



Synodical Relations

Statement of purpose

Within the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Synodical Relations coordinates the relationships between synods and the churchwide organization; develops and implements support for synod bishops, officers and staff; and provides staff services for the Conference of Bishops. The vision for this work is to foster effective, well-equipped leaders in healthy, mission-driven synods. The governing description for this is in ELCA continuing resolution 15.12.F13.

Report of work for 2016–2019

Conference of Bishops

Supporting the work of the Conference of Bishops and its committees is one of the highest priorities of Synodical Relations. Staff work with the committees to plan and conduct the Conference of Bishops two semiannual meetings: the Bishops' Academy and the Bishops Formation event for newly elected bishops.

The 2017 Bishops' Academy was held in Charleston, South Carolina, and was spent observing the 500th anniversary of the Reformation with educational presentations. The 2018 Bishops' Academy was in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and focused on "First Nations Peoples: Spirituality, Theology, Reconciliation," with three guided presentations from experts. The 2019 Bishops' Academy met in San Antonio, Texas, on the theme "Caring for Our Common Home" and focused attention on stewardship and care for creation.

As a result of retirements, termed-out calls and bishops not standing for reelection, 13 new bishops were elected and will attend their first conference meeting in fall 2019. Prior to the assemblies, Synodical Relations and the Office of the Secretary conducted conference calls with leaders from 20 synods that held elections to review procedures and other issues. Processes that are unique to each synod were discussed, and questions from leaders were answered. Synodical Relations staff obtained helpful information that benefited those who presided at the elections.

The Bishops Formation Committee spent considerable time planning for the Bishops Formation event July 9-13, which provided the new bishops' orientation and formation time and the opportunity to meet with churchwide staff. As leadership changes, there will be significant transitions in those synods, as well as for the bishops who will be leaving office. The Synodical Relations staff welcomes the new bishops and looks forward to working with them.

Synod assembly representation

In collaboration with Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton, Synodical Relations prepared for the 2019 synod assemblies, which began in April and ran through June. Churchwide representatives were assigned to each assembly and equipped with resource materials to share.

Assistants to the bishops

The bishops' assistants and associates gathered in 2017 and 2019 for educational, spiritual and professional growth opportunities. In February 2017, they met at the Francis Marion Hotel in Charleston, South Carolina, with an agenda focusing on "The Shifting Sands of Synodical Service." Pre-gathering sessions featured a program on preventing clergy sexual misconduct, led by Ms. Barbara Keller, Mr. Phillip H. Harris and Mr. Thomas A. Cunniff, with synod reporting guidance from Secretary Wm Chris Boerger and Deacon Sue Rothmeyer. The gathering featured Russell Crabtree and Emily Swanson of Holy Cow! Consulting, who led sessions on organizational intelligence.

In February 2019, assistants and associates to the bishops gathered in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, under the theme "Don't Go Thirsty." The gathering focused on the concept of "doing enough" and seeking Sabbath, thanks to the guidance of our keynote speaker, the Rev. Wayne Muller. Pregathering sessions were offered for new assistants' orientation, and the entire group had a session with Ms. Barbara Keller and Mr. Thomas A. Cunniff on preventing clergy sexual misconduct.

Vice presidents

From Sept. 29 to Oct. 1, 2017, synod vice presidents met in Chicago under the theme “Leading in a Changing Culture.” Their meeting coincided with the Conference of Bishops, and the vice presidents spent one full day meeting with the bishops. The vice presidents also had sessions regarding their role in responding to our changing culture with bold leadership, and attended the Fund for Leaders banquet.

The synod vice presidents met at the Lutheran Center Oct. 18–21, 2018, with the theme “We Shall Go Out in Joy.” An orientation for new vice presidents allowed these individuals to get to know each other and the call of their new role. The orientation included a panel discussion with veteran synod vice presidents, Legal 101 training with Mr. Thomas A. Cuniff and Ms. Aja Favors, instruction from Ms. Deborah Coe, PhD, on how the Research, Planning and Evaluation team can assist with synod reports, and guidance from Secretary Boerger on how to lead a synod council. The entire group met with Ms. Mary J. Streufert, PhD, and Heather A. Dean regarding the proposed social statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Lutheran Call to Action*, and met with many other churchwide organization colleagues to receive updates on current happenings that affect synods.

Fund management

This team manages the Good Samaritan and Shared-Risk funds. Good Samaritan grants are made to rostered ministers and family members or survivors to maintain health coverage in times of financial need. The Shared Risk Fund is a self-insurance program in which all synods participate, reducing their financial liability for high-cost disciplinary proceedings.

