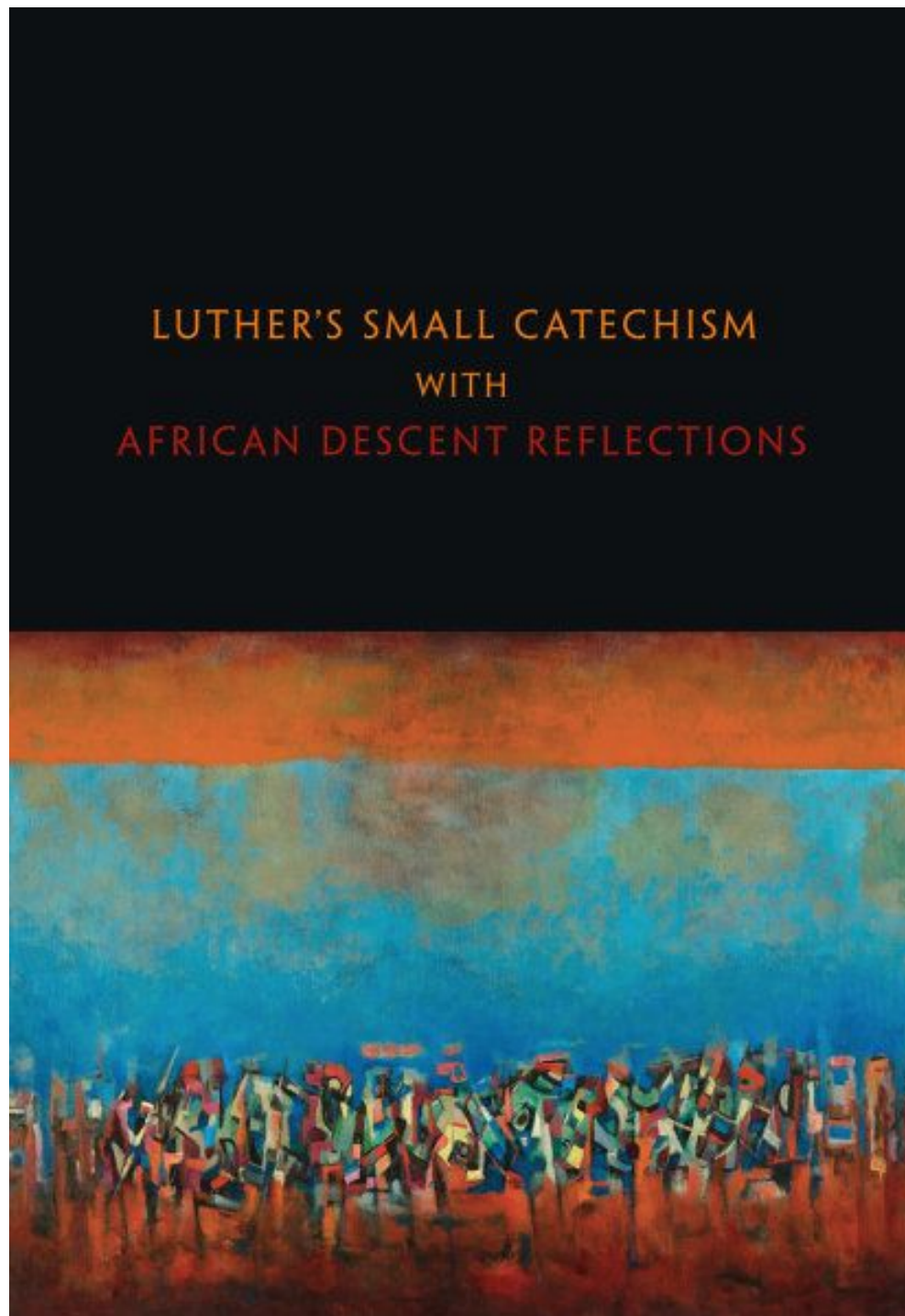
When have you experienced power misused in the life of the church?

