

***Sexual misconduct is against the policies of the ELCA.***

The Florida-Bahamas Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America works in cooperation with member congregations to prevent, detect, and remedy the effects of sexual misconduct within the Church.

The Florida-Bahamas Synod is strongly committed to working with Church agencies and local parishes to insure that the Church at every level is free from any form of sexual harassment or misconduct. All forms of sexual misbehavior are unacceptable within the Church and are subject to appropriate mediation and/or disciplinary action. Such a policy complements the remedies provided in civil and criminal law for sexual misconduct and harassment.

The Church should be a safe place where people can worship, learn, work, love and receive care in a manner that is free from sexual misconduct.

***WHO CAN HELP?***

If you believe you are a victim of sexual misconduct or harassment within the Church, please contact Bishop Pedro Suarez or a member of the Florida-Bahamas Synod Response Team:

Bishop's Office  
3838 W. Cypress St.  
Tampa, FL 33607  
(813) 876-7660 x225

Rev. Ellen Cross  
Retired Minister  
Jacksonville  
(904) 318-5436

Connie Schmucker, Deacon  
Assistant to the Bishop  
Leadership  
(813) 876-7660 x228

Rev. Khader EL-Yateem  
Assistant to the Bishop/DEM  
South Region  
(813) 440-1590

Rev. Rob Carlson  
Assistant to the Bishop/DEM  
North Region  
(813) 498-8458

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# Keeping the Church a Safe and Sacred Place for All

## ***Responding to Sexual Misconduct***

Resources for safer congregations in the  
Florida-Bahamas Synod



**Florida-Bahamas Synod**  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

**T**he Church needs to be a safe place for all. Every level of the Church and every agency and congregation affiliated with the Church must be free of sexual misconduct. When God’s gift of sexuality is used faithfully, the Church is a safe place for all to worship, learn, work, play, and be helped in a manner that is free from sexual exploitation, abuse, or harassment. When the Church becomes an unsafe place, the integrity of the Gospel is impaired, particularly among those who are victimized.

Because rostered ministers are in a position of power, they should not violate another person’s spiritual, emotional, or physical well-being. On the contrary, rostered ministers have the responsibility of protecting the boundaries of persons, especially those who are vulnerable. Young people, as well as individuals experiencing life crisis situations like grief, familial conflict, or emotional turmoil of marital conflict, separation or divorce, are especially vulnerable to victimization.

#### ***What does sexual misconduct within the Church include?***

- Sexual advances, which may or may not include sexual intercourse
- Requests for sexual favors
- Implied or blatant threats
- Innuendo, humor, and jokes about sex or gender-specific traits
- Suggestive or insulting whistling, gestures, or leering
- Offensive contact (patting, pinching, brushing against the body), attempted or actual fondling or kissing, or any other form of sexualized behavior, including intercourse
- Requiring submission to sexual conduct or communication in order to obtain the services of the Church, or to be employed there
- Sexual conduct or communication that interferes with employment or the services received from the church or those affiliated with the church
- Any other sexual conduct or communication that creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment

#### ***“Mutual Consent?”***

The belief that there was mutual consent does not exonerate the accused rostered minister. Sexual misconduct results when those in positions of authority use that authority to create an intimidating or hostile environment by violating the healthy emotional and relational boundaries that are vital in establishing trust in that relationship. From the perspective of this synod, there is no mutual consent.

#### ***What Can you do?***

If you feel you have been subjected to sexual misconduct within the church:

- Say no to the individual. Be direct and firm. Tell the person without apology that you want the behavior to stop.
- Keep records of what happened and when. Document dates, times, places, witnesses, and the nature of the misconduct. Save letters, cards, or notes.
- Contact a member of the Response Team. It takes courage to come forward and report an incident of sexual misconduct. We will make every effort to respond to you with respect and care.

#### ***The Response Team***

The Response Team members, whose names and contact information are on the back panel of this brochure, are available to hear reports of church-related sexual misconduct. They will listen carefully and act expediently on your report. They reflect the church’s care and concern for you and will begin an immediate response. Specific allegations against a named rostered minister will be relayed to the bishop’s office. The members of the Response Team act as representatives of the bishop of the Florida-Bahamas Synod of the ELCA. Please remember:

- Don’t blame yourself.
- Don’t delay. Misconduct may continue if you delay.
- Don’t keep it to yourself. You will help yourself and others by speaking out.
- Don’t forget that sexual misconduct is a violation of Church policy and in many cases violates the law.