Federal Chaplaincy Ministries

The Rev. Christopher L. Otten has provided this narrative under separate cover in Section III.

Conference of Bishops 2019

The Conference of Bishops consists of the 65 synodical bishops, the presiding bishop and the secretary of this church. As of February 2019, the members were:

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton
Secretary Wm Chris Boerger
Bp. Thomas M. Aitken, Northeastern Minnesota Synod
Bp. Abraham D. Allende, Northeastern Ohio Synod
Bp. Jon V. Anderson, Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Bp. James A. Arends, La Crosse Area Synod
Bp. Tracie L. Bartholomew, New Jersey Synod
Bp. Daniel G. Beaudoin, Northwestern Ohio Synod
Bp. Terry A. Brandt, Eastern North Dakota Synod
Bp. David H. Brauer-Rieke, Oregon Synod
Bp. Susan J. Briner, Southwestern Texas Synod
Bp. Michael L. Burk, Southeastern Iowa Synod
Bp. Idalia Negrón Caamaño, Caribbean Synod
Bp. H. Jeffrey A. Clements, Northern Illinois Synod
Bp. Barbara J. Collins, Upper Susquehanna Synod
Bp. Jessica R. Crist, Montana Synod
Bp. Patricia A. Davenport, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod
Bp. Steven H. Delzer, Southeastern Minnesota Synod
Bp. Suzanne D. Dillahun, Southern Ohio Synod
Bp. James S. Dunlop, Lower Susquehanna Synod
Bp. Paul D. Erickson, Greater Milwaukee Synod
Bp. R. Guy Erwin, Southwest California Synod
Bp. Katherine A. Finegan, Northern Great Lakes Synod
Bp. William O. Gafkjen, Indiana-Kentucky Synod
Bp. Michael K. Girlinghouse, Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod
Bp. William J. Gohl Jr., Delaware-Maryland Synod
Bp. James W. Gonia, Rocky Mountain Synod

Bp. H. Julian Gordy, Southeastern Synod
Bp. Richard H. Graham, Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod
Bp. Erik K.J. Gronberg, Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod
Bp. Roger R. Gustafson, Central States Synod
Bp. James E. Hazelwood, New England Synod
Bp. Mark W. Holmerud, Sierra Pacific Synod
Bp. Robert F. Humphrey, Virginia Synod
Bp. Deborah K. Hutterer, Grand Canyon Synod
Bp. Richard E. Jaech, Southwestern Washington Synod
Bp. Ralph E. Jones, Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod
Bp. Donald P. Kreiss, Southeast Michigan Synod
Bp. Wilma S. Kucharek, Slovak Zion Synod
Bp. Kristen E.M. Kuempel, Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod
Bp. Kurt F. Kusserow, Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod
Bp. Patricia J. Lull, Saint Paul Area Synod
Bp. Brian D. Maas, Nebraska Synod
Bp. John S. Macholz, Upstate New York Synod
Bp. Gerald L. Mansholt, East-Central Synod of Wisconsin
Bp. Donald J. McCoid, Metropolitan New York Synod
Bp. Wayne N. Miller, Metropolitan Chicago Synod
Bp. Mark E. Narum, Western North Dakota Synod
Bp. Rodger C. Prois, Western Iowa Synod
Bp. Michael L. Rhyne, Allegheny Synod

Bp. Matthew L. Riegel, West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod
 Bp. Michael W. Rinehart, Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod
 Bp. S. John Roth, Central/Southern Illinois Synod
 Bp. Craig A. Satterlee, North/West Lower Michigan Synod
 Bp. Laurie Skow-Anderson, Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
 Bp. Timothy M. Smith, North Carolina Synod
 Bp. Pedro M. Suárez, Florida-Bahamas Synod

Bp. Ann M. Svenningsen, Minneapolis Area Synod
 Bp. Andrew A. Taylor, Pacifica Synod
 Bp. Viviane E. Thomas-Breitfeld, South-Central Synod of Wisconsin
 Bp. Steven L. Ullestad, Northeastern Iowa Synod
 Bp. B. Kirby Unti, Northwest Washington Synod
 Bp. Shelley R. Wickstrom, Alaska Synod
 Bp. Larry R. Wohlrabe, Northwestern Minnesota Synod
 Bp. Herman R. Yoos III, South Carolina Synod
 Bp. Samuel R. Zeiser, Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod
 Bp. David B. Zellmer, South Dakota Synod

Committees

The Conference of Bishops organizes itself according to its identified needs and mandated tasks.

