



**British Columbia Synod**  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

## **Code of Conduct**

**for Participants in Events, Meetings and Other gatherings  
Organized by the British Columbia Synod  
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada**

**Adapted for use by  
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Vancouver, BC**

Drafted: May 2025 based on 2021 BC Synod Code of Conduct

Approved by St. Mark's Church Council: June 10, 2025

# Code of Conduct for Participants in Events, Meetings and Other gatherings <sup>1,2</sup>

(Code of Conduct)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), the BC Synod and St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church are committed to being a church that welcomes all of God's people in a safe, healthy, and accepting environment.

Systemic and structural racism, discrimination, and harassment has been and continues to be experienced by women, indigenous peoples, racial and ethnic minorities, people of diverse faith communities, people of different abilities, people of different ages, and members of the LGBTQ2SIA+ community. We recognize that the church and its members have exhibited such behaviours.

The ELCIC has adopted the following commitment:

**This church upholds the dignity of all people. We recognize the image of Christ in every person and serve that person as Christ himself. In meeting diverse people, we begin with a core sense of respect for the value of each person as a unique child of God.<sup>3</sup>**

This is why we are creating this Code of Conduct for all congregational events including studies, worship, groups, conferences and other meetings and events organized or co-hosted by St. Mark's Lutheran Church.

## **Expected Behaviours by Participants of the Congregation:**

- Treat all persons fairly, with respect, courtesy, and dignity during in-person or virtual events including break and mealtimes.
- Be fair, respectful and courteous in any comments written or video postings made over social media platforms, emails or other technologies.
- Behave respectfully towards others and do not misuse personal or professional relationships.
- Be sensitive to cultural and social differences and practices, and careful in your use of language that may be disrespectful or demeaning.
- Respect personal boundaries set by others. If someone indicates "No", even without words, acknowledge/accept it.

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<sup>1</sup> The Code of Conduct for Participants in Events, Meetings and Other gatherings Organized by St. Mark's has been developed based on that prepared and approved by the BC Synod, the ELCIC and by that of the *Lutheran World Federation*.

<sup>2</sup> This Code of Conduct does not supersede existing policies for Rostered Ministers such as Sexual Abuse or Harassment or Manual on Discipline.

<sup>3</sup> ELCIC Social Statement on Human Sexuality 2011.

- Behaviours such as bullying, harassment, sexual abuse, or sexual harassment will not be tolerated.
- Speak with honesty, truth, and integrity when making accusations against others so as not to create one's own advantage over another.
- Commit to working with the process outlined even if you are the subject of the complaint.
- Be transparent when endorsing an activity/business motion/opportunity through public disclosure of any real or perceived conflicts of interest.
- Maintain confidentiality of congregational business or privileged conversations as required (e.g. in camera discussions).
- Advocate for continual improvements to processes and systems for the benefit of all members and friends of St. Mark's.

## **For all events**

- For events with over twenty participants a minimum of two people and preferably of different genders and with an understanding of and sensitivity to diversity, are appointed by the event organizer before the start of the event to form the Complaint Handling Committee (CHC). The CHC members will receive instructions from the event organizer on this Code of Conduct and the procedures to follow. For events of less than 20 participants the CHC committee will consist of one person.
- At the beginning of each event, the organizers shall remind all participants about the Code of Conduct. The CHC should be introduced at the first session. The attention of the participants shall be drawn to the Code of Conduct principles and the commitment of the congregation to uphold them.
- Due to time and space constraints for online meetings, it may be impractical for a CHC to function during the meeting. Participants shall be provided with an electronic copy of the Code of Conduct prior to the meeting and be advised that, following the meeting, complaints may be filed according to Procedure 7 below.
- Events organized with a partnering organization shall follow this Code of Conduct Policy or a similar Code of Conduct Policy of the organization co-hosting the event.

## **What action should be taken when someone violates the code of conduct?**

The procedures to follow are in harmony with Matthew 18:15–17. In the case of criminal behavior, the matter should be referred directly to the police.

