



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

MEMORANDUM

To: Synod Bishops and Vice Presidents

From: Sue Rothmeyer and Mary Ann Schwabe

Date: October 2025

Subject: 2026 Toolkit for Synod Bishop Elections

This 2026 Toolkit for Synod Bishop Elections is designed to serve as an aid to synod councils, bishop's election committees, and those who are preparing to conduct the election of a bishop in 2026. The Toolkit and related documents can be found under the "Synods" tab of the Office of the Secretary's resource page:

https://resources.elca.org/?_categories=office-of-the-secretary&_subcategory=synod-assembly.

Of course, nothing in the Toolkit supersedes or amends the governing documents of the synod. As described in detail in the first document in the Toolkit—"Guidelines for Synod Bishop Elections"—each synod's constitution contains a provision or provisions regarding the nomination and election of a synod bishop, and there may be other procedures or processes that have been adopted by synod councils that are not incorporated into governing documents. As a matter of governance, these provisions must be followed. However, neither the model provision in the *Constitution for Synods* used by most synods (S9.04.) nor variations thereof in some synods address all issues involved in the nomination and election of a bishop. Therefore, we are presenting this Toolkit to provide useful information and suggestions for synod leadership regarding important aspects of the call process for a synod bishop.

The contents of the Toolkit for Synod Bishop Elections will not apply to every synod and may be adapted based on local context. Indeed, we encourage synod councils and bishop's election committees to carefully craft the suggestions in various documents to fit local circumstances. The overriding considerations are to faithfully implement the synod's governing documents and to educate and inspire synods as they engage in a discernment process resulting in a call for service as a synod bishop.

The contents of the Toolkit for Synod Bishop Elections are as follows:

- **Guidelines for Synod Bishop Elections:** These Guidelines have been issued annually for the past several years. They remain a cornerstone document in evaluating the processes for the nomination and election of a synod bishop. The Guidelines review the nomination and election processes, identify issues that must be addressed, and provide suggestions based on experience over many years. They also include appendices that provide sample ballot forms, sample rules of organization and procedure, sample questions for nominees, a sample biographical information form, a release form authorizing background checks, etc. The 2026 Toolkit also includes suggestions for conducting an election at an electronic synod assembly.
- **Appendix:** Included in the Appendix are the following documents. Note that several of them are available as fillable PDF forms.
 - Authorization and Release for Background Checks and Screening
 - Protocol for Churchwide Officer Background Checks and Screening and Disclosure Form
 - Sample Rules of Organization and Procedure for Synod Assemblies

- Sample Biographical Information Form
- Sample Ballots for Bishop
- Request for Withdrawal from Ballot for Bishop
- Sample Reports of Election Results
- Sample Questions for Synod Bishop Nominees
- ***Constitutional provisions regarding synods and the role of the synod bishop (Exhibit A):*** The applicable constitutional provisions describing the responsibilities of synods are found in Chapter 8 of the *Constitution for Synods*. The duties of a bishop are addressed in provision †S8.12. of the *Constitution for Synods*. In addition, several provisions from the ELCA constitution that address the foundational concept of interdependence are included.
- ***Timeline (Exhibit B):*** The timeline identifies key events and recommends a sequence of events for addressing issues involved in the nomination and election processes.
- ***Congregation and Synod Statistical Report (Exhibit C):*** Each synod will be provided individual statistical reports based upon its congregations' reports. These are intended to provide background information for the synod as you prepare for the bishop's election. Upon reasonable request, additional or different data may be obtained. The synod specific data for 2023 are available. The data for 2024 will be available by January 2026. For more information, contact Destiny Hisey (destiny.hisey@elca.org).
- ***Agenda and suggestions for conference/cluster meetings (Exhibit D):*** A review and assessment of the synod's ministry are necessary aspects of the discernment process in the nomination and election of a bishop. Regardless of the nomination and election processes required by the synod's governing documents, conversations among as many people as possible (both lay persons and rostered ministers) facilitate discernment by identifying and evaluating ministry priorities and focusing on desired leadership attributes. These discussions also provide an opportunity to evaluate the status of the synod's strategic plan, if one exists, and to provide a foundation for future strategic planning, if a plan does not exist. The attached agenda and suggestions can be adapted for use in different contexts and with different audiences, but the elements of the meetings are important in all contexts: Bible study and prayer; information about the nomination and election processes; conversation about the synod's ministries and priorities; conversation about leadership attributes and qualities; report back and distillation of the meeting; and dissemination of meeting conclusions. Conference or cluster meetings provide an appropriate venue for these discussions, but some synods schedule separate meetings to address these issues. Whatever the context, it is important to capture and share the results of the meetings so that they can inform the discernment process. The organization of these meetings may be coordinated with the survey described above to obtain consistent input from many sources that can be evaluated by the synod as part of the discernment process.
- ***Sample prayers for discernment (Exhibit E):*** Individual and communal prayer is an indispensable ingredient of a discernment process. The prayers included here have been developed by the worship team of the churchwide organization. They may be used in conjunction with meetings addressing nomination and election processes, distributed to congregations, or provided for individual devotions. Of course, synods may develop other prayers and worship resources for gatherings and assemblies.
- ***Transition checklist (Exhibit F):*** In addition to considerations related to nominations and elections, issues regarding possible transition should be considered by the Synod Council. The transition checklist has been developed to identify pertinent issues and to sensitize synod leadership regarding the possible implications and timing of transition in the office of synod bishop.
- ***Affirmation of Ministry (at the re-election of a synod bishop) (Exhibit G):*** In the event that a synod bishop is re-elected, an affirmation of ministry may be used at the Synod Assembly. A short rite for the affirmation of ministry is enclosed.
- ***Lists of synods holding elections from 2023 through 2026 (Exhibit H):*** Some of the best resources regarding bishop nomination and election processes are the work of other synods. The enclosed list identifies those synods that held bishop elections in 2023 and 2024 and those that will hold elections in 2025 and 2026. Review of websites of these synods and conversations with their leaders will provide context and assistance for synod Bishop Election Committees and other synod leaders.

- ***A Relational Agreement (Exhibit I):*** This document (referred to as the “Bishops’ Relational Agreement”) was developed and adopted by the Conference of Bishops to describe the responsibilities of synod bishops and their relationship together as the Conference of Bishops.

The churchwide organization is committed to assisting synods as they develop and implement processes and engage in communal discernment regarding the nomination and election of their bishops. Do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions or comments about resources.

May God richly bless you in your discernment process!



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

Guidelines for Synod Bishop Elections

Deacon Sue E. Rothmeyer
Secretary

Deacon Mary Ann Schwabe
Executive for Synod Relations

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I. Introduction

Electing a bishop is one of the most important responsibilities in the life of a synod in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and a key responsibility of the Synod Assembly. As an election, it is a process governed by the constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions of the synod; however, it is also a call process. As such, it involves discernment, from the perspective both of individual potential nominees and of the synod as a whole. Thus, engaging in prayerful reflection and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit are indispensable aspects of the process of nomination and election, regardless of the particular provisions in the synod's governing documents.

Thoughtful preparation also is an important ingredient in the process of nominating and electing a bishop. The Office of the Secretary and the Office of the Presiding Bishop have reviewed the nomination and election processes of many synods and have prepared these guidelines to assist your synod in this important endeavor. It is our goal to support you in the process of nomination and election of a bishop and to provide information so you can avoid pitfalls. Do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

As you begin to consider the nomination and election of a bishop, it may be useful to prepare a profile of your synod and reflect on the attributes desired in a bishop. You can approach preparing a profile just as a congregation prepares a profile as part of a call process. In considering attributes for a bishop, you can begin by reviewing the responsibilities of a synod bishop as delineated in provision †S8.12. in the *Constitution for Synods* and consider also the practice in your synod. Although the substance of these guidelines addresses procedures and pitfalls, prayerful reflection on the ministry of the synod and thoughtful consideration of the role of the bishop are critical aspects at each stage of the nomination and election process.

II. The Constitutional Context

Chapter 9 of your synod's constitution addresses nominations and elections. S9.04. specifically addresses the process for the election of a bishop. Because this provision in the *Constitution for Synods* is not required, considerable variety exists among synods in the processes for the nomination and election of bishops. Regardless of the specifics, it is exceedingly important that the requirements of your synod constitution and any applicable bylaws or continuing resolutions be followed carefully.¹

Many synods use the model language in the *Constitution for Synods* S9.04.:

The bishop shall be elected by the Synod Assembly by ecclesiastical ballot. Three-fourths of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election on the first ballot. If no one is elected, the first ballot shall be considered the nominating ballot. Three-fourths of the legal votes cast on the second ballot shall be necessary for election. The third ballot shall be limited to the seven persons who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on the second ballot, and two-thirds of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. The fourth ballot shall be limited to the three persons who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on

¹ If a bishop will be elected at a special meeting of the Synod Assembly, care must be taken to review and comply with the synod's articles of incorporation, as well as the synod's constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions. This step is particularly important when it comes to defining voting members of a special assembly. In general, provisions in the articles of incorporation control if there are inconsistencies with the constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions. If you have a question, contact the Office of the Secretary.

the third ballot, and 60 percent of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. On subsequent ballots a majority of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. These ballots shall be limited to the two persons who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on the previous ballot.²

In response to requests from synods for a definition of “ecclesiastical ballot” and guidance on its use, the Church Council in 1994 voted:

To define an “ecclesiastical ballot” for the election of a bishop in synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as an election process:

1. in which on the first ballot the name of any eligible individual may be submitted for nomination by a voting member of the assembly;
2. through which the possibility of election to office exists on any ballot by achievement of the required number of votes cast by voting members of the assembly applicable to a particular ballot;
3. that precludes spoken floor nominations;
4. in which the first ballot is the nominating ballot if no election occurs on the first ballot;
5. in which the first ballot defines the total slate of nominees for possible election on a subsequent ballot, with no additional nominations permitted;
6. that does not preclude, after the reporting of the first ballot, the right of persons nominated to withdraw their names prior to the casting of the second ballot;
7. in which any name appearing on the second ballot may not be subsequently withdrawn;
8. that does not preclude an assembly’s adoption of rules that permit, at a defined point in the election process and for a defined period of time, speeches to the assembly by nominees or their representatives and/or a question-and-answer forum in which the nominees or their representatives participate; and
9. in which the number of names that appear on any ballot subsequent to the second ballot shall be determined in accordance with the provisions of the governing documents (or, if the governing documents are silent, in accordance with rules adopted by the assembly).

Whether or not your synod’s constitution provides for the ecclesiastical ballot according to this definition, your governing documents must be reviewed and followed carefully to ensure a proper process that cannot be challenged.

Some synods have chosen to use modifications of this process or different processes altogether. Some use a modified ecclesiastical ballot that allows identification and nomination of nominees before the Synod Assembly. In some circumstances, the first ballot may contain previously selected nominees. Other synods have developed identification processes by Synod Council action. Most of these do not have previously identified names on the ballot but do post biographical information that is available to voting members. The actual voting process then follows the traditional “ecclesiastical ballot” procedures.

