

Addiction and Substance Abuse Guidelines
Greater Milwaukee Synod
September 2019

Arising out of deep compassion and concern for all persons affected by addiction, and informed by the short definition adopted by the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) and the ASAM's understanding of addiction¹, the following guidelines describe how the Greater Milwaukee Synod (the "Synod") will respond to evidence of addiction and/or substance abuse of either a rostered Minister of Word and Sacrament or a rostered Minister of Word and Service (collectively referred to as "Rostered Minister(s)" or "Minister(s)"), while preserving the Synod's discretion to treat each person and each case in the manner necessitated by differing facts, circumstances, and the needs of those affected. Nothing in these Guidelines is intended to, or should be understood to, conflict with the ELCA's Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline.

1. Speaking the Truth in Love: Upon receiving information regarding a rostered minister struggling with substance abuse/addiction, the bishop or a person designated by the bishop will investigate the matter and will consult with the identified Minister and the lay leadership of his or her congregation about the concern and possible need to seek professional assessment for addiction and/or substance abuse behavior. Resources and options for assessment and treatment (if needed) will be explored with the Minister and, upon the Minister's consent, his or her spouse.
2. Potential Execution of Agreement. The Synod may discuss with the congregation the possible execution of a Conditions of Continued Employment Agreement. The congregation may institute proceedings to terminate the call. The bishop could also institute proceedings under S14.18 of the Synod Constitution or disciplinary proceedings under Chapter 20 of the ELCA Constitution.
3. Professional Assessment: The Minister will normally be assessed by an addiction professional.

¹ Definition of Addiction (from the American Society of Addiction Medicine):

[Short Definition] "*Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social, and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors.*

Addiction is characterized by inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control, cravings, diminished recognition of significant problems with one's behaviors and interpersonal relationships, and a dysfunctional emotional response. Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves cycles of relapse and remission. Without treatment of engagement in recovery activities, addiction is progressive and can result in disability or premature death."

(<https://www.asam.org/resources/definition-of-addiction>)

4. Non-Compliance: If the Minister refuses to comply to a professional addiction assessment, or if there is refusal to seek treatment that such assessment indicates, the bishop will consider the following responses (which may be implemented separately or in conjunction):
 - a. Initiate an intervention in consultation with concerned persons.
 - b. Consult with the congregational leadership (if the Minister is serving a congregation) about placing the Minister on administrative leave or suspending the Minister until compliance takes place.
 - c. Instituting proceedings under S14.18 or Chapter 20 of the ELCA Constitution.
 - d. Take other action as deemed appropriate.

4. Compliance (Outpatient Treatment): If the assessment of the Minister recommends outpatient treatment, a designated Synod staff representative and the elected lay leader of the congregation will meet with the Minister to determine whether the Minister will take a medical leave or continue in his/her duties at the congregation while in treatment. They will also discuss the support (emotional & financial) the Minister will receive from the congregation.

5. Compliance (Inpatient Treatment): If the Minister assessment calls for inpatient treatment, the Synod staff representative and the elected lay leader of the congregation will meet with the Minister to develop a plan for a medical leave while the Minister is in treatment and will discuss the support (emotional & financial) the Minister will receive from the congregation.

6. Release of Information: While in treatment, the Minister will be asked to sign a “release of information” statement giving permission for the treatment counselor to update the Synod representative on the Minister’s compliance with treatment protocols prescribed by the counselor or health care provider.

7. Family Support & Treatment: The Synod representative will express concern for the family and will encourage family participation in the treatment program as well as in appropriate 12-Step programs.

8. Congregational Support & Education: The Synod representative will encourage the congregation to make use of resources provided by the Synod and by community organizations to better understand addiction, the systemic dimensions of addiction (family and congregational), treatment, and the recovery process.

9. Aftercare: The Minister will be expected to participate in an aftercare program as recommended by the recovery treatment plan. The Minister will be asked to sign a “release of information” statement giving permission for the designated Synod representative to be updated on the Minister’s compliance with aftercare treatment.

10. Resumption of Duties: Once treatment has been completed, the Minister will consult with the Bishop or designated Synod representative, along with the elected lay leadership of the congregation (if the Minister is serving a congregation), to create a plan, which would

include ongoing communication about the Minister's recovery and any additional support the Minister might need, as well as a timetable for resumption of duties.

11. RMP Information: The bishop will communicate with the Minister about the requirement for disclosure of the Minister's addiction or substance abuse on future Rostered Minister Profiles ("RMP").
12. Addiction Resource Team: The bishop will appoint a group of persons knowledgeable about addiction to serve on a Helping Addicts Resource Team (HART). HART will function as a support for rostered ministers dealing with addictions, along with their families and their congregations. In addition, HART will strive to educate members of all congregations about addiction and offer its services to members of any congregation in the Synod. (Please see the Supplement for the specific services of HART.)
13. Reservation of Rights: Nothing in these guidelines makes any Minister an employee of the Synod. Ministers will always remain employees of the congregation where they are called. Further, nothing in these guidelines affects the rights of the Synod, the congregation, or the Minister under the Constitution, By-Laws, and Continuing Resolutions and other governing documents of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.