### **Procedure:**

1. An individual who experiences or witnesses a violation of the Code of Conduct should speak directly to the subject of complaint in as timely a manner as possible, pointing out the violation in a reasonable manner and requesting that it stop/not be repeated.
  2. If there is no resolution, or if the complainant is not comfortable speaking directly to the subject of complaint, the complainant (including a third-party complainant) should speak to a member of the CHC, who will discuss with them potential next steps.
  3. If the complainant decides to begin a formal complaint process, the complainant should fill out the Complaint Form available at the event. The Complaint Form is also available at the church office.
  4. If the subject of a complaint is a member of the CHC, they shall recuse themselves from any participation in the complaint handling process. If the subject of the complaint is the sole member of the CHC, the complainant should speak to the organizer of the event.
  5. If the subject of the complaint is a rostered member of the ELCIC or full communion partner of the ELCIC, the CHC shall, as part of the process of handling the case, consult the ELCIC Manual on Discipline
  6. During the event the complainant should hand or transmit electronically the completed Complaint Form to a member of the CHC.
  7. After the event, the complainant should email the Complaint Form to the contact person from the CHC identified at the event. Complaints may be registered up to 30 days following the completion of an event organized by St. Mark's.
- All complaints will be carefully investigated in a time-sensitive manner. Wherever possible, the CHC will meet privately and separately with the subject of complaint and the complainant. Complaints will be dealt with in a confidential manner.
  - For the complainant, pastoral care and support should be made available. In cases where the complainant wishes to consider reporting the incident to the relevant legal and/or ecclesial authorities, they shall be offered support and assistance in considering such a report. However, if the complainant decides to pursue legal action against the subject of complaint, it shall be done by the complainant independent of St. Mark's.
  - For the subject of complaint, pastoral care and support should be made available. The CHC may remove the subject of complaint from the meeting or from positions where the offense could be repeated if the CHC determines it is reasonable to do so.

**Working Definitions** (Adapted from the *Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Code of Conduct*)

**Bullying** Bullying is the use of force or coercion to abuse, humiliate or intimidate others. The behaviour can be habitual and involve an imbalance of social or physical power. It can include verbal harassment or threat, physical assault or coercion and may be directed repeatedly towards particular victims, perhaps on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexuality, or ability.

**Complainant** The person making a complaint of a violation of the Code of Conduct. This may include a third party, someone who has witnessed a violation.

**Complaint Handling Committee (CHC)** The individuals appointed at an event organized by St. Mark's to receive and review complaints.

**Discrimination** Discrimination means exclusion of, treatment of, or action against an individual based on social status, race, ethnicity, color, religion, gender including gender identity and gender expression, sexual orientation, age, marital status, national origin, political affiliation or disability.

**Event organizer** Usually a St. Mark's Church Council or Staff member.

**Harassment** Harassment means any unwelcome comment or behavior that is offensive, demeaning, humiliating, derogatory, or any other inappropriate behavior that fails to respect the dignity of an individual.

**Sexual harassment** Sexual harassment means any unwelcome sexual advance, comment, expressed or implied sexual demand, touch, joke, gesture, or any other communication or conduct of a sexual nature, whether verbal, written or visual, by any person to another individual. Sexual harassment may be directed at members of any gender and includes harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

**Sexual abuse** Sexual abuse is actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, including inappropriate touching, by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

**Subject of Complaint** The person about whom a complaint is made for violating the Code of Conduct.

**Zero tolerance** The principle and practice of not tolerating any instance of sexual abuse, harassment, bullying and discrimination in all of our meetings and conferences and applying a clear procedure for breaches or violations.

# Guidelines for Members of the Complaint Handling Committee (CHC)

1. Individuals or groups of individuals may come to you with concerns about how to handle a violation of the Code of Conduct. Your initial response is to listen to the complainant or to arrange a mutually agreeable time and place for a meeting. Such meetings should be conducted in private but in a public space.
2. Options for you to consider in dealing with a complaint are:
  - a. To encourage the complainant to speak directly to the subject of complaint.
  - b. To be willing to go with the complainant to speak directly to the subject of complaint.
  - c. To encourage the complainant to fill in a Confidential Complaint Form, and then to speak in private with the subject of complaint.
3. You will need to exercise your caring discretion to help the complainant choose which avenue to pursue.
4. In cases involving what you know to be, or which might be criminal behavior the matter should be reported by the complainant directly to the police.
5. Remember you are part of a team. Use the other CHC team member(s) as a sounding board. You may decide which one of you will speak to the subject of complaint or you may go together. You may also speak to the event organizer for assistance.
6. In any case, do your best to provide pastoral care and support to both the complainant and the subject of complaint. With the permission of the complainant or the subject of complaint you may ask others at the event to provide pastoral care or support.
7. Keep written notes of the actions you take and submit them, along with the original complaint form to the event organizer for confidential management.

# CONFIDENTIAL COMPLAINT FORM

For Events Organized by St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church

This form should be completed by a person wishing to lodge a complaint. All information will be held securely, and confidentiality will be maintained at all times. It may also be filled out, scanned and emailed to the designated Complaint Handling Committee contact person for the event:

## A. General data

Name of the person lodging the complaint:

\_\_\_\_\_

Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the person you wish to lodge a complaint against (if known):

\_\_\_\_\_

Date of incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of incident:

\_\_\_\_\_

Title of Event:

\_\_\_\_\_

Place of incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of reporting: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of reporting: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## B. Brief description of the incident or concern

State what happened, trying to follow the sequence of events from start to finish. If the incident location is not well known, describe the location based on your memory of it. Give a description of the "subject of complaint" if you do not know their name.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## C. Name of witnesses: (if any)

Supply the names of witnesses and how they can be contacted, if known.

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