² The adjective “legal” in this (and other) provisions was added as the result of action taken at the Churchwide Assembly in 2001. If your synod constitution incorporated this change pursuant to †S18.12., invalid or illegal votes are not counted in determining the percentage needed for election. An illegal vote is a ballot, for instance, on which the name of a person not eligible for election to a synod bishop is submitted. An example of an “illegal” vote would be any ballots cast for persons who are not on the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament of the ELCA. Similarly, if a ballot is unintelligible, it is not considered a legal vote. If the term “legal” is not used in your synod’s S9.04. provision or in the rules of procedure adopted by the Synod Assembly, all votes cast are counted for determining the applicable percentages. Whether or not the word “legal” appears in your synod constitution, however, blank ballots or abstentions never are counted and are ignored. See *Robert’s Rules of Order (Newly Revised)*, 12th ed., Section 44.

III. Pre-election Issues

Several issues must be addressed in advance of the Synod Assembly to ensure a thoughtful and orderly process for the bishop's election. This section identifies and briefly discusses some of these issues.

A. Synod Council Responsibilities

The Synod Council has oversight responsibility to make certain that the process for nomination and election of a bishop is competently and fairly handled. It is important to understand and follow the synod's standing rules for the conduct of an assembly and for nominations and elections, as well as the requirements of the synod's governing documents. We encourage you to make use of resources available through the churchwide organization, as well.³

It is advisable to review minutes of prior synod assemblies at which bishop elections occurred to determine and evaluate prior nomination and election practices. Additionally, it is sometimes useful to confer with the officers of other synods that have recently elected a bishop. The ELCA listservs provide a convenient vehicle to ask questions and solicit input regarding bishop nomination and election processes from synod bishops, vice presidents, and secretaries.

A threshold issue that must be addressed well in advance is the composition of the Synod Assembly. Constitutional provision †S7.21. prescribes the composition of the Synod Assembly and requires that at least 60 percent of voting members be laypersons. †S6.04. establishes a goal that at least 10 percent of the membership in the Synod Assembly be persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English and requires that each synod establish processes that will enable it to meet this goal. †S6.04.01. establishes a goal that at least 10 percent of the voting members the Synod Assembly be youth and young adults and requires the Synod Council to develop a plan to implement this goal. In addition, S7.22. authorizes the synod to establish processes that permit rostered ministers who are retired, on leave from call, or with disability status to serve as voting members; S7.26. authorizes the synod to establish processes that permit representatives of synod-authorized worshiping communities to serve as voting members; and S7.27. authorizes the synod to establish processes that permit ministers of Word and Sacrament from full communion partners serving congregations in the synod to serve as voting members. In all cases, extra care is warranted in determining the composition of the Synod Assembly when a bishop's election will take place to ensure that constitutional prerequisites are met.

Whether or not a synod utilizes the ecclesiastical ballot, numerous decisions regarding the nomination and election process must be made and communicated in a timely manner. With respect to pre-assembly matters, the Synod Council must determine if there will be informational meetings regarding the bishop's nomination and election process. It is desirable and useful to identify and discuss what the synod is looking for in terms of leadership and the desired attributes of a bishop and to recall the commitments of this church to raise up and support faithful, wise, and courageous leaders who reflect this church's commitment to diversity. Information should be disseminated to congregations so they are aware of the important responsibility that will be exercised by their voting

³ If the Synod Council is considering amendment of S9.04. or the adoption of new or revised bylaws regarding the bishop nomination and election process or the composition of the Synod Assembly, it is important to take into account the requisite amendment process and timelines specified in Chapter 18 of the *Constitution for Synods*. The changes should take place no later than the Synod Assembly preceding the assembly at which a bishop is to be elected.

members. If informational meetings or forums are held, it is important to ensure that they be scheduled throughout the synod in a way that maximizes synod-wide exposure and opportunity for input from both rostered and lay persons. Whether or not informational meetings or forums are held, it is important to publicize the upcoming election and provide congregations and individuals with information regarding the role and responsibilities of the bishop and the nomination and election process in a timely manner.

In 2009, the Churchwide Assembly adopted an amendment to the *Constitution for Synods* requiring background checks and screening of nominees for synod officers. Constitutional provision †S9.12. provides:

Background checks and screening shall be required and completed for persons nominated as synod officers prior to their election, if possible, or as soon as practical after their election. The specific procedures and timing of background checks and screening shall be determined by the Synod Council.

Under this provision, before the Synod Assembly the Synod Council must develop a protocol for conducting background checks and screening of nominees for bishop. This protocol should include the process that the Synod Council or Executive Committee will follow if information is revealed in the background check that might affect the nominee's ability to serve in this office. The Office of the Secretary is available to assist the Executive Committee should something be discovered. If there is a pre-assembly nomination process, background checks should be completed before the election. If the election will take place by ecclesiastical ballot, a background check and screening must be conducted as soon as practical after the election using a protocol developed by the Synod Council. Regardless of the timing of the background check and screening, it is important to establish the process and advise potential nominees about it in advance of the Synod Assembly. (Appendix B contains a form authorizing a background check and screening, as well as the protocol for background checks and screening of churchwide officers. In addition to the authorization for a background check, there is a sample disclosure form that also should be completed by the nominee.)

The Synod Council must determine if there will be other election procedures in addition to those described in the governing documents. For example, S9.04. does not mention a question-and-answer period or speeches by nominees. Many synods have question-and answer periods and/or speeches by nominees at some time during the election process. Some synods also have other steps in the election process. Whether or not to use such procedures should be addressed by the Synod Council well in advance of the Synod Assembly and the ground rules disseminated so that potential nominees, congregations, and voting members understand the process. Once decisions are made about using these additional steps in the election process, the Synod Council must determine whether to incorporate them into the synod's governing documents, the applicable rules of organization and procedure, or standing rules of the assembly. (Appendix C offers sample rules for incorporation into the rules of organization and procedure or standing rules of the assembly.)

In addition, it is very important to ensure that the people preparing the agenda allow enough time for the election to take place smoothly. As part of its oversight capacity, the Synod Council should take care that adequate time is provided in the agenda to facilitate counting ballots (especially the first ballot), allow withdrawal of nominees, contact absent nominees, complete and disseminate biographical information, offer question-and-answer periods, hear speeches, and other activities involved in the election process.

Voting procedures must be thoughtfully planned out well in advance of the assembly. The bishops of this church have also shared among themselves best practices that have been employed in their synods, so your bishop may be able to provide some of those to you. You may also contact the Office of the Secretary to get ideas for how best to organize your procedures.

Once the Synod Council determines the process for election of the bishop, the process must be disseminated to voting members and others far enough in advance of the Synod Assembly to afford opportunity for conversation and prayerful reflection. If preassembly responsibilities are delegated to the Bishop's Election Committee or other designees, the Synod Council should provide explicit instructions, including expectations for reporting and oversight.

The conclusion or potential conclusion of a bishop's tenure raises important issues regarding closure, transition and acknowledgment of service. Important issues also exist relating to synod staff in times of transition. These issues warrant thoughtful and prayerful consideration by synod leadership in collaboration with the churchwide organization and should not be neglected as preparation takes place for the nomination and election process.

B. Bishop's Election Committee Responsibilities

A Bishop's Election Committee, chaired by a person knowledgeable about the synod and its governing documents and procedures, can significantly facilitate the nomination and election process. Please note that the Bishop's Election Committee is not synonymous with the Elections Committee of the Synod Assembly. The Bishop's Election Committee is responsible for the processes related to the election of a synod bishop, often including the counting of ballots and reporting of results. The Elections Committee of the assembly would then be responsible for the counting of ballots and reporting of results for all other elections. These are two separate committees, and both are important.

The timing of the appointment of Bishop's Election Committee members is important. Some synods use a modified ecclesiastical ballot and have conferences/clusters nominate persons for bishop in advance of the Synod Assembly. In some cases, the initial nominations are made several months before the Synod Assembly. If the Synod Council delegates responsibility for eliciting nominations to a Bishop's Election Committee, it must be appointed and educated on the processing of such nominees well before the initial deadline. If the Bishop's Election Committee will be responsible for informational meetings or forums before the Synod Assembly or other pre-assembly activities such as obtaining biographical information or collecting questions for nominees, it is important to appoint and train the Bishop's Election Committee in a timely manner.

In considering the composition of the Bishop's Election Committee, avoid appointing persons who are likely to be nominated for bishop. (In the case of elections using the ecclesiastical ballot, prior to appointment to the committee a potential committee member should commit to withdrawing after the nominating ballot should his or her name be put forward.) It is important to appoint enough members to the Bishop's Election Committee to address pre-assembly responsibilities.

The responsibilities of the Bishop's Election Committee should be carefully specified by the Synod Council. For example, the committee's charter should address who is responsible for preparing announcements and disseminating information regarding the nomination and election process, setting up pre-assembly informational meetings or forums (if they will occur), drafting questions

for nominees (if there will be a question-and-answer period), assisting nominees through the process, determining how the nomination of persons not present at the assembly will be handled (including notification, obtaining biographical information, and arranging for representatives to make presentations, if applicable).

The Bishop's Election Committee may be responsible for working with tellers/ushers to distribute ballots and oversee the counting of ballots. It is important that enough people be identified in advance of the assembly to count the first two ballots, at least. These counters should not be voting members of the assembly and should not be persons whose names are or may be placed on the ballot. On the first ballot, if the name of someone counting the ballots is discovered, that person should recuse themselves from counting, unless or until they have withdrawn their name from consideration.

C. Information from Nominees

Regardless of the mechanism used to obtain nominations for bishop, the synod must be prepared to obtain biographical and other information from nominees. To facilitate this process, a form for biographical and other information should be used that is the same for all nominees. (A sample form that facilitates electronic submission is attached in Appendix D.) The scope and content of questionnaires may vary from synod to synod. Each synod should evaluate the information requested in a questionnaire in light of its individual circumstances. A pivotal consideration is uniformity and the equal opportunity for all nominees to complete the form. This form should be provided in enough time that potential nominees will be able to fill it out in advance (if that is your process) or during the course of the assembly.

With respect to substance, both background information and responses to open-ended questions should be obtained. Because communication skills are important for a bishop, voting members should have the opportunity to see how nominees answer important questions in writing. Open-ended questions also allow nominees to address issues raised in the synod's profile and important synod priorities.

The Bishop's Election Committee should review the forms submitted by nominees before they are finalized and distributed. In the interest of fairness, completed forms should be disseminated at the same time for all nominees, if possible. If nominees are identified in advance, biographical and other information can be posted on the synod's website and distributed to voting members by email.

D. Liaison with the Churchwide Organization

The Church Council appoints representatives of the churchwide organization to attend synod assemblies. In assemblies at which bishops' elections will occur, the churchwide representative is willing and trained to conduct the election itself, if desired by the Synod Council. A decision should be made about who will conduct the election before the nomination and election process begins. If the churchwide representative will chair the assembly during the election process, a rule of procedure should be included as part of the adoption of the rules at the start of the assembly. A model rule is in Appendix C.

The churchwide organization will endeavor to keep lines of communication open with the persons in the synod who will be responsible for the bishop's election. Conference calls between representatives of the churchwide organization and the Bishop Election Committee and/or

Executive Committee should take place to review the nomination and election process and issues relating to it. In addition, within approximately 30 days of the Synod Assembly, the churchwide representative at the Synod Assembly and the Bishop's Election Committee and/or Executive Committee should confer.

