

Report to the 2009 Northwestern Minnesota Synod Assembly Process for nominating and electing our bishop in 2013.



The ministry of the Bishop

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) recognizes only one office of ordained ministry – the office of Word and Sacrament. There is no special “class” or designation for bishops. As ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament, bishops are elected and called to be the chief pastor of the synod. The ministry of the Bishop of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod is carefully described in section †S8.12 of the *Constitution of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*. As the Synod’s pastor, the bishop is called to administer the sacraments, preach, provide pastoral care, advise, ordain, advocate, interpret, and serve as the synodical ecumenical officer. The bishop also serves as the Synod’s chief executive and administrative officer, coordinating the ministries of the Synod and supervising the leadership of other officers and staff. These duties take unique shape within the mission, goals, context, and structure of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod.

Current Process for Electing a Bishop

Every Synod of the ELCA elects their bishop in accordance with their Synod Constitution. The current NWMN Synod Constitution limits the bishop’s election process to an ecclesiastical ballot and specifies that our bishop shall serve a term of six-years. (†S9.04) The NWMN Synod Constitution does not limit the number of terms a bishop may serve. The ecclesiastical ballot process is one in which there are no nominees for the office of bishop prior to the Assembly. At the beginning of the election during the Assembly, a ballot is taken and all ELCA rostered clergy in good standing are eligible to be nominated on the first 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 becomes the nominating ballot, and all subsequent balloting is based upon those who’ve been nominated on this first ballot. This method provides no opportunity prior to the Assembly for nominations to be brought forward or for information or dialog to occur. The process then continues as detailed in section †S9.04 of our synodical constitution:

“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 (plus ties) who receive the greatest number of legal votes 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 (plus ties) who receive the greatest number of legal votes on 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 (plus ties) who receive the greatest number of legal votes on the previous ballot.”

Ballot	Who is on the ballot	Votes needed for an election
First (If no one is elected on the first ballot, this ballot shall be considered a nominating ballot.)	All eligible nominees	$\frac{3}{4}$ of legal votes cast
Second	All eligible nominees	$\frac{3}{4}$ of legal votes cast
Third	Top seven plus ties	$\frac{2}{3}$ of legal votes cast
Fourth	Top three plus ties	60% of legal votes cast
Subsequent ballots	Top two plus ties	Majority of legal votes cast

Once an election has occurred; it will be announced to the Synod in Assembly. The bishop-elect will assume their six-year term beginning the first day of the third month following election.

Bishop Election Taskforce

In response to the 2007 “Resolution Regarding Bishop Election Process” the Synod Council established a Bishop Election Taskforce to explore and develop a process for the election of a bishop within our Synod. The Taskforce recommends a process whereby nominations for bishop are made in advance of the Synod Assembly and biographical information on those nominees are provided before the Assembly occurs. This process will allow more time for Voting Members of the Assembly to discern those nominees with the gifts and skills needed to be our bishop.

The goals of this process are to:

- Provide more time for information sharing, reflection and prayer on the part of all the people who make up our Synod.
- Identify nominees and provided interactive communication between nominees and the Synod through more timely information sharing.
- Promote a spirit of collaboration and support among participants in the process.
- Increase opportunities for the many people of the Synod to have a voice in the process.
- Identify further vision and mission opportunities for our Synod.
- Elect a new bishop in a manner that provides for gratitude for all those who have been nominated, as well as a providing a spirit of unity and celebration at the Synod Assembly.

Recommended Process for Bishop Election

Demographics are changing. Congregations have evolving needs. Pastors need care. More leaders – both clergy and laity – are needed to share the work of the Synod. The church is faced with many important issues. A desire for open discussion on these topics grows out of a sense of responsibility and stewardship for the gifts of persons and for the Synod’s leadership needs. These are exciting times as the election of a bishop marks the beginning of a new or renewed partnership in the life of the Synod’s ministries. At the same time, all who engage in discussion should exercise great care to do so in a pattern of prayerful reflection, conversation, education, and deliberation that avoids divisiveness and the appearance of campaigning or advocacy.

