

**South Dakota Synod, ELCA
2018 Synod Assembly Resolution
Bishop Term Limits, Background and Rationale**

South Dakota Synod Bylaw S8.51.10.

The Bishop may be elected to no more than two consecutive terms and shall serve until a successor assumes office.

Background

March 2017 the South Dakota Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions were reviewed by a task force comprised of Bishop David Zellmer, Carla Borhardt, Rev. Jonathan Vehar, Sara Dannen, and Jon Schmitz. The ELCA Model Constitution for Synods guided this review. The model constitution contains no language regarding officer term limits. The task force had no recommendation regarding term limits for officers (including the bishop) and suggested this be a point of discussion by the Synod Council.

The matter was brought forward at the March 17, 2017, Synod Council meeting where it was tabled.

The matter was discussed at the August 17, 2017, Synod Council meeting with the direction that Synod Council members discuss the topic with leaders and congregations of the conferences.

The matter was discussed at the October 6, 2017, Synod Council meeting, without the bishop or staff present, with approval of the following motion:

To recommend to the 2018 South Dakota Synod Assembly that Bylaw S8.51.10 be repealed.

Rationale

The office of the bishop is a call from the Holy Spirit. This calling should not be time limited by governing documents. The Synod Assembly and bishop should be free to discern the call of the Holy Spirit.

South Dakota Synod Bylaw S9.04.01 states that the Bishop shall be elected by ecclesiastical ballot and continuing resolution S9.04.B17.2 states any ELCA rostered minister of Word and Sacrament is eligible for nomination for bishop. However, term limits preclude a sitting bishop from being eligible.

A survey conducted by the ELCA in 2014 found the following regarding term limits for bishop (65 synods):

Limited to one term = 0 synods
Limited to two terms = 17 synods (26%)
Limited to three terms = 3 synods (5%)
No term limit = 45 synods (69%)