IV. The Synod Assembly

By the time the Synod Assembly convenes, voting members should be thoroughly oriented and the agenda and rules of organization and procedure or standing rules should be carefully crafted to facilitate the election process. Sample rules of organization and procedure providing for processes addressed in this section are contained in Appendix C.

A. Introduction of the Election Process

Because the election of a bishop is both an election and a call process, it is appropriate to devote assembly time before the first ballot for reflection on the office of the bishop. The churchwide representative will provide an introduction and overview of the role and responsibilities of the synod bishop and the importance of the election process. Be sure to communicate with the churchwide representative in advance of preparing the agenda so that enough time is planned. Pausing at the beginning of the process to ponder the duties of the office and the meaning of calling a pastor for the synod is an introductory step that facilitates a wholesome and Spirit-led election process. Further, the presentation includes leading the assembly voting members in prayer as they embark on their crucial responsibility in the life of this church. Modeling the importance of prayer and reflection sets an important precedent and tone for each subsequent step in the election process.

B. Credentials Committee Responsibilities

In all deliberative assemblies, including synod assemblies, the registration of voting members and the issuance of appropriate credentials are important responsibilities. It is even more important when elections occur. Because only voting members may cast ballots for the election of officers, voting members must be appropriately registered and identified in advance of the balloting.

Provisions in Chapter 7 of the *Constitution for Synods* address the membership of the Synod Assembly. Constitutional provision †S7.21. specifies the composition of the voting membership of the Synod Assembly. In addition, other provisions in Chapter 7 provide options to allow other persons attending Synod Assemblies to have voice and vote. For example, under S7.22., ministers who are on the retired roster, on leave from call, or with disability status who are not voting members have the privilege of voice but not vote at a Synod Assembly, but the Synod Council may establish processes to make such persons voting members. S7.26. and S7.27. also authorize the Synod Council to establish processes to allow other designated persons to have voice and vote. Members of the Synod Council who are not otherwise elected as voting members may be given the privilege of voice and vote, pursuant to S7.28. *Only those persons authorized in Chapter 7 of the synod's constitution can serve as voting members of the Synod Assembly and vote in the bishop's election.* However, synods may provide that others have voice (but not vote) at the Synod Assembly in their rules of organization and procedure or standing rules.

Regardless of registration procedures for others, the Credentials Committee must ensure that voting members are appropriately registered and issued credentials that allow them to be identified at the

time of balloting. In electronic meetings, procedures must be in place to ensure that only voting members are allowed to vote. Careful preparation of registration processes and identification of voting members at the time of balloting will minimize the risk of a challenge to election results or an invalid ballot.

Of course, guests almost always attend a Synod Assembly, but they have neither voice nor vote. For assemblies meeting in person, it generally is not desirable to authorize seating of observers with voting members. For assemblies meeting electronically, observers should view only by streaming and should be muted.

It also is important to coordinate reports of the Credentials Committee with balloting. This avoids the potential problem of having more ballots cast than voting members reported present. This may require closing registration/check in for a time prior to each ballot for bishop. This should be communicated to all voting members in advance of the assembly. As a practical matter, an abbreviated credentials report announcing the number of voting members present should be made immediately before each ballot.

It is neither necessary nor desirable to have a complete report of the Credentials Committee before each vote. Once a quorum exists and the Synod Assembly is properly constituted, the interim reports of the Credentials Committee should include only the number of voting members present.

C. The First Ballot

As indicated above, the process of balloting should be prefaced by reflection on the election of a bishop. After this prayerful consideration and the report of the Credentials Committee, the person conducting the election will review the process for casting the first ballot, announce the vote required for election, and solicit questions. (Pursuant to *Robert's Rules of Order [Newly Revised]*, 12th ed., Section 45, once voting begins, there should not be any interruptions, so care should be taken to ensure that the opportunity exists to answer all questions before initiating the voting process.)

At assemblies meeting in person, the Elections Committee or designated tellers should distribute the ballots, if paper ballots are used, upon instruction of the person presiding at the election. (Appendix E contains sample forms for written ballots.) Only voting members should receive ballots. Once ballots are distributed, the person presiding will explain the proper method for voting (writing a name, circling a name, checking a box, etc.). Members should be asked to refrain from marking their ballots until instructed to do so. In addition, the process for collecting ballots should be explained. (For ease of counting, it is advisable not to fold paper ballots; instruct members to turn ballots face down and pass them in a designated direction.)

For assemblies meeting electronically, various online voting methods are available. Care must be exercised that only credentialed voting members be allowed access to the voting method.

Note that the ecclesiastical ballot process does not allow spoken nominations from the floor (see ELCA continuing resolution 19.01.C19.). If the first ballot is designated a nominating ballot under other election processes, spoken nominations from the floor are neither necessary nor desirable. If the first ballot is not designated as a nominating ballot, applicable governing document provisions or rules of procedure should address whether spoken nominations from the floor are allowed.

It is appropriate and recommended to transition from instruction to voting with a period of silence, followed by prayer. If the assembly is online, it is recommended that these prayers be live and in the moment, rather than pre-recorded. After silence and prayer, the person presiding will announce that the first ballot for bishop will now be taken and instruct voting members to vote.

The designated tellers should collect *all* ballots when instructed by the person presiding at the election. In electronic elections, a time limit may be set for submitting a ballot, and voting should cease after that deadline. After the voting and collection of ballots, the person presiding will declare that the first ballot is closed. Thereafter, the designated tellers will count and tabulate the results in private. The ELCA Digital Directory can be used to check that a person is on the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament (directory.elca.org). Any questions regarding the counting should be addressed to the person presiding over the election.

Ballots cast, whether electronically or on paper, both legal and illegal, should be retained until after the Synod Assembly adjourns, when they should be discarded.

It is important, whether the meeting is in person or electronic, that assembly planners integrate enough time into the agenda to allow for counting and tabulating the first ballot.

D. Reporting of Election Results

Provision S9.09. in the *Constitution for Synods* recommends that the result of each ballot in every election shall be announced in detail to the Synod Assembly. If the synod has adopted this or a similar provision, following the first ballot and all succeeding ballots for the election of a bishop, both the names of the persons receiving votes and the vote totals for each person must be reported to the assembly as part of the report of the Elections Committee. (A sample form for the report of each ballot is contained in Appendix G.) Regardless of the form, the report should include the number of total votes cast, the number of legal votes cast, and the number of votes needed for election on the particular ballot, as well as each nominee's name and the number of votes each person received. (See paragraph I below for special instructions when a ballot results in an election.) It also is advisable to post the report of the first ballot after it is announced. The report form should be maintained by the synod secretary for purposes of preparing assembly minutes. A copy of the report form should also be given to the churchwide representative.

After the report of the first ballot, the presiding officer will address the process for nominees to withdraw from the election process, as explained in more detail in the following section. It is important to remind nominees that a background check and screening will take place in accordance with the synod's governing documents and policies, and an Authorization and Release for Background Check and Screening form will need to be completed at an appropriate time.

E. After the First Ballot

When the ecclesiastical ballot or modified ecclesiastical ballot is used, it is important to incorporate sufficient time in the agenda to confirm that nominees are on the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament of this church and to provide an easy and expeditious process for allowing nominees to withdraw. This process should involve use of a form such as the one provided in Appendix F. For assemblies meeting electronically, the Bishop's Election Committee should set a protocol in advance for how withdrawals will be handled, whether by email, text, online form submission, or

other method. Some synods allow a person to withdraw verbally when heard by at least two members of the Bishop's Election Committee. The process should not include withdrawals in the presence of the assembly, however.

The Bishop's Election Committee should be prepared to contact nominees who are not in attendance at the Synod Assembly. If an absent nominee does not desire to withdraw, the nominee should be invited to attend the Synod Assembly and to submit biographical and other information as prescribed in the synod's procedures. If the nominee cannot attend, in rare circumstances a representative may be identified to speak on the nominee's behalf, if this alternative is authorized by the synod's procedures.

The second ballot for bishop should be scheduled enough time after the report of the first ballot to allow adequate time for withdrawals, contact of absent nominees, and preparation of a new ballot. If biographical information will be obtained, it is advisable to distribute forms to nominees on the second ballot in order to save time between the second and third ballots.

F. Subsequent Ballots

The process for the second and subsequent ballots is essentially the same as for the first ballot, except voting members may vote only for persons whose names appear on the ballot. Thus, after an interim report of the Credentials Committee, the person presiding will explain the process for that ballot, answer questions, call for a period of silence, invite a prayer team member to lead prayer, and call for the balloting. After voting takes place and the ballots are collected, the second (or subsequent) ballot for bishop will be declared closed.

An appropriate time to ask for submission of the *Authorization and Release for Background Check* and *Screening and the Disclosure Form for Nominees* is before the third ballot when the ecclesiastical ballot is used.

The report of the Elections Committee for ballots subsequent to the first should follow the format described above, except in the case of the final ballot when the total for the runner-up is announced first, followed by the vote total for the person elected. (Sample report forms for subsequent ballots are contained in Appendix G.) Ballots cast should be maintained until the Synod Assembly adjourns, and the report of the Elections Committee should be provided to the synod secretary for purposes of preparing Synod Assembly minutes.

When biographical and other written information is obtained, it must be carefully reviewed and questions regarding content answered before it is duplicated and distributed. Although speed is always important, fairness requires that the information provided from nominees be comparable and not argumentative and that it be distributed at the same time. It is usually advisable to distribute the biographical material no later than before the third ballot. The more time available for voting members to review the biographical and other information, the better.

G. Nominees Speaking to the Assembly

Many assemblies provide an opportunity before the third ballot for nominees to address the assembly. The following suggestions are made for such addresses.

1. The ground rules regarding time and content of speaking should be disseminated in advance.

2. The sequence of speaking should be predetermined and established in a random manner.
3. Some synods sequester nominees so that they cannot hear the presentations of other nominees. Arrangements should be made to have the nominees at the dais in a timely manner.
4. A time limit should be announced and fairly imposed; five minutes has worked well in the past. (Again, a timekeeper should be identified who will provide a 30-second warning and indicate when time has expired.)
5. Instruction should be given that there will be no applause after individual speakers; after all speaking is completed, the person presiding at the election will thank and invite applause for all nominees.

Again, it is appropriate that the person presiding at the election confer with the speakers in advance to ensure that they understand the ground rules and to lead them in prayer.

H. Questions to Nominees

Many synods provide for a question-and-answer period before the fourth ballot. Experience has shown that thoughtful preparation and presentation of the question-and-answer period can be important in the discernment process of electing a bishop.

A key ingredient in a meaningful question-and-answer period is the preparation of questions. Sometimes the Executive Committee or Bishop's Election Committee prepares questions; sometimes questions are solicited from the assembly. Regardless of the mechanism, it is strongly recommended that the questions be reviewed, organized, and edited in advance. This avoids duplication, ensures that questions are intelligible and focused on important issues, and makes the most effective use of time. Questions should also be screened so that they are not argumentative or directed at an issue related to a specific nominee. (Sample questions are provided in Appendix H.) It is also recommended that a neutral person be designated to ask the questions. Ordinarily, this will be the person designated to preside at the election, although it could also be the synod vice president, chair of the Bishop's Election Committee, or other neutral person.

