

**PROCESS FOR NOMINATING
AND CALLING A BISHOP
2024 - 25**

**Northwest Washington Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**



**Presented by the Northwest Washington Synod
Bishop Call Process Task Force**

Introduction

The Northwest Washington Synod of the ELCA will elect a bishop at the 2025 Synod Assembly, to be held May 16-17, 2025. The newly elected bishop will serve a six-year term beginning August 1, 2025.

Who is Eligible

Any minister of Word and Sacrament on the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is eligible to be elected as bishop (pursuant to provision S8.11 of the *Constitution and Bylaws of the Northwest Washington Synod*). There are no additional requirements or limitations. The nominee is *not* required to be rostered in the Northwest Washington Synod, or to reside within the synod's geographical boundaries. Accordingly, nominations can be received from any of the ministers of Word and Sacrament of the ELCA, but the minister must be nominated by a member of a congregation of the Northwest Washington Synod.

The Responsibilities of the Bishop

What Is a “Bishop”?

There are many images and experiences to describe what a bishop is and does. The root of the word “bishop” is from a Greek verb meaning “to look at, care for, pay attention to.” The noun, *episkopos*, referred to a person with responsibility for oversight or inspection, a term that became used to refer to leaders within early Christian communities (Philippians 1:1, for example). Other scriptural images connected to the work of care and oversight are shepherd, guide, leader, laborer, and witness. This ministry is accomplished alongside of, and for the purpose of, building up and encouraging the ministries of God's people. Through the centuries, some churches (including the ELCA) have chosen the title “bishop” to describe the person designated with these responsibilities of oversight and care.

For further study of the ministry of bishops, consider the following: 1 Peter 2:25, 1 Timothy 3:1-17, Titus 1:7-9, and passages suggested for the installation of a bishop (John 20:21-23, Matthew 28:18-20, and 2 Timothy 1:13-14).

The Ministry of the Bishop

The ELCA recognizes only one office of Word and Sacrament, and there is no special “class” or designation for bishops. As ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament, bishops are elected and called to be the pastor of the synod.

The ministry and responsibilities of the bishop of the Northwest Washington Synod are carefully described in provisions S8.10 - S8.15 of the *Constitution and Bylaws of the Northwest Washington Synod*. As the synod's pastor, the bishop is called to administer the sacraments, preach, teach, provide pastoral care, advise, ordain, consecrate, 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 Northwest Washington Synod. (A copy of the relevant provisions of the *Constitution and Bylaws of the Northwest Washington Synod* describing the ministry and responsibilities of the bishop, along with other information addressing the nomination and election processes, are posted on the synod's website: www.lutheransnw.org/bishop-call-process. Copies of these documents also may be requested in printed form as indicated below.)

Who May Serve as Bishop?

In addition to a deep and abiding faith commitment, ministers of Word and Sacrament who may serve as bishop need to have broad skills in pastoral care and preaching, administrative leadership, conflict resolution, collaboration, innovation, and the ability to lift up the vision for the synod and its ministry. Some people look for a nominee with demonstrated administrative skills. Others place a higher value on pastoral care and preaching. Still others may look for a sense of vision for the synod's ministry. The task of electing a bishop is best served when the nominating process produces a number of names, with individuals of varying skills and experiences, each of whom could serve well as bishop of the Northwest Washington Synod.

Sometimes persons reflecting on potential nominees for bishop look initially to ministers of Word and Sacrament from large congregations, synod staff, and persons with churchwide experience, stature, and visibility. However, ministers of Word and Sacrament serving smaller congregations, chaplains, and teachers also warrant consideration. In addition, ministers of Word and Sacrament who serve in all the various arenas of the ELCA's ministry (congregations, synods, churchwide organization, agencies, and related institutions) also have gifts and skills that may commend them for consideration. Thus, it is very important to reflect prayerfully on potential nominees for bishop and engage in discernment with an open mind.

To assist in determining who might best serve as bishop, consider the following:

- What are the synod's priorities for ministry?
- What are the current and future challenges and opportunities for the synod?
- What are the priorities and emphases desired for leadership of our synod?
- What are the qualities, experiences, skills, and leadership styles that would best serve the synod?