# Power Maps

*Reflect upon all areas of your life.*

*Where are you currently a steward of power? Where and when are you influencing the thinking and behavior of other people?*



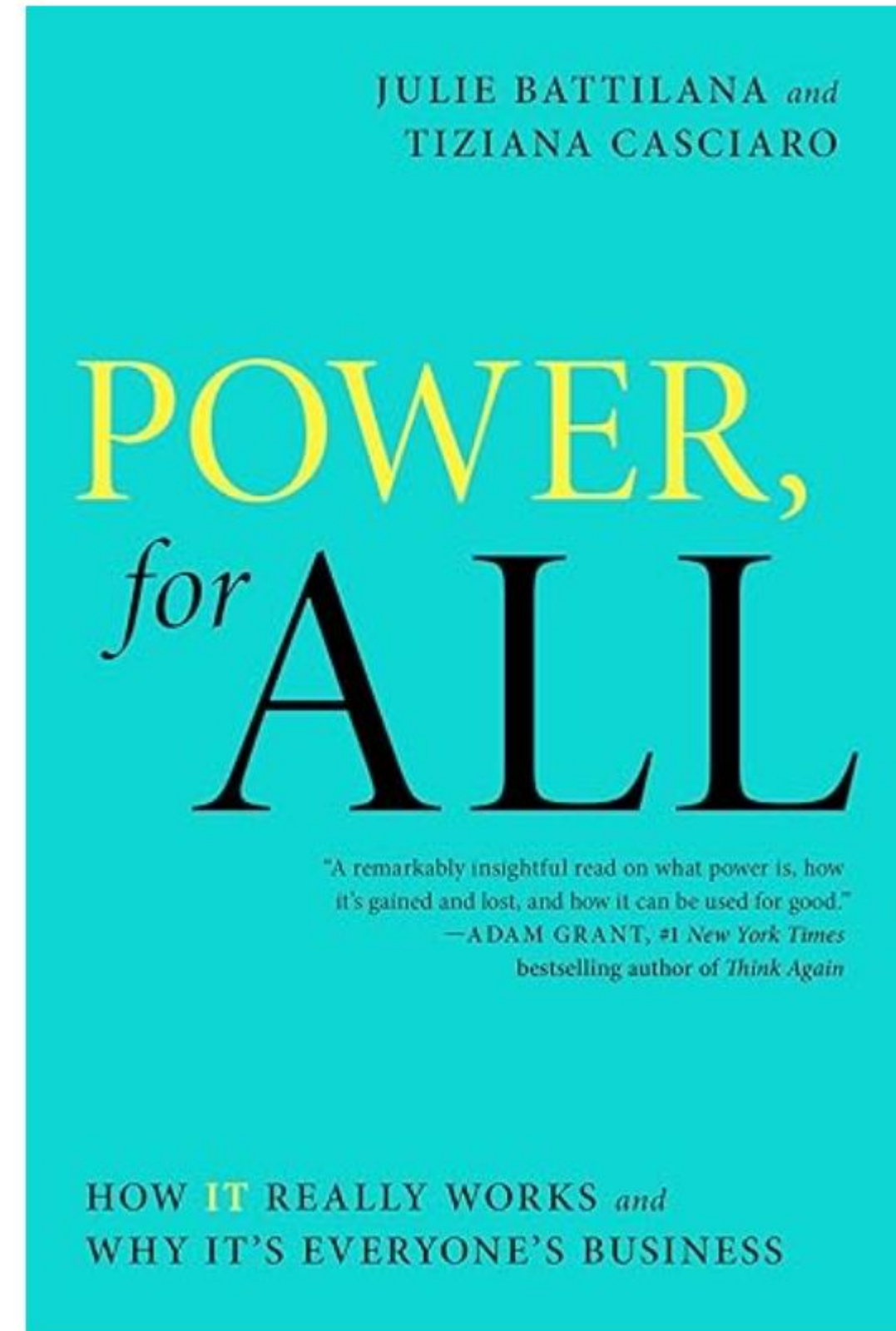


# ‘And deliver us from evil’

Evil is the abuse of power. Evil causes individuals harm and injury. Evil creates socioeconomic, ideological and institutional chaos and denigrates sacred bodies and spirits in community...So, when we pray “deliver us from evil” - we are calling on God to keep us from acting in evil ways. Asking God to deliver us from evil is a call for resistance.