The procedure for asking questions must be carefully considered and the process disseminated in advance. Fairness to the nominees and time management are important factors. Based on experience, the following are suggestions regarding the question-and-answer process:

1. Exactly the same questions should be asked of each nominee.
2. At assemblies that are in person, if the nominees are sequestered, provision should be made to have them move to the dais in a timely manner. In assemblies that are online, consider placing the speakers in breakout rooms, then bring them into the main room at the appropriate time.
3. Questions should be asked of nominees in a predetermined, rotating order. Thus, the same persons will not answer all questions in the same order.
4. An alternative format to a question-and-answer period in a plenary session is to divide the assembly into the same number of groups as number of nominees and to have each nominee rotate from group to group. This allows each nominee to respond to questions without being influenced or affected by prior responses of another. This could be managed easily in electronic formats that allow for breakout rooms.
5. A time limit should be announced and fairly imposed; a 90-second maximum response time works well. (A timekeeper can indicate with a yellow card when 30 seconds remain and a red card when time has expired.)
6. Applause should be withheld until the conclusion of the question-and-answer period, when it should be invited by the chair.

Before the question-and-answer period begins, a member of the Bishop's Election Committee should review the ground rules with the nominees and lead them in prayer.

I. The Election

When, as the result of any ballot, there is an election, the person reporting the results should advise the person presiding *before* the formal report is made to the assembly. This allows the person presiding time to make preparatory comments. Similarly, if electronic voting is used, the results should be provided to the person presiding *before* displaying them to the assembly. If the assembly is online, this could be accomplished by a private text message or instant message. The Bishop's Election Committee should check the percentages determined by electronic voting to make sure that an election has taken place.

When there has been an election by the required percentage of the vote, the report of the Bishop's Election Committee should announce that fact in advance of the vote totals. Unlike the report on the previous ballots, it is advisable to report vote totals in ascending order so the last person announced is the person elected. This will facilitate the audience in applauding the results and election at the end of the report and allow the person presiding to declare the person elected as the new bishop.

After the report of the Elections Committee, the person presiding at the election will declare, on the basis of the report, that the person who received the requisite number of votes has been duly elected (or re-elected) bishop of the synod.

After opportunity for a brief presentation by the person elected, the person presiding (if other than the current bishop) will return the chair to the bishop.

APPENDIX

The Appendix contains the following sample forms and information to assist in the election process. If desired, the PDF links on the left are fillable forms for your synod's use.

-  A. Authorization and Release for Background Checks and Screening
-   B. Protocol for Churchwide Officer Background Checks and Screening and Disclosure Form
- C. Sample Rules of Organization and Procedure for Synod Assemblies
-  D. Sample Biographical Information Form
- E. Sample Ballots for Bishop
-  F. Request for Withdrawal from Ballot for Bishop
- G. Sample Reports of Election Results
- H. Sample Questions for Synod Bishop Nominees



Download PDF form

Appendix A: Authorization and Release for Background Checks and Screening

An outside vendor is used for background checks and screenings. These include county, state, and federal criminal checks. If applicable, education and credit checks may also be applied.

In order to complete the appropriate screenings, please provide the following information:

Legal first name: _____

Legal last name: _____

Current email address: _____

An email containing a consent form will be sent to you.

Appendix B: Protocol for Churchwide Officer Background Checks and Screening and Disclosure Form

The following is a protocol for implementation of continuing resolution 19.01.B09.

19.01.B09. *Background checks and screening shall be required and completed for persons nominated as churchwide officers prior to their election, if possible, or as soon as practical after their election. The specific procedures and timing of background checks and screening shall be determined by the Church Council.*

General Information for Background Checks for Presiding Bishop, Vice President, and Secretary

1. The Church Council's Executive Committee is responsible for background checks and screening of nominees for the offices of Presiding Bishop, Vice President, and Secretary in churchwide elections. The churchwide executive for Human Resources, or a designee if the executive is unable to serve, shall provide all necessary services related to background checks and screening.
2. Any member of the Church Council's Executive Committee or churchwide staff member who intends to stand for election, or whose name is on the second ballot for an office, shall not participate in any of this background check and screening process (except as a nominee). Any person who is a close relative of a nominee for election shall not be part of the process.¹
3. The Executive Committee, in cooperation with the Secretary, will announce the background check and screening requirements to this church generally and to all voting members in advance of each Churchwide Assembly. The Rules of Organization and Procedure for the Churchwide Assembly will note continuing resolution 19.01.B09. Copies of this protocol will be made available to nominees and other individuals upon request.
4. The Executive Committee will approve forms prepared by Human Resources to be completed by nominees to comply with the background check and screening requirements. These shall include background check authorization and a screening disclosure form. Screening disclosure forms may be modeled upon the Rostered Minister Profile form disclosures.
5. Background checks for nominees may include a criminal check, financial check, driver's license check, and credentials check, and such other checks, and in such jurisdictions, as deemed necessary by the Executive Committee.
6. Best efforts will be made to complete all background checks prior to the officer's election. However, if that is not possible, the election process will not be delayed.
7. This protocol may be amended by the Church Council.

¹ This protocol is intended to handle most conflict-of-interest situations. In the event of other conflicts or the appearance of conflicts, the Executive Committee will take steps to address such concerns.

Procedures for Background Checks for Presiding Bishop, Vice President, and Secretary

1. During the Churchwide Assembly, the Executive Committee will provide background check authorization and disclosure forms to the nominees remaining after the second ballot. There will be a statewide and county criminal search as well as a sex offender registry search. To the extent possible, it will cover seven years. The executive for Human Resources may use his or her discretion to do a search in an adjoining state to the home address of the person depending on state's proximity and possible previous work location. An Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) list check will be completed.
2. A deadline for return of the forms by the nominees will be set and communicated to each nominee. The Office of the Secretary will provide a biographical information form to be completed by the nominees along with the other forms.
3. The Executive Committee will assign a member to each of the nominees remaining after the second ballot. That member will be responsible for distributing and collecting all the forms and information from the assigned nominee and, as appropriate, providing copies of the materials to the Executive Committee, the Office of the Secretary, and the executive for Human Resources, or the designee, as specified below.
4. The biographical information form, background check authorization, a screening disclosure form and an envelope for returning the disclosure form will be handed out to the nominees by the Executive Committee member assigned to the nominee. The nominees will complete the forms and return them to the assigned Executive Committee member before the deadline. The background check authorization form will be given immediately to Human Resources in order to do the background checks. The disclosure form will be retained by the executive for Human Resources, or designee, and kept confidential. The biographical information form will be given to the Office of the Secretary.
5. Upon receipt of the authorization form, Human Resources will promptly complete the specified background checks and keep all results confidential. Human Resources will deliver the completed background check survey along with the disclosure forms to the Executive Committee at a committee meeting held in executive session for that purpose. The results of the background check surveys and disclosure forms will be reviewed promptly by the Executive Committee in that meeting. The committee may confidentially share the information it receives with third parties to seek advice or expertise in their review process.
6. A copy of the nominee's background check survey results will be given to the nominee. That delivery should be done by the assigned committee member in a sealed, confidential envelope. Written instructions should accompany the background checks stating that any error or mistake in the report should be promptly explained by the nominee in writing to the Executive Committee. The written explanation by the nominee should be given to the assigned committee member in a confidential manner for delivery to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee may seek the assistance of Human Resources to address any report of errors.
7. If necessary, the Executive Committee will meet again to review the background check survey disclosure forms, and nominees' explanations, if any. Concerns with the background check results and disclosure form answers should be raised and discussed with the nominee by the Executive Committee.
8. Notice that background checks and screening have been completed will be announced to the Churchwide Assembly. The Executive Committee will make a decision regarding disclosing any results of the

background checks or screening information with the Churchwide Assembly as well. There must be consultation with the nominee before such disclosure occurs.

9. Copies of the background check reports and screening disclosure forms will be handled in a secure manner throughout the process. Human Resources will mark all forms “Confidential” and keep them secure. The information and reports concerning the persons elected to office will be retained in a secure Human Resources file. All other forms and reports will be destroyed.

Procedures for Background Checks for the Treasurer

1. Human Resources will be responsible for conducting a background check and screening disclosure prior to the nomination of an individual for the Office of Treasurer. There will be a credit check completed. There will be a statewide and county criminal search as well as a sex offender registry search. To the extent possible, it will cover seven years. The Executive for Human Resources may use his or her discretion to do a search in an adjoining state to the home address of the person depending on state's proximity and possible previous work location. An Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) list check will be completed.
2. Human Resources will share results with the Presiding Bishop. The Presiding Bishop may consult with the Secretary and, as appropriate, with the Church Council Executive Committee regarding results and any evaluation. A copy of the background check will be shared with the nominee.
3. Notice that a background check and screening documents have been completed will be shared with the Church Council.
4. Copies of the background check reports and screening disclosure form for the elected Treasurer will be marked “Confidential” and kept in a secure Human Resources file.

This protocol was approved by the Executive Committee of the Church Council on July 27, 2012 [EC12.07.23] for use at the 2013 Churchwide Assembly.

Suggested protocol for review of background check for synod bishop:

1. The Synod Council should develop a written policy on how background checks for synod bishop are received and processed.
2. If the current bishop is a nominee, the synod council should authorize the synod vice president to review the background checks. If the current bishop is not a nominee for re-election, the current bishop could review the background checks.
3. If something is identified in the background checks, the vice president or the bishop should consult with the executive committee of the synod council to determine if the information would disqualify the nominee from serving or is not disqualifying but should be disclosed to the synod or Synod Assembly before voting proceeds or does not rise to the level of disqualification or disclosure. The churchwide office legal team can assist the executive committee with this.



Download PDF form

Disclosure Form for Nominees

Out of care for this church, the following questions are asked of all who are making themselves available for election to churchwide office:

1. Have you ever engaged in, been charged with, or convicted of illegal conduct or a crime, including conduct resulting in suspension or revocation of your driver's license?
 Yes No If yes, please explain below.

2. Do you have any addictive behavior, including a history of drug, alcohol, or pornographic addictions that might interfere with your ability to serve or continue serving as a rostered minister?
 Yes No If yes, please explain below.

3. Have you ever engaged in, been sued for, or charged with sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, substance abuse, child or spousal neglect or abuse, or financial improprieties?
 Yes No If yes, please explain below.

4. While in candidacy or on the roster, have you ever engaged in, been charged with, or disciplined for any conduct proscribed in Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline?
Never Rostered Yes No If yes, please explain below.

5. Have you ever been accused of or investigated for any of the items described in the preceding questions, even if the accusations were not true?
Yes No If yes, please explain below.

6. Have you ever engaged in any behavior or been involved in any situations that, if they became known to the church, might seriously damage your ability to begin or continue in ministry?
 Yes No If yes, please explain below.

I have read the above statements and my replies are true and accurate.

Print Name _____

Date: _____ Signature: _____

I have attached _____ additional page(s). Yes No

Additional Information for Disclosure Form

Please provide as complete an answer as you deem appropriate on this sheet. Please make sure to number your answers to correspond to the questions. If more than one page is needed, please indicate that information is continued on another page.