The Bishop Election Taskforce recommends that the Bishop Election process begins with the Synod Council appointing a team to develop a synodical profile. Modeled on a congregational mission profile, this document will give those nominating people for bishop a better sense of where the synod is currently at, where it is headed, and what type of leader the synod needs to move where the Spirit is leading. During the process of creating the synod profile the team might consider:

- What are the major challenges facing the church?
- What might the church look like in five years? Ten years?
- What are the strengths and challenges of our Synod?
- What are the priorities and emphases desired for leadership of our Synod?
- What are the qualities, experiences, skills, and leadership styles desired in our Synod?
- Who might have the faithful leadership skills, the desired abilities, and the exemplary service experience required to best serve us as bishop for the next six years?

Once the profile is completed, the Synod Council will appoint a Bishop Election Committee which will develop a request for nominations to be sent to all rostered leaders and congregations of the NWMN Synod inviting them to submit up to 3 nominations for bishop to the Synod office no later than 110 days before the Synod Assembly.

In the request for nominations, the Bishop Election Committee will outline who is eligible to serve as bishop. In addition to a deep and abiding faith commitment, pastors who might serve as bishop will need to have broad skills in pastoral care and preaching, administrative leadership, and the ability to lift up the vision of the Synod and its ministries. The task of electing a bishop is best served when the nominating process produces several names, with individuals of varying skills and experiences, each of whom could serve the Synod well as bishop. Whether they are from small or large congregations – in towns or in a rural setting, teach at seminaries, serve as chaplains of institutions, serve on synod staffs, serve at church-wide offices, serve in church agencies or have a variety of experience in many different places, any of those ordained clergy who are rostered and in good standing in the ELCA are eligible to be nominated for the office of bishop.

The Bishop Election Committee will vet the nominations and request biographical information from those who are eligible and willing to accept the nomination. Those who are nominated by 110 days prior to the Assembly will have their biographical information be made available online.

All eligible persons who are nominated, accept the nomination, and complete biographical information at least 75 days prior to the Assembly will have their names placed on the first ballot at the Synod Assembly. The Assembly Chair will also take nominations from the floor. Those nominated from the floor must be able to provide biographical information at the time of nomination. The remainder of the election process will continue as currently outlined in the Synod's Constitution as described above.

Proposed Process and Timeline

Task	Responsible Party	Completion Date
Synod Profile Team appointed	Synod Council	No later than 360 Days Prior to Assembly
Final Synod Profile Presented to the Synod Council	Profile Team	270 Days Prior to Assembly
Provide an overview of the process to the Synod Council	Synod Officers	270 Days prior to Assembly
Appoint Bishop Election Committee	Synod Council	270 Days prior to Assembly
Announce the process/timeline. Request questions to be addressed to nominees.	Election Committee	270 Days prior to Assembly
Provide article with nomination information in Synod newsletter	Election Committee Synod Communications	270 Days prior to Assembly
Approve Synod Profile	Synod Council	240 Days prior to Assembly
Letters of request for nominations sent to every ELCA rostered leader and congregation of the Synod.	Election Committee	240 Days prior to Assembly
Completion of Bishop Election website with Synod Profile	Election Committee, Profile Team, and Synod Staff	240 Days prior to Assembly
Nominations Open	People of the Synod	180 Days prior to Assembly
Nominations sent to Synod Vice President who send acknowledgement to nominator	Synod Vice President	180 to 110 Days prior to Assembly
Nominations end for inclusion on Synod website. (All nominations made after this date will be brought forward to the Assembly as nominations from the floor.)	People of the Synod	110 Days prior to Assembly
All nominated & eligible clergy who accept the nomination are sent biographical information forms and questionnaires	Election Committee	105 Days prior to Assembly
Nominees must return completed packet of information.	Nominees	75 Days prior to Assembly
Announce that nominees names and biographical information available on the website	Election Committee	45 Days prior to Assembly
Request for questions for use at the Assembly at Spring Conference Gatherings	Election Committee	Throughout Spring
Election of bishop	Synod in Assembly	

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In order to adopt this proposed method of electing our bishop the Synod, in Assembly, must make a Constitutional change.