- **The Executive Committee** is composed of the chair, vice chair, three at-large members, the presiding bishop and the secretary. The staff liaison is the executive for Synodical Relations. This committee makes decisions on behalf of the conference, makes recommendations on appointments to standing committees and gives oversight for conference meetings. It also, as needed, assigns work to committees and task forces; coordinates consideration of concerns, issues and requests for or between conference meetings; offers advice, counsel and support to the presiding bishop as requested; and approves agendas for conference meetings.
- **The Committee on Academy** is responsible for the Conference of Bishops continuing education event. Typically, the academy is held annually during the first days of January and seeks to provide stimulating presenters on a variety of topics. One of the most important components of the academy is the opportunity for fellowship and relationship-building among colleagues. Following 2019, the academy will meet every other year.
- **The Committee on Bishop Formation** familiarizes newly elected bishops with the Office of the Presiding Bishop and helps them connect with partners throughout the ELCA. The committee also assigns them veteran bishops as mentors, who are available for support and guidance as needed.
- **The Committee on Roster** reviews roster criteria and procedure requests from synods. It also provides recommendations for action by the Conference of Bishops relative to ELCA constitutional requirements for roster categories. The committee addresses the following specific matters:
 - Exceptions to the three-year congregational service bylaw.
 - Extensions of three-year on-leave-from-call status.
 - Calls to nonstipendiary service.
 - Calls to serve in unusual circumstances.
- **The Committee on Theological and Ethical Concerns** assists the conference in its role as a forum for reflection upon the theological and ethical implications of issues that affect this church.
- **The Committee on Synodical-Churchwide Relations** assists churchwide units and related organizations in securing review, advice, consultation and recommendations from the Conference of Bishops on policies and programs. It also fosters good communication between the churchwide staff and the conference.
- **The Committee on Care of Rostered Ministers** serves in two capacities. First, it oversees the Shared-Risk Fund, established by the conference in 1992, which permits participating synods a degree of protection against the costs of disciplinary proceedings against rostered ministers and congregations. After a deductible of \$10,000 has been satisfied, eligible expenses may be submitted for partial or full reimbursement according to fund guidelines. Synods are assessed premiums of \$2 per rostered minister and \$2 per congregation. Second, it oversees the Good Samaritan Fund, which provides limited financial aid to rostered ministers and spouses. It reviews the history of usage of the funds and appropriate application forms.
- **The Committee on Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations** facilitates communication and coordination between the Conference of Bishops and ecumenical conversations. Individual committee members may be given ecumenical assignments by this church. The committee will:
 - Assist in interpreting ecumenical work to the other bishops, channel any counsel or questions, and assist the conference in dealing with ecumenical matters by providing resources and resource people, framing questions and consulting on related matters.

- Encourage conference members in carrying out their ecumenical responsibilities within their synods, including their use of the Lutheran Ecumenical Representatives Network.
- Encourage conference members who have accepted special assignments to dialogue teams or ecumenical governing boards.
- **The Committee on Global Mission Liaison** seeks to enhance and strengthen relationships between ELCA bishops and their companion synods or dioceses. The committee also assists when policy questions arise or difficult situations develop in these relationships.
- **The Committee on Leadership** serves in an advisory role to the Domestic Mission unit. This committee reports to the Conference of Bishops at its meetings, receives its counsel, and then raises any questions with Domestic Mission staff. Proposals for new and revised policies are reviewed and recommendations are made to matters under consideration by the unit in the following areas:
 - Candidacy
 - Book of Faith
 - Disability ministry
 - Leadership support
 - Lilly grants
 - Misconduct prevention
 - Mission schools and colleges and universities
 - Outreach leadership
 - Seminaries
 - Specialized ministries
 - Theological Education for Emerging Ministries
- **The Committee on Congregational Vitality** serves in an advisory role to the Domestic Mission unit. Proposals for new and revised policies are reviewed and recommendations are made to matters under consideration by the unit in the following areas:
 - New congregations
 - Congregational renewal
 - Campus ministry
 - Youth ministry
 - Youth Gathering
 - Young adult ministry
 - Outdoor ministry

Conclusion

On behalf of the Office of the Presiding Bishop and its responsibility for synodical relations, this staff is pleased to provide service and assistance to the Church Council and Conference of Bishops in their ministry and to work to strengthen relationships between the Church Council, synods, synodical bishops and churchwide organization.

The Rev. Walter S. May, assistant to the presiding bishop and executive for synodical relations