Appendix C: Sample Rules of Organization and Procedure for Synod Assemblies

1. *Biographical Information:* Biographical information on the seven nominees (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes on the second ballot, submitted on a form determined by the Synod Council, shall be distributed to voting members prior to casting the third ballot for bishop.
2. *Addresses to the Assembly by Nominees:* Prior to the third ballot for bishop, the seven persons (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes on the second ballot will be invited to address the assembly, with speaking limited to five minutes each. If any such person is not present at the assembly, the individual may address the assembly telephonically or may designate an alternate to speak on her or his behalf. A timekeeper shall indicate to the speaker when 30 seconds remain of the allocated time and when the allocated time has elapsed. The sequence of the speeches shall be determined by lot.
3. *Questions to Nominees:* Prior to the fourth ballot for bishop, the three persons (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes on the third ballot will be invited to participate in a question-and-answer period. The period shall be moderated by the person designated to preside at the election. The questions shall be asked in rotating order of the nominees, and the same questions will be asked to each nominee. Each nominee shall have a maximum of 90 seconds to respond to each question. A timekeeper shall indicate to the speaker when 30 seconds remain of the allotted time and when the allotted time has ended. The sequence of the questions to be asked shall be determined by the vice president and secretary of the synod. Questions may be submitted in writing to the secretary, or the secretary's designee, by any voting member of the assembly by (*list date, day, and time certain for the deadline*). The time for the question-and-answer period shall be a maximum of 45 minutes.
4. *Election of a Bishop:* The representative of the churchwide organization shall preside over the assembly whenever the assembly is in session and considering business related to the election of the synod bishop, or when the assembly is casting ballots in this election. Upon conclusion of balloting or of specific business related to the election, the bishop shall resume presiding over the assembly.



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Appendix D: Sample Biographical Information Form

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FORM:

NOMINEE FOR BISHOP OF THE

1. Name:
2. Current Position:
3. Congregation Membership:
4. Date and Year of Birth:
5. Date and Year of Ordination:
6. Previous Positions:

7. Education and Earned Degrees (with institutions and years, most recent first):

8. List up to five (5) current or past synod or churchwide activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.

9. List up to five (5) current or past community-related activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.
10. What gifts would you bring to the office of bishop of this synod? (1,000 characters maximum)
11. What do you see as the principal challenge to this synod in the next six (6) years, and how would you address it? (1,000 characters maximum)
12. Describe your leadership style. (1,000 characters maximum)



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Appendix E: Sample Ballots for Bishop

First Ballot

for Bishop of the

(synod)

To vote, write the name of a pastor on the roster of ministers of Word and Sacrament of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

Please identify the current call of the person for whom you are voting.

Where does this person currently live?

(Submit your ballot as instructed by the person presiding at the election.)



Download PDF form

Second Ballot

for Bishop of the

(*synod*)

(List names in descending order of totals received on first ballot; do not list names of persons who withdrew.)



Download PDF form

Third Ballot

for Bishop of the

(*synod*)

(List names of seven nominees [in synods where the third ballot is limited to the top seven] in descending order of totals received on second ballot.)



Download PDF form

Fourth Ballot

for Bishop of the

(synod)

(List three names in descending order of totals received on third ballot.)



Download PDF form

Fifth Ballot
for Bishop of the *(synod)*

(List two names in descending order of totals received on fourth ballot.)



[Download PDF form](#)

Appendix F:
Request for Withdrawal from Ballot for Bishop of the
(*synod*)

I, the Reverend [REDACTED], request that my name be withdrawn from the ballot for bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

(Signed)

Date

(Submit this form to the secretary of the synod prior to the announced deadline.)



Download PDF form

Appendix G: Sample Reports of Election Results

Report of the First Ballot for Bishop of the *(synod)*

Number of votes cast:

Number of legal votes cast:

**Number of votes needed for election
on this ballot (75%):**

(List names with vote totals in descending order of totals.)



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Report of the Second Ballot
for Bishop of the **(synod)**

Number of votes cast:

Number of legal votes cast:

**Number of votes needed for election
on this ballot (75%):**

(List names with vote totals in descending order of totals.)



Download PDF form

Report of the Third Ballot
for Bishop of the **(synod)**

Number of votes cast:

Number of legal votes cast:

**Number of votes needed for election
on this ballot (two-thirds):**

(List names with vote totals in descending order of totals.)



Download PDF form

**Report of the Fourth Ballot
for Bishop of the *(synod)***

Number of votes cast:

Number of legal votes cast:

**Number of votes needed for election
on this ballot (60%):**

(List names with vote totals in descending order of totals.)



Download PDF form

**Report of the Fifth Ballot
for Bishop of the *(synod)***

Number of votes cast:

Number of legal votes cast:

**Number of votes needed for election
on this ballot (majority):**

*(List names in ascending order of totals. Be sure to advise the presider of the election results **before** reporting to the assembly.)*

Appendix H: Sample Questions for Synod Bishop Nominees

What do you see as the principal challenge for this synod's bishop in the next six (6) years?

What is your vision for the ministry of this synod in the next six (6) years?

What is your principal priority for this synod and what will you do to address it?

If you could change one thing in the administration or organization of this synod, what would it be?

What gifts will you bring to the office of bishop of this synod?

What experiences in your life have prepared you for the responsibilities of synod bishop?

Describe some of the leadership positions you have held in the past and how you made a difference in those positions.

As you look at the difficult issues facing this synod and this church, how will you provide leadership to facilitate decision making to help address them?

If you are elected bishop, what ideas do you have to facilitate and motivate evangelical outreach?

What specific steps will this synod take under your leadership as bishop to identify and develop lay leaders and rostered ministers for the mission and ministry of this church?

Describe specific events or experiences in your life that reflect your commitment to making this church diverse and multicultural.

The office of synod bishop requires significant time away from the synod in leadership throughout this church. Tell us what you have done in the past to balance two very demanding roles.

Tell a story about how God's Word has shaped your life.

Tell us a favorite story about Jesus and how you speak of it in your daily life.

Describe a defining moment in your call to the ministry.



EXHIBIT A

Constitutional provisions regarding synods and the role of the synod bishop

ELCA CONSTITUTION

CHAPTER 8. RELATIONSHIPS

8.11. This church shall seek to function as people of God through congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, all of which shall be interdependent. Each part, while fully the church, recognizes that it is not the whole church and therefore lives in an interdependent relationship with the others.

8.13. The synod shall provide for pastoral care of the congregations, ministers of Word and Sacrament, and ministers of Word and Service within its boundaries. It shall plan for, facilitate, and nurture the life and mission of its people and shall enlarge the ministries and extend the outreach into society on behalf of and in connection with the congregations and the churchwide organization. Conferences, clusters, coalitions, other area subdivisions, or networks shall serve to assist the congregations and synods in exercising their mutual responsibilities.

8.16. In faithful participation in the mission of God in and through this church, congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization—as interdependent expressions of this church—shall be guided by the biblical and confessional commitments of this church. Each shall recognize that mission efforts must be shaped by both local needs and global awareness, by both individual witness and corporate endeavor, and by both distinctly Lutheran emphases and growing ecumenical cooperation.

CONSTITUTION FOR SYNODS

CHAPTER 6. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

†S6.01. 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.

†S6.02. To participate in God's mission, this synod as a part of the Church shall:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

- d. Worship God in proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments and through lives of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, witness, and service.
- 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.

†S6.03. This synod, in cooperation with the churchwide organization, shall bear primary responsibility for the oversight of the life and mission of this church in its territory. In fulfillment of this role and consistent with policies and procedures of this church, the synod shall:

- a. Provide for pastoral care of congregations and rostered ministers in the synod;
- b. Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations;
- c. Strengthen interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, and foster relationships with agencies and institutions affiliated with or related to this church as well as ecumenical partners; and
- d. Interpret the work of this church to congregations and to the public on the territory of the synod.

†S6.03.01. The responsibilities of the synod include the following:

- a. providing for pastoral care of congregations, ministers of Word and Sacrament, and ministers of Word and Service in the synod, including:
 - 1) approving candidates for rostered ministry in cooperation with the appropriate seminaries of this church, which may be done through multi-synod committees;
 - 2) authorizing ordinations and ordaining rostered ministers on behalf of this church;
 - 3) consulting in the call process for rostered ministers.
- b. providing for leadership recruitment, preparation, and support in accordance with churchwide standards and policies, including:
 - 1) nurturing and supporting congregations and lay leaders;
 - 2) seeking and recruiting qualified candidates for the rostered ministries of this church;
 - 3) making provision for pastoral care, call review, and guidance;
 - 4) encouraging and supporting persons on the rosters of this church in stewardship of their abilities, care of self, and pursuit of continuing education to undergird their effectiveness of service; and
 - 5) supporting recruitment of leaders for this church's colleges, universities, seminaries, and social ministry organizations.
- c. providing for discipline of congregations, ministers of Word and Sacrament, and ministers of Word and Service; as well as for termination of call, appointment, adjudication, and appeals consistent with Chapter 20 of this church's constitution.
- d. providing for archives in conjunction with other synods.

†S6.03.02. In planning for, facilitating, and nurturing the mission of this church through congregations, the responsibilities of the synod include the following:

- a. developing of new ministries, redevelopment of existing ministries, and support and assistance in the conclusion, if necessary, of a particular ministry;
- b. leading and encouraging of congregations in their evangelism efforts;

- c. assisting members of its congregations in carrying out their ministries in the world;
- d. encouraging congregations to respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society;
- e. providing resources for congregational life; and
- f. grouping congregations in conferences, clusters, coalitions, or other area subdivisions for mission purposes.

†S6.03.03. In strengthening interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, and in fostering relationships with agencies and institutions affiliated with or related to this church as well as with ecumenical partners, the responsibilities of the synod include the following:

- a. promoting interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, and entering into relationships with other synods in the region;
- b. fostering organizations for youth, women, and men, and organizations for language or ethnic communities;
- c. developing relationships with social ministry organizations and ministries, participating in their mission planning, and providing supportive funding;
- d. supporting relationships with and providing supportive funding on behalf of colleges, universities, and campus ministries;
- e. maintaining relationships with and providing supportive funding on behalf of seminaries and continuing education centers;
- f. fostering supporting relationships with camps and other outdoor ministries;
- g. fostering supporting relationships with preschools, elementary schools, and secondary schools operated by congregations of the synod;
- h. fostering relationships with ecumenical and global companions; and
- i. cooperating with other synods and the churchwide organization in creating, using, and supporting regions to carry out those functions of the synod which can best be done cooperatively with other synods and the churchwide organization.

†S6.03.04. In interpreting the work of this church on the territory of the synod, the responsibilities of the synod include the following:

- a. encouraging financial support for the work of this church by individuals and congregations;
- b. participating in churchwide programs;
- c. interpreting social statements in a manner consistent with the interpretation given by the churchwide unit or office which assisted in the development of the statement, and suggestion of social study issues; and
- d. providing ecumenical guidance and encouragement.

CONSTITUTION FOR SYNODS

CHAPTER 8. OFFICERS

†S8.12. As this synod's pastor, the bishop shall:

- a. Preach, teach, and administer the sacraments in accord with the Confession of Faith of this church.
- b. Have primary responsibility for the ministry of Word and Sacrament in this synod and its congregations, providing pastoral care and leadership for this synod, its congregations, its ministers of Word and Sacrament, and its ministers of Word and Service.