A desire for reflection and open discussion on these and other 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 ministry. At the same time, all who engage in discussion should exercise great care and diligence to do so in prayerful reflection and open-minded and thoughtful deliberation, in ways that avoid divisiveness and the appearance of campaigning or advocacy.

Overview of the Process for Nomination and Election

The method for nominating and electing a bishop is described in provision S9.04 of the *Constitution and Bylaws of the Northwest Washington Synod*. The Synod Council has appointed a Bishop Call Process Task Force, and it is charged with creating and implementing fair, open, and transparent nomination and election processes in accordance with constitutional and bylaw provisions. The Task Force will provide periodic updates regarding the nomination and election processes, as well as data and other information to assist voting members of the Synod Assembly and others in their discernment.

Process for Nominations

Any member of a Northwest Washington Synod congregation may nominate a candidate for the office of bishop. A nominator may only make one nomination. A person may not nominate themselves for the position.

Nominators must complete a Nomination Form, which only asks for contact information for the nominee, an indication that the nominee is a minister of Word and Sacrament on the roster of the ELCA, as well as contact information for the nominator. Nominations may be submitted either electronically or in writing as indicated below. (A copy of the Nomination Form is available on the

Synod website and can be requested by contacting either the Synod Office or the Chairperson of the Bishop Call Process Task Force.)

Nominations will be accepted ONLY from January 15, 2025 through February 16, 2025. (Nominations received prior to, or after, this period will *not* be considered.)

After the nomination has been received and acknowledged, the nominee will be provided with a Nominee Response Form, which will include a request for biographical data and other pertinent information. Responses provided on the Nominee Response Form will be placed (unedited) on the Task Force website at www.lutheransnw.org/bishop-call-process for viewing by voting members of the Synod Assembly prior to the election.

Unless the nominee removes themselves from the ballot in writing by February 28, 2025, their name will appear on the first ballot at the 2025 Synod Assembly, whether or not the Nominee Response Form is returned. Additional nominations may *not* be made from the floor of the Synod Assembly according to constitutional provision S9.04.

Because it is the synod's intent to facilitate a free and fair election process for all candidates, campaigning for the office of Bishop is prohibited, including advertising, mailings, telephone solicitations, etc.

Process for Election

In addition to dissemination of Nominee Response Forms, as authorized by Bylaw S9.04.01, it is anticipated that there will be online (Zoom) forums held in the spring of 2025 to introduce nominees to Synod Assembly voting members and others. Dates of these forums will be announced in a timely manner. Additionally, in accordance with Bylaw S9.04.03, there will be an additional forum and/or a period for questions and answers with nominees during the election process at the Synod Assembly. The format for these processes will be determined by the Synod Council, based on recommendations from the Bishop Call Process Task Force.

The names of all persons nominated in accordance with constitutional provisions (who have not otherwise removed their names from consideration) will be placed on the first ballot at the 2025 Synod Assembly. The remainder of the election process, as described under bylaw provision S9.04.02, will continue as follows until an election takes place:

<u>Ballot</u>	<u>Who is included</u>	<u>Votes needed to elect</u>
First ballot	all eligible nominees	75%
Second ballot*	seven persons (plus ties)	66.7%
Third ballot	three persons (plus ties)	60%
Fourth ballot	two persons (plus ties)	50% + 1

**If there are fewer than seven persons on the first ballot, the election automatically proceeds to the third ballot.*

Once an election has taken place, the results will be announced to the Synod Assembly. The bishop-elect will assume a six-year term of office beginning August 1, 2025.

Questions/Additional Information

Information regarding the nomination and election processes (including Nomination Forms, blank Nominee Response Forms, and important data regarding the Northwest Washington Synod) will be available on the Synod's website, www.lutheransnw.org/bishop-call-process.

Please direct any questions or requests for documents to the Chairperson of the Bishop Call Process Task Force as follows:

Pastor Gail Rautmann
pastorgail@gloria-dei-lutheran.org
425-776-2444

In preparation for the nomination process and election of a Bishop at the Synod Assembly in 2025, please remember that the Northwest Washington Synod is engaged in a call process and keep the Synod, its leadership, nominees, voting members, and everyone involved in its ministry in your prayers.