

Dear Deacons, Pastors, and Members of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod,

Late Monday afternoon, the five-day “spring” meeting of the ELCA Conference of Bishops (COB) concluded. In that meeting we considered many things, including congregational vitality, racial justice and diversity, the leadership needs of the church, and a proposed social statement on women and justice to be considered by the Churchwide Assembly in August. We also adopted a statement on the situation in Venezuela, especially as it relates to the Lutheran church there. We also discussed concerns raised by many across the church about the ways in which the application of *Vision and Expectations*, a document that describes standards by which rostered ministers and candidates for rostered ministry are expected to abide, has hurt and marginalized many people over the years since its adoption by the ELCA Church Council in 1990. We also reviewed a draft proposed replacement for that document, *Trustworthy Servants of the People of God*, and offered advice regarding this document to the ELCA Church Council, which will consider it in early April.

It’s about these last two that I write you today.

On Ash Wednesday, a pastoral message regarding *Vision and Expectations* adopted by the Conference of Bishops was posted online and highlighted in a media release. This message acknowledges the hurt and pain caused by the uneven and inequitable ways in which *Vision and Expectations* has been applied to the LGBTQIA+ community and others. This confession arose from a genuine sense of repentance and is accompanied by a “pledge in the future to apply the church's standards for ministry with equity and compassion, to listen and take seriously the concerns of all our leaders—particularly those who historically have been marginalized—and to treat with dignity all those seeking to lead in our church.” The message also affirms the “appropriateness of expectations and standards as means of protecting the people of God and providing accountability for the power that church leaders hold.” The document can be found here: <https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/7962>.

Last evening, Thursday March 7, a draft proposed replacement for *Vision and Expectations*, called *Trustworthy Servants of the People of God*, was made available online, accompanied by an introduction to it from the Domestic Mission unit of the ELCA. A media release today gave public notice of the availability of the document. The document and the introduction to it can be found here: <https://www.elca.org/About/Leadership/Church-Council/Trustworthy-Servants>.

*Vision and Expectations* has been revised before and has been under intentional review for the last couple of years. As provided in the governing documents of the ELCA, in this process the Conference of Bishops serves as an advisory group with responsibility to review such documents before they are presented to the Church Council and to offer any advice that we deem appropriate. In fact, a draft revision was presented to the Conference of Bishops last fall. At that time, the COB advised that it be rewritten and renamed and take into account the effects that application of *Vision and Expectations* has had on some people. The staff of the Domestic Mission Unit and the ELCA Church Council heeded that advice and brought to this meeting of the COB a new draft, more replacement than revision, to be reviewed on its way to the Church Council’s April 2019 meeting. As a Conference, we have advised the Church Council that we

affirm *Trustworthy Servants* as a timely replacement for the former document and as a faithful expression of our calling to serve as rostered ministers in this church.

I commend both documents to you. Should you desire to offer feedback on the content of *Trustworthy Servants of the People of God*, please email that to me at [bishopbill@iksynod.org](mailto:bishopbill@iksynod.org), no later than March 18. As Chair of the Conference of Bishops, I will receive and collate the feedback that other bishops receive as well. As is mentioned in the introduction to *Trustworthy Servants*, should we see cause for a major revision we will so advise the ELCA Church Council before its meeting April 5-7.

I especially hope that rostered ministers and candidates for rostered ministry will discuss *Trustworthy Servants* not only among themselves, but also with lay members of the congregations and other ministries they serve, and with people who hold different perspectives on the various topics covered in the document. As you read, reflect on, and discuss the content of the documents, I invite you to do so thoughtfully, prayerfully, and in ways that honor one another as siblings in Christ and as partners in proclaiming and embodying the good news of Jesus Christ crucified and risen for the life of the world.

I am grateful for your partnership in that good news.

Peace be with you,

Bishop Bill Gafkjen