- c. Exercise solely this church's power to ordain (or provide for the ordination by another synod bishop of) approved candidates who have received and accepted a properly issued, duly attested letter of call for the office of ministry of Word and Sacrament (and as provided in the bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).
- d. Ordain (or provide for the ordination of) approved candidates who have received and accepted a properly issued, duly attested letter of call for service as ministers of Word and Service of this church.
- e. Attest letters of call for persons called to serve congregations in the synod, letters of call for persons called by the Synod Council, and letters of call for persons on the rosters of this synod called by the Church Council.
- f. Install (or provide for the installation of) rostered ministers whose calls the bishop has attested.
- g. Exercise leadership in the mission of this church and in so doing:
 - 1) interpret and advocate the mission and theology of the whole church;
 - 2) lead in fostering support for and commitment to the mission of this church within this synod;
 - 3) coordinate the use of the resources available to this synod as it seeks to promote the health of this church's life and witness in the areas served by this synod;
 - 4) submit a report to each regular meeting of the Synod Assembly concerning the synod's life and work; and
 - 5) advise and counsel this synod's related institutions and organizations.
- h. Practice leadership in strengthening the unity of the Church and in so doing:
 - 1) exercise oversight of the preaching, teaching, and administration of the sacraments within this synod in accord with the Confession of Faith of this church;
 - 2) be responsible for administering the constitutionally established processes for the resolution of controversies and for the discipline of rostered ministers and congregations of this synod;
 - 3) be the chief ecumenical officer of this synod;
 - 4) be a member of the Conference of Bishops and consult regularly with other synod bishops;
 - 5) foster awareness of other churches throughout the Lutheran world communion and, where appropriate, engage in contact with leaders of those churches;
 - 6) cultivate communion in faith and mission with appropriate Christian judicatory leaders functioning within the territory of this synod; and 7) be *ex officio* a member of the Churchwide Assembly.
- i. Oversee and administer the work of this synod and in so doing:
 - 1) serve as the president of the synod corporation and be the chief executive and administrative officer of this synod, who is authorized and empowered, in the name of this synod, to sign deeds or other instruments and to affix the seal of this synod;
 - 2) preside at all meetings of the Synod Assembly and provide for the preparation of the agenda for the Synod Assembly, Synod Council, and the council's Executive Committee;
 - 3) ensure that the constitution and bylaws of the synod and of the churchwide organization are duly observed within this synod, and that the actions of the synod in conformity therewith are carried into effect;
 - 4) direct and guide the work of the other officers;

- 5) exercise supervision over the work of all synod staff members;
- 6) appoint all committees for which provision is not otherwise made;
- 7) be a member of all committees and any other organizational units of the synod, except as otherwise provided in this constitution;
- 8) provide for preparation and maintenance of synod rosters containing the names and addresses of all rostered ministers of this synod and a record of the calls under which they are serving or the date on which their retired or disability status took effect;
- 9) annually bring to the attention of the Synod Council the names of all rostered ministers on leave from call or engaged in approved graduate study in conformity with the constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions of this church and pursuant to prior action of this synod through the Synod Council;
- 10) provide for prompt reporting to the secretary of this church of:
 - a) additions to and subtractions from the rosters of this synod;
 - b) the issuance of certificates of transfer for rostered ministers in good standing who have received and accepted a properly issued, duly attested, regular letter of call under the jurisdiction of another synod; and
 - c) the entrance of the names of such persons for whom proper certificates of transfer have been received;
- 11) provide for preparation and maintenance of a roster of the congregations of this synod and the names of the laypersons who have been elected to represent them; and
- 12) appoint a statistician of the synod, who shall secure the reports of the congregations and make the reports available to the secretary of this church for collation, analysis, and distribution of the statistical summaries to this synod and the other synods of this church.



TIMELINE: Synod Bishop Election

The following actions should be taken under the direction and oversight of the Synod Council. Specific responsibilities, as appropriate, may be assigned to a Bishop's Election Committee or other designated group(s).

1 year prior to the Synod Assembly at which a bishop's election will occur:

- At the Synod Assembly the year before a bishop's election, announce that an election will take place at the next regular meeting and describe the nomination and election processes as provided in the synod's governing documents and procedures.
- Announce the dates and place of the Synod Assembly. (If this information is not provided at the Synod Assembly, it should be provided as soon as possible in the synod newsletter and posted on the synod's web site.)

8-9 months prior to the Synod Assembly:

- Review the applicable governing documents and procedures related to the nomination and election processes. Review *Guidelines for Synod Bishop Elections*.
- Consider how a review of the synod's mission and ministries will take place and schedule conference/cluster meetings or other gatherings, as appropriate.
- Adopt additional policies, as appropriate, and a timeline to implement the provisions of the governing documents and any additional policies.¹
- Identify who will have the responsibility to oversee the nomination and election processes. (This could be addressed by designation of the Executive Committee or appointment of a Bishop's Election Committee.)
- Confer with the churchwide organization regarding the nomination and election processes.
- Engage the bishop in discussion about her/his discernment process, if the bishop can be re-elected. (This could be addressed by the Mutual Ministry Committee or the Executive Committee.)
- Notify congregations and voting members of approved nomination and election processes. Provide information on the synod's Web site and in the synod newsletter.

6-8 months prior to the Synod Assembly:

- Review the synod's strategic and mission plans and goals. Are they currently relevant? How do they intersect and relate to actions of the Churchwide Assembly?

¹ The governing documents may not address pre-assembly issues relating to ministry review or identifying potential nominees. For example, constitutional provision S9.04 in the *Constitution for Synods* is not mandatory, and it does not address either pre-assembly processes or the process for presentations or questions-and-answers during the Synod Assembly. In the absence of express provisions in the synod's governing documents, a Synod Council can develop procedures that address these issues. For additional discussion of pre-assembly and assembly issues, see the current version of *Guidelines for Synod Bishop Elections*.

- Consider conducting a survey of rostered ministers and key congregation leaders in your synod to gather data about the synod's ministry and desired attributes for the synod bishop, if appropriate.
- Engage in conversations at conference/cluster meetings and/or in other venues regarding the synod's mission and ministry and attributes desired in a bishop. Share information and the results of the survey, if available.
- Provide updated information on the synod's Web site and in the synod newsletter.

5-6 months prior to the Synod Assembly:

- Following consultation with the Synod Council or Executive Committee, implement a plan to advise the synod whether the bishop will allow his/her name to go forward for re-election, if the information is not already available.

3-5 months prior to the Synod Assembly:

- Review and assess status of nomination and election processes.
- Communicate survey findings and results of conference/cluster discussions to congregations and voting members.
- Develop biographical information form and questions to be asked of nominees. (These should include information obtained from the survey and conference/cluster discussions.)
- Work on the agenda for the Synod Assembly, including the bishop election process.
- Consult with the churchwide organization regarding nomination and election processes.
- Provide updated information on the synod's Web site and in the synod newsletter.

2-3 months prior to the Synod Assembly:

- Implement process for identification of potential nominees, if applicable.²
- Provide potential nominees with biographical and other information to be completed prior to the established deadline.
- Review transition information provided by the churchwide organization, as appropriate.
- Ensure that rules of organization and procedure or standing rules for the Synod Assembly are updated and complete.
- Provide updated information on the synod's Web site and in the synod newsletter.

45-60 days prior to the Synod Assembly:

- Nominees submit biographical information and other information to the synod office, if applicable.

30-45 days prior to the Synod Assembly:

- Provide biographical and other information to voting members, if applicable. (This information should be included in the pre-assembly materials and posted on the synod's Web site.)
- Analyze registration information to ensure that composition of Synod Assembly is appropriate.
- Provide updated information on the synod's Web site and in the synod newsletter.

² Conference/cluster meetings provide an appropriate forum for this process because they both gather leaders together and they facilitate conversation. If conference/cluster meetings will be used for this purpose, it is important that they be widely representative of the synod and that they not give the appearance of a political campaign. The churchwide organization will provide suggested Bible studies, agendas, and discussion topics for these meetings.

14-30 days prior to the Synod Assembly:

- Consult with churchwide representative regarding election process at Synod Assembly.
- Finalize agenda and procedures for election process (including process for background checks, credentials reports, forms of ballots, arrangements for presentations, questions-and-answers, reporting of ballot results, etc.)
- Provide updated information on the synod's Web site and in the synod newsletter.



EXHIBIT C

CONGREGATION AND SYNOD REPORTS

The Office of the Secretary will provide each synod a Synod Toolkit report, called “Synod Data Toolkit,” containing a summary of congregation statistics and various trend data. This report will be synod specific, and synods are encouraged to distribute it widely as part of the discernment process; the report will be available through [Congregations and Synod Data](#) on the “Topics” dropdown menu on the ELCA Resources page. Reports containing 2023 data are currently available. Reports containing 2024 data will be available by January 2026.

1. Synod Data Toolkit

- Synod Trend Tables and Charts – Synod Trend Tables and Charts showing the baptized membership, average attendance, participation, and giving for the synod over the last eight years. This section also includes size categorizations and growth and decline tables.
- Size of Congregations – Sorted list of congregations based on active participants
- Baptisms by Congregation – Sorted list of congregations based on total number of child and adult baptisms.
- Summary of Form A Data – Includes the location of congregations in the synod and summaries of congregational membership and attendance statistics, financial statistics, participation of different ethnic-specific groups, and what assistances are offered to those with disabilities.

Additionally, synods may find it helpful to collect survey data from their congregations.

Sample questions are provided, and programs like SurveyMonkey can facilitate the process.

2. Synod Bishop Election Survey

a. Background and Instruction

To expand participation in the discernment process and provide data in addition to that collected at conference or cluster meetings, synods may find it helpful to conduct a survey of their rostered ministers and key congregation leaders. Using a program like SurveyMonkey can facilitate the process.

b. Sample Questions

Sample questions for the synod survey might include the following:

1. What three factors most influence what your congregation does and how it does it?
2. What is your primary hope for the future of your congregation?
3. What are your congregation’s three greatest strengths?
4. How well does your congregation reach out to people in your community?
5. What can be learned from how your congregation relates to its community?
6. What should congregations in the synod expect of the synod’s bishop in the next six years?
7. What should the synod’s bishop expect of congregations in the synod in the next six years?

8. What should be the two top priorities of the synod in the next six years?
9. What are your primary hopes for the ELCA as a whole in the next six years?
10. Are you a rostered minister in the synod?
11. How long have you attended an ELCA congregation in the territory of the synod?
12. Have you ever served on the Synod Council or on a committee of the synod?



AGENDA

Conference/Cluster Meetings

A Conversation Regarding the Election of a Synod Bishop

Welcome/Purpose of Gathering

- Introductions
- Agenda and timeline for meeting
- Election of a synod bishop: discernment and call process

Worship and Bible Study/Dwelling in the Word

- Responsive Prayer (ELW p. 328)
- Leading God's People – Part 1
 1. Leader: Exodus 18: 1–12
 2. Table group discussion: Exodus 18: 13–27
 - Discussion questions:
 - What attributes or qualities are needed by God's people?
 - What challenges will leaders face?
 - What is God saying about the gifts needed in a leader?
 - 3. Reports from table groups and discussion
- Leading God's People – Part 2
 1. Table group discussion:

Each table group will take one of the following passages and discuss the same three questions as above, exploring how the passage further informs and refines the discussion of the Exodus passage.