# Research on Power

- The more power a person has, the more likely they are to see their own actions as legitimate and moral.
- The more power a person has, the more likely they are to overestimate their own self-awareness.
- The more power a person has, the more likely they are to take action.



**EQUIPPING THE COUNCIL  
& THE CONGREGATION**

**Chapter 4.**

**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

- \*C4.01. The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world.
- \*C4.02. To participate in God's mission, this congregation as a part of the Church shall:
  - a. Worship God in proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments and through lives of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, witness, and service.
  - b. Proclaim God's saving Gospel of justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith alone, according to the apostolic witness in the Holy Scripture, preserving and transmitting the Gospel faithfully to future generations.
  - c. Carry out Christ's Great Commission by reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ and by doing all ministry with a global awareness consistent with the understanding of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of all.
  - d. Serve in response to God's love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity, justice, and equity for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, caring for the marginalized, embracing and welcoming racially and ethnically diverse populations, and standing in solidarity with the poor and oppressed and committing itself to their needs.
  - e. Nurture its members in the Word of God so as to grow in faith and hope and love, to see daily life as the primary setting for the exercise of their Christian calling, and to use the gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world.
  - f. Manifest the unity given to the people of God by living together in the love of Christ and by joining with other Christians in prayer and action to express and preserve the unity which the Spirit gives.
- \*C4.03. To fulfill these purposes, this congregation shall:
  - a. Provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered.
  - b. Provide pastoral care and assist all members to participate in this ministry.
  - c. Challenge, equip, and support all members in carrying out their calling in their daily lives and in their congregation.
  - d. Teach the Word of God.
  - e. Witness to the reconciling Word of God in Christ, reaching out to all people.
  - f. Respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society.
  - g. Motivate its members to provide financial support for this congregation's ministry and the ministry of the other expressions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
  - h. Foster and participate in interdependent relationships with other congregations, the synod, and the churchwide organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
  - i. Foster and participate in ecumenical relationships consistent with churchwide policy.



**MODEL CONSTITUTION  
FOR  
CONGREGATIONS  
OF THE  
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN  
CHURCH IN AMERICA®**

*Current as of August 2022*



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

**DEFINITIONS AND GUIDELINES  
FOR DISCIPLINE**

**ROSTERED MINISTERS,  
CONGREGATIONS, AND  
MEMBERS OF CONGREGATIONS**



Southeastern Minnesota Synod Policy and Procedures Regarding

**Sexual Misconduct by Rostered Ministers**

**I**

**Commitment Relationships Responsibility**

**Grounding Values**

Rooted in God's grace and steadfast love, we are called as followers of Jesus to live a life "of bold trust in God and joyful, generous service to everyone we know and meet in daily life."<sup>1</sup> Affirming God's gracious covenant made with us in baptism, we commit to live in right relationship with God and our neighbors.

Rostered ministers serving in parishes or in specialized ministries are highly involved in the personal lives of their parishioners and people they serve. Pastors and deacons in ministry often deal with people who are in crisis situations or are otherwise vulnerable and in need of help. Members of congregations look to their rostered leaders as their spiritual leaders. Leadership inevitably connotes power. Rostered ministers may not perceive or understand the degree of power held in relationship to their congregational and community members. This power is heightened when persons come to them for counseling or spiritual help.

The power of the ministerial office contains the authority and symbols derived from God. Such symbolic authority not only gives rostered ministers power but also establishes the expectation that people may come to them without fear of exploitation or abuse. As professionals, rostered ministers should not become sexually involved with congregation members, counselees or employees of the congregation. To do so often constitutes an abuse of the power inherent in their role and substitutes personal gratification for the needs of the people served. The power of the office makes it very difficult for a rostered minister and parishioners or people they serve to be in a relationship of equality.

The Office of Ministry implies trust. The relationship between rostered ministers and those they serve has similarities to the relationship between counselors and counselees. Minnesota Statute Chapter §604.2 strictly proscribes sexual contact of any kind between

<sup>1</sup> <https://elca.org/Faith>



*A social message on ...*

**Child Protection**

*This social message was adopted by the ELCA Church Council on November 12, 2025.*

*"Jesus said, 'Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.'"*  
—Matthew 19:14

**INTRODUCTION**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America rejoices that as "Jesus invited the children (Mark 10:13-16; cf. Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17), and so we are to welcome children, teaching and learning from them in ways that recognize their dignity and complexity."<sup>1</sup> The stark, tragic realities of child abuse and neglect in the U.S. today demand renewed commitment to this church's sacred calling.

