



January 2025

To: Council Presidents, Pastors, Deacons, and SAMs

Please share this information with Conference and Synod Assembly voting members.

Called

With this word, all members of the South Dakota Synod are invited to pray for and discuss the election of a bishop, which will occur at the next Synod Assembly on May 30-31, 2025, at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls. We invite your thoughtful participation in the process.

Electing a bishop is one of the most important responsibilities in the life of the Synod and a key responsibility of the Synod Assembly. As an election, the process is governed by the *South Dakota Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions*; however, it is, first and foremost, a call process. As such, it involves discernment, from the perspective both of individual potential nominees and of the synod as a whole. Therefore, engaging in prayerful reflection and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit are indispensable aspects of the process of nomination and election.

According to Chapter 9 of the *South Dakota Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions*, the Office of Bishop is open to any minister of Word and Sacrament on the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). That person may serve two consecutive six-year terms. Our current Bishop, Rev. Constanze Hagmeier, has served one term and is eligible for re-election. She has indicated her willingness to serve a second term.

A Synod study was completed and is available on the Synod website. This document provides an overview of the Synod and outlines individuals' and congregations' hopes and expectations for the Synod moving into the future. Individuals, especially those who serve as voting members at the Synod Assembly, and congregations of the South Dakota Synod are encouraged to review and discuss the Synod study.

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 election process. Continued open and respectful conversation about our hopes, dreams, priorities, and challenges and discernment about ministers who have the desired and necessary gifts for the Office of Bishop will occur at the spring conference assemblies on February 23, 2025.

The Synod Council has appointed a Bishop Election Committee to coordinate an open, orderly, and transparent election process. The committee will communicate its progress to congregations, pastors and deacons, and assembly voting members through the Synod News and on the Synod website. A Q&A (question and answer) document has been posted to the synod website. The website will be updated periodically throughout the process.

The election of the bishop is a call process. Prayer is the foundation of this process, where both the Synod Assembly voting members and nominees seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to understand the needs of the Synod and discern whom God is calling to leadership.

Holy Spirit, guide our hearts and minds that we may receive a faithful servant who will care for God's people and equip us for our ministries, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

South Dakota Synod, ELCA The Bishop Election Process Q&A

The election of a bishop is a spiritual, rather than political, process. Members of the Synod, especially voting members at the Synod Assembly, and potential nominees seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to understand the needs of the Synod and discern who God is calling to leadership at this time, in this place.

What is the process for electing a bishop?

The process for electing a bishop consists of several steps. This process, which will culminate in the election of a bishop at the 2025 Synod Assembly, has already begun. A Synod Study Committee and Bishop Election Committee were appointed by the Synod Council in the summer of 2024. Much like a call committee in a congregation, these committees will guide the discernment of the synod.

A Synod study was conducted by the Synod Study Committee. The committee presented its results at the October 2024 Synod Council meeting. The results were published on the Synod website and the weekly Synod News at the beginning of November 2024.

At the conference assemblies, which will be held on February 23, 2025, voting members will engage the Synod study material and be invited to identify ministers of Word and Sacrament who have the desired and necessary gifts for the office of bishop. Names lifted up at this time will be sent to the Bishop Election Committee, which will contact potential nominees to obtain biographical information. This information will be made available on the Synod website prior to the Synod Assembly (by April 15, 2025). **The pre-identification at the conference is not a nomination process.**

The conference assembly discernment is not a nomination process. A minister of Word and Sacrament who is lifted up at the conference assembly will still need to be nominated on the first ecclesiastical ballot at