 - Joshua 1:1–9
 - Matthew 28: 18–20
 - John 20:21–23
 - 1 Corinthians 12:13–14, 27–28
 - 1 Timothy 3:1–7
 - 2 Timothy 1: 13–14
 - Titus 1:7–9
 2. Reports from table groups and discussion

Overview of Bishop Election Process

- Explanation of governing document provisions
- Explanation of timetable, if there will be a pre-assembly nomination process

The Synod We Are

- Overview of the Synod Toolkit, 'Your Synod at a Glance'
- What is a synod?
 1. Working definition: "to walk along side" or "to accompany"
 2. ELCA Constitutional provisions
 - ELCA constitutional provisions 8.11, 8.13, 8.16
 - *Constitution for Synods*, Chapter 6
- 3. Synod mission statement/strategic plan³
- Table group discussions:
 1. Discussion questions:
 - What are we able to do better as a synod and congregations working together for the sake of Christ's mission than as individual congregations?
 - Considering the definition and responsibilities of a synod and this synod's mission statement and strategic plan, what has the synod done well and what has it done not so well in the last six years?
 - What should be the primary priorities for synod ministry in the next six years?
 - What should congregations in the synod expect of the synod's bishop in the next six years?
 - What should the synod's bishop expect of congregations in the synod in the next six years?
 2. Reports from table groups and discussion

The Bishop We Seek

- Overview of responsibilities of the bishop (†S8.12)
- Table group discussions
 1. Discussion question:
 - In light of the Bible study and discussion today, what are the spiritual gifts and leadership attributes that are the most important for a bishop in this synod in the next six years?
 2. Reports from table groups and discussion

Concluding Comments/Invitation to Congregational Conversations

Closing Prayer

³ If a synod does not have a mission statement or applicable strategic plan, delete the references that do not apply and modify the discussion questions accordingly.



Prayer resources for synods preparing for bishop elections

Electing a bishop is one of the most important responsibilities in the life of a synod in the ELCA and a key responsibility of a synod assembly. As an election, it is a process governed by the constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions of the synod; however, it is also a call process. As such, it involves discernment, from the perspective both of individual potential nominees and of the synod as a whole. Thus, engaging in prayerful reflection and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit are indispensable aspects of the process of nomination and election, regardless of the particular provisions in the synod's governing documents. The resources and prayers offered here may be used by individuals, congregations and gatherings in synods that are preparing to call a bishop.

Responsive Prayer

The prayer may begin with singing "Come and Fill Our Hearts" (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 528) or another appropriate song or psalm.

The leader begins the dialogue

Come, Holy Spirit!

Come, Holy Spirit!

Come, breath of God and fill the minds and hearts of your people.

Come, Holy Spirit!

Come, fire of truth and kindle in us the flame of your love.

Come, Holy Spirit!

Come, font of wisdom, enlighten us and give us counsel and insight.

Come, Holy Spirit!

Come, leading spirit and guide our discerning.

Come, Holy Spirit!

Come, Holy Spirit!

Holy Spirit, come!

Silence is kept.

The leader concludes the silence with the following prayer:

Almighty God, you have given your Holy Spirit to the church to lead us into all truth. Bless with the Spirit's grace and presence the people of this synod (*name*) as we prepare to elect a bishop. Keep us steadfast in faith and united in love, that we may manifest your glory and prepare for the way of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.** (*adapted from ELW Occasional Services for the Assembly, p. 413*)

Prayers

The church

Gracious Father, we pray for your holy catholic church. Fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in need, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. (*ELW*, p. 73)

Almighty God, grant to your church your Holy Spirit and the wisdom which comes down from heaven, that your word may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, that in steadfast faith we may serve you and in the confession of your name abide to the end; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. (*ELW Occasional Service for the Assembly*, p. 389)

Church unity

Most high and holy God, pour out upon us your one and unifying Spirit, and awaken in every confession of the whole church a holy hunger and thirst for unity in you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. (*ELW*, p. 73)

Enlightenment of the Holy Spirit

God Almighty, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: Grant us, we pray, to be grounded and settled in your truth by the coming of the Holy Spirit into our hearts. That which we know not, reveal; that which is wanting in us, fill up; that which we know, confirm; and keep us blameless in your service; through Jesus Christ our Lord. (*ELW*, p. 86)

O God, through water and the Holy Spirit you give us new birth, cleanse us from sin, and raise us to eternal life. Stir up in your people the gift of your Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever. (*ELW*, p. 237)

Those discerning a call

Almighty God, by the power of the Spirit you have knit your servants into the one body of your Son, Jesus Christ. Look with favor upon them as they discern a new call in Christ's name. Give them courage, patience, and vision; and strengthen us all in our Christian vocation of witness to the world and of service to others; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Voting members

Gracious God, you bless your people with a variety of gifts. Guide with your wisdom those voting members who will elect a bishop of this synod (*name*), that we may receive a faithful servant who will care for your people and equip us for our ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Guidance

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. (*ELW* p. 317)

Scripture Readings

Exodus 3:1-12	<i>God calls Moses</i>
Numbers 27:12-23	<i>God's choice of Joshua</i>
1 Samuel 3	<i>God speaks to Samuel</i>
1 Samuel 16:1-13	<i>David anointed by Samuel</i>
Psalm 104:24-34, 35b	<i>Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth (30)</i>
Psalm 139:1-18, 23-24	<i>Lord, you have searched me out; O Lord you know me (1)</i>
Luke 5:1-11	<i>Jesus Calls the first disciples</i>
Acts 1:15-26	<i>Matthias added to the disciples</i>
Acts 2:1-12	<i>Filled with the Spirit</i>
Romans 8:22-27	<i>Praying with the Spirit</i>
Ephesians 6:18-20	<i>Praying in the Spirit</i>
Jude 1:20-22	<i>Praying in the Spirit</i>

Hymns and Songs

ELW 178	Hear Our Prayer
ELW 179	O Lord, Hear Our Prayer
ELW 180	The Spirit Intercedes for Us
ELW 395	Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord
ELW 401	Gracious Spirit, Heed Our Pleading
ELW 403	Like the Murmur of the Dove's Song
ELW 406	Veni Sancte Spiritus <i>Holy Spirit, Come to Us</i>
ELW 407	O Living Breath of God <i>Soplo de Dios viviente</i>
ELW 528	Come and Fill Our Hearts <i>Confitemini Domino</i>
ELW 577, 578	Creator Spirit, Heavenly Dove
ELW 743	Now to the Holy Spirit Let Us Pray
ELW 751	O Lord, Hear My Prayer
ELW 752	Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying
ACS 940	Come, Holy Spirit
ACS 941	Breath on Us, Breath of God
ACS 942	Every Time I Feel the Spirit
ACS 944	O Spirit All-Embracing
ACS 1013	Anointing Fall on Me
ACS 1074	Óyenos, Señor
ACS 1075	O God, We Call

ELW: *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

ACS: *All Creation Sings*

Updated: September 2023

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SYNOD TRANSITION CHECKLIST

From the moment a synod bishop announces her or his intention to leave office in order to retire or to accept another call, or from the time of an unexpected resignation, incapacity to serve, or death, the synod will experience a season of significant transition. Many persons, as well as other expressions of this church and related organizations, are affected by this event. As in all times of change, leaders who develop and implement a transition plan can help make this an opportunity for growth and positive forward movement in the synod's mission. The following checklist is provided to assist synod officers, staff, council members, and other leaders, working with the outgoing bishop, to prepare for this significant time of change in the synod's life. Synod leaders are encouraged to contact partners in the churchwide organization who may be able to provide assistance. In addition, consultation with leaders from other synods who have gone through similar transitions may be useful.

Transition and Closure with the Outgoing Bishop

- When a synod bishop discerns that she or he will not continue to serve, that bishop should promptly notify the Presiding Bishop and the executive for synod relations, as well as the executive committee of the synod. The verbal notification should be followed by a written communication. (In the event of a death or unexpected resignation, the Presiding Bishop, executive for synod relations, and the executive committee of the synod should be promptly notified.) Upon the death or resignation of a bishop, or if a bishop is unable to serve, the vice president of the synod, after consultation with the Presiding Bishop, shall convene the Synod Council to arrange for the appropriate care of the responsibilities of the bishop until an election of a new bishop is held, or in the case of temporary disability, until the bishop is able to serve again. (See †S8.54 in the *Constitution for Synods*.)
- In appropriate circumstances, the Synod Council, in consultation with the churchwide organization, may appoint an interim bishop.
- The Synod Council will coordinate notification to rostered ministers, congregations, and others in the synod.
- The Synod Council will review the status of all synod staff, including the evaluation of any coterminous calls. The Synod Council should consult with the bishop-elect on issues related to synod staff. If some staff will be terminated or if staffing patterns will change, plans should be developed, implemented, and communicated, as appropriate.
- The Synod Council will conduct an “exit interview” with the outgoing bishop and any staff that will be leaving. The outgoing bishop’s exit interview should be accomplished in coordination with the churchwide organization.
- The Synod Council will be responsible for planning a farewell and appreciation event for the outgoing bishop, if one will take place.
- The outgoing bishop and staff and the secretary of the synod, as appropriate, will work on file and document transition, in accordance with the records management policies of this church. Documents of historical value will be sent to the archives. If issues arise regarding

the sensitive nature of some documents, questions should be addressed to the Office of the Secretary.

- Synod staff should compile a transition manual containing forms for correspondence, information on routine procedures, calendar information regarding upcoming and recurrent events, contact information, identification of key resources, etc.
- Signature authorizations on synod accounts should be changed.
- The outgoing bishop and the incoming bishop or interim bishop should confer on important and sensitive issues, if possible.

Preparation for a Bishop Election

- The Synod Council should review its processes for nominating and electing a bishop (in Chapter 9 of the *Constitution for Synods*) and the “Guidelines for Synod Bishop Elections,” and it should designate the person(s) responsible for planning and coordinating the election process.
- Synod officers and those responsible for the bishop election process will confer with the churchwide organization.
- If a special Synod Assembly will be called, the Synod Council will coordinate with the executive for synod relations in setting the date and will notify voting members, other rostered ministers, congregations, and others. (Notification must comply with governing documents and state law.)
- The Synod Council will set the tentative date for the new bishop’s installation, in consultation with the Office of the Presiding Bishop, and will make advance site reservations, as required. (In accordance with †S8.15, the Presiding Bishop or his or her appointee shall install each newly elected synod bishop.)
- The Synod Council will address possible transition issues and specify the time when the new bishop will begin to serve. (Note that provision †S8.52., authorizes the Synod Council in special circumstances to designate when the term will begin.)

New Bishop Assumes Office

- A letter of call to the new bishop is prepared by the Office of the Secretary.
- The Synod Council confers with the bishop-elect and Office of the Presiding Bishop, confirming plans for the installation.
- The bishop-elect and outgoing bishop should confer regarding matters of pastoral care and synod administration.
- The bishop-elect will confer with the churchwide organization on matters related to staffing, strategic planning, scheduling of upcoming events, and other matters.
- The bishop-elect should confer with her or his mentor bishop (assigned by the Conference of Bishops) and participate in orientation for new bishops, as arranged by the Conference of Bishops and the churchwide organization.
- The bishop-elect should review recent minutes of the Synod Council and Conference of Bishops, as appropriate.
- The bishop-elect should give careful attention to selecting a staff. (Note that calls for rostered ministers to serve as bishop assistants or associates are issued by the Synod Council; calls for Directors of Evangelical Mission are issued by the Church Council or the Synod Council in consultation with the churchwide organization.)



**Affirmation of ministry
at the
re-election of a synod bishop**

This order is intended for use when a bishop of a synod is re-elected and is intended to be used during the synod assembly. When possible, this rite is set within Holy Communion and precedes the prayers of intercession. This rite may be used by itself when circumstances do not allow for the affirmation to take place during Holy Communion. The vice president of the synod and/or the churchwide representative leads the rite.

The leader addresses the assembly. When a bishop is newly elected, a service of installation is planned and takes place at a time after the assembly. At this assembly we re-elected our bishop and now we affirm *them* in *their* call.

name has been re-elected to serve a six-year term in the office of bishop in the synod name of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The prophet Isaiah writes,
“How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger
who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’ ”

The leader addresses the bishop.
Bishop name, when you were first installed
you promised to discharge your duties
in accordance with the Holy Scriptures
and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church.
You promised to be diligent
in your study of the Bible
and in your use of the means of grace.
You promised to give faithful witness in the world,
that God’s love may be known.
You promised to guide, encourage

and support the people of this synod
in their varied ministries and the ministries of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Now, this synod, gathered here in assembly,
has renewed your call to this ministry.

Will you renew your efforts
to keep the promises you have made,
striving to fulfill all of the duties,
responsibilities, and obligations
of your office as bishop of this synod?

The bishop responds:

I will, and I ask God to help me.

The leader addresses the assembly.

People of God,
will you continue to receive first name,
as a servant of God and a shepherd
in Christ's church?
Will you pray for *them*, help and honor *them*
for *their* work's sake,
and in all things strive to live together
in the peace and unity of Christ?
If so, answer, "We will."

The assembly responds:

We will.

Let us pray. (*brief pause*)

Ever-living God,
strengthen and sustain, first name,
that with patience and understanding
he/she may love and care for your people.
Give *them* the courage and the compassion
to do the things you have called *them* to do.
Surround *them* with your love
and uphold those who love and care for *them*.
Grant that together we may all follow
in the way of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.

When set within Holy Communion the service continues with the prayers of intercession.

*When the order is used at another time, an assembly song or another acclamation of thanksgiving
may be included.*

2023–2026 Schedule of Bishop Elections**EXHIBIT H**

2023			
SYNOD	BISHOP	ASSEMBLY DATES	NEW BISHOP
1D Northwest Intermountain	Kristen Kuempel	April 27-29	Meggan Manlove
4C Arkansas-Oklahoma	Michael Girlinghouse	May 5-7	Becca Middeke-Conlin
5C Central/Southern Illinois	John Roth	March 23, June 1-3	Greg Busboom
5G Northern Great Lakes	Katherine Finegan	May 18-20	[Reelection]
6A Southeast Michigan	Donald Kreiss	May 18-20	[Reelection]
9A Virginia	Robert Humphrey	June 8-11	Phyllis Milton
9E Florida-Bahamas	Pedro Suarez	June 8-10	[Reelection]
2A Sierra Pacific	Interim Claire Burkat	September 15-17	Jeff Johnson

2024			
SYNOD	BISHOP	ASSEMBLY DATES	NEW BISHOP
1A Alaska	Shelley Wickstrom	April 26-28	Timothy Oslovich
2D Grand Canyon	Deborah Hutterer	June 13-15	[Reelection]
2E Rocky Mountain	James Gonia	April 25-27	Megan Aelabouni
3G Minneapolis Area	Ann Svennungsen	May 2-4	Jen Nagel
4E Southwestern Texas	Susan Briner	May 3-5	[Reelection]
5H Northwest Synod of Wisconsin	Laurie Skow-Anderson	June 7-8	Martin Halom
6C Indiana-Kentucky	William Gafkjen	June 7-9	Timothy Graham
7B New England	James Hazelwood	June 6-8	Nathan Pipho
7F Southeastern Pennsylvania	Patricia Davenport	May 3-4	Bryan Penman
9F Caribbean	Idalia Negron-Caamano	June 7-8	Vivian Davila

2025			
SYNOD	BISHOP	ASSEMBLY DATES	NEW BISHOP
1B Northwest Washington	Shelley Bryan Wee	May 16-18	[Reelection]
1C Southwestern Washington	Richard Jaech	June 6-7	Keith Marshall
1E Oregon	Laurie Larson Caesar	May 30-June 1	[Reelection]
1F Montana	Laurie Jungling	May 29-June 1	Ben Quanbeck
3C South Dakota	Constanze Hagmaier	May 30-31	[Reelection]
3D Northwestern Minnesota	William Tesch	May 30-June 1	[Reelection]
3I Southeastern Minnesota	Regina Hassanally	May 30-31	[Reelection]
4B Central States	Susan Candea	June 5-7	Donna Simon
4F Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast	Mike Rinehart	May 15-17	Tracey Breashears Schultz
5A Metropolitan Chicago	Yehiel Curry	June 6-7	[Synod reelection - elected presiding bishop 2025]
5E Western Iowa	Lorna Halaas	June 13-14	Scott Dalen
6B North/West Lower Michigan	Craig Satterlee	May 18-20	Julie Schneider-Thomas
6F Southern Ohio	Suzanne Dillahunt	June 6-7	[Reelection]
7A New Jersey	Tracie Bartholomew	June 5-7	Christa Compton
7C Metropolitan New York	Paul Egensteiner	May 1-3	Katrina Foster
8A Northwestern Pennsylvania	Michael Lozano	June 12-14	Kristen Papson
8B Southwestern Pennsylvania	Kurt Kusserow	June 12-14	Melissa Stoller
8C Allegheny	Barbara Collins, interim	Oct. 31-Nov. 1	TBD
8D Lower Susquehanna	James Dunlop	June 5-7	Stephen Herr
8G Metropolitan Washington, D.C.	Leila Ortiz	June 6-7	Phil Hirsch
9D Southeastern	Kevin Strickland	May 29-31	[Reelection]

2026			
SYNOD	BISHOP	ASSEMBLY DATES	NEW BISHOP
3A Western North Dakota	Craig Schweitzer		
3B Eastern North Dakota	Tessa Moon Leiseth		
3E Northeastern Minnesota	Amy Odgren		
3H Saint Paul Area	Patricia Lull		
5D Southeastern Iowa	Amy Current		
5I East-Central Synod of Wisconsin	Anne Edison-Albright		
5K South-Central Synod of Wisconsin	Joy Mortensen-Wiebe		
6E Northeastern Ohio	Laura Barbins		
7E Northeastern Pennsylvania	Christopher deForest		
9C South Carolina	Virginia Aebischer		
5A Metropolitan Chicago Synod	Wayne Miller, interim		

Exhibit I

A Relational Agreement *created by the ELCA Conference of Bishops for the ELCA Conference of Bishops' use.*

PREAMBLE:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America understands itself to be one church in three expressions: congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization. Each expression, while fully the church, recognizes that it is not the whole church, and therefore lives in an interdependent relationship with the others.¹

Synod bishops are called to serve as their synod's pastor.² Synod bishops are also members of this church's Conference of Bishops.³ This body consults with and advises the Church Council.⁴ The Conference also provides a forum for learning, regular opportunities for conversation, and other collegial enterprises that seek to advance the ministry of the Gospel within each expression of this church.⁵

Synod bishops recognize that the nature of their office is to serve the unity of the whole church⁶ and to provide authentic leadership for the local mission of each synod.⁷ Because this work is best done collegially, the synod bishops of this church, along with the Presiding Bishop and the Secretary of this church, pledge themselves to this relational agreement. We will review this agreement annually.

SECTION I: MUTUAL RESPECT AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

We agree to respect the other members of the Conference of Bishops for the sake of the offices to which they have been elected, and we pledge to be trustworthy in our own exercise of the office to which we have been called. Specifically,

I agree that I will attend the meetings of the Conference as a high priority.

I agree that I will respond in a timely manner to communications from colleagues in the Conference.

I agree that I will speak directly to other colleagues about matters that pertain to the care of the Church, and follow the other specific efforts described in Matthew 18:15 if needed.

I agree that I will interpret my colleagues' actions in the best possible light,⁸⁸ and engage with my colleagues in a spirit of curiosity.

I pledge to serve in my own context in faithfulness to the vows I made at my ordination and at my installation into the office I now hold.

I pledge not to perform any ministerial functions in a synod other than my own without the knowledge and consent of that synod's bishop.

I pledge to inform my colleagues in the Conference in advance if I am aware that a local action I am about to take or that my Synod Council (the Church Council) has taken will likely present a challenge of interpretation in other expressions of this church.

¹ *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*, provision 8.11. And we recognize other expressions of the Church not specifically named in this provision, such as the Lutheran World Federation, all the baptized members of the Body of Christ, and church-related agencies and institutions.

² *Constitution for Synods*, provision †S8.12.

³ *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*, provision 10.81.

⁴ *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*, bylaw 10.81.01.

⁵ *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*, continuing resolution 10.81.A16.

⁶ *Constitution for Synods*, provision †S8.12.g.1)

⁷ *Constitution for Synods*, provision †S8.12.g.2)

⁸ Luther's interpretation of the Eighth Commandment.

SECTION II: MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

As members of the Conference of Bishops, we agree to hold one another accountable for our individual and corporate actions, and we pledge to be accountable to others for our own exercise of the office to which we have been called. Specifically,

I agree to speak directly to a colleague in the Conference about any matter in that colleague's exercise of the office I find inappropriate before speaking to others about it, and

I pledge to receive direct expressions of concern from colleagues in the Conference in the spirit of Proverbs 15:31.⁹

I agree to receive the decisions made in other synods in Candidacy, Mobility, and Discipline as authentic expressions of care for the whole Church, and

I pledge to make decisions in my own synod in Candidacy, Mobility, and Discipline that are in the best interest of the whole Church.¹⁰

We agree to find consensus within the Conference before publishing a pastoral letter from the Conference on any matter, and

I pledge to voice my concerns in the process of deliberation, or to accept as my own the result of the deliberation of the Conference if I choose to remain silent during the debate.

I agree to use the authority of my office to support those whose circumstances in life require special care, not only in our meetings and in my ecclesial responsibilities but also within the wider world, and

I pledge to provide a public voice of admonition to rebuke the actions of those who use power to abuse or malign others.

POSTAMBLE:

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. (Colossians 3:12-15)

Adopted September 30, 2022

⁹ "The ear that heeds wholesome admonition will lodge among the wise." (Proverbs 15:31 NRSV)

¹⁰ This church has several other resources that describe in greater detail what best serves the whole church in matters of Candidacy, Mobility, and Discipline.