This social message draws on Holy Scripture, Lutheran traditions, research, and the experiences of ELCA Lutherans to deepen this church's understanding of child maltreatment, to offer a theological vision of childhood, and to call all members of the ELCA to strengthen their commitment to the dignity and well-being of children.

There are four sections in this social message:

- I. Understanding Child Maltreatment
- II. The Church and Child Protection
- III. Elements of a Lutheran Theology of Childhood
- IV. Guidance for Protecting Children

# THREE PRIMARY RISK FACTORS OF A BOUNDARY VIOLATION



**UNCERTAINTY IN THE SYSTEM**

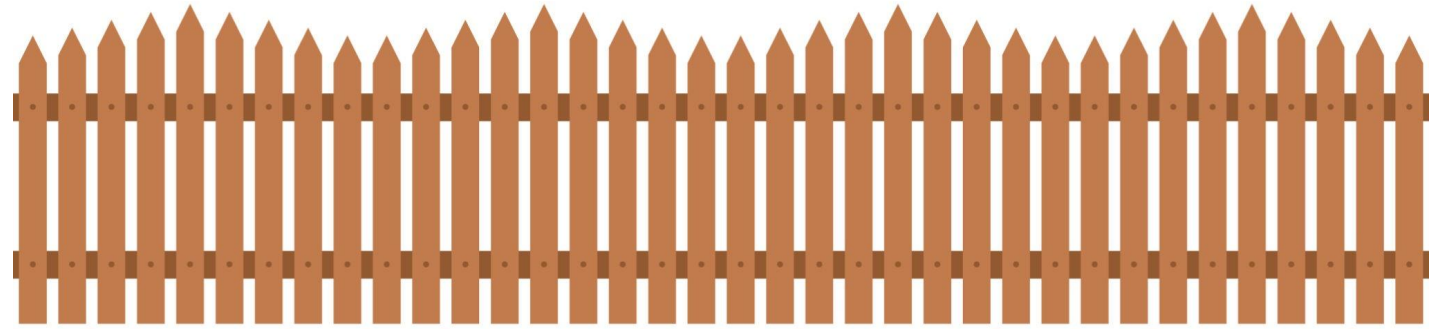


**ISOLATION**



**TIME PRESSURE**

# REFLECTION



What are the internal and external signals that help YOU to know you're coming up close to a boundary?

# PHYSICAL TOUCH & BUILDING CULTURES OF CONSENT

How can the church -  
in all its expressions -  
intentionally build  
cultures of consent?

# Safe Church Policies and Best Practices

- Does your church have a Child and Vulnerable Adult Safety Policy?
- If someone comes into your congregation and wants to volunteer with children, what's the response? What's the process?
- Does your church conduct background checks? On whom?
- Who will implement the Child Safety Policy? How will it become part of the culture of the congregation?

# Policy Development

- <https://safegatherings.com/>
- <https://www.churchmutual.com/resources>
- Ms. Kendra Stea serves as the ELCA Consultant for Prevention of Sexual Misconduct. She can be reached at [safeplace@elca.org](mailto:safeplace@elca.org), 773-380-7142.

# BOUNDARIES IN CONGREGATIONAL LIFE



**PERSONNEL**  
**FEEDBACK**  
**GOSSIP**  
**GENDER**

**TRANSFERENCE**

**PHYSICAL TOUCH**

**MEETINGS**

**CHILDREN &**  
**VULNERABLE ADULTS**

# Self-awareness

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**Self-awareness:** 1) how clearly we recognize our own values, thoughts, feelings, strengths and weaknesses, AND 2) how clearly we recognize their impact on other people.

Self-awareness & self-control  
& emotional regulation TAKE  
ENERGY!



# the resilience tank

Research by Dr. Matt Bloom

What are your wise well being practices?

What are your Sabbath keeping boundaries and practices?



# Wrapping up

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- What is something you're going to carry with you from this gathering?
- What's something you'd like to bring back to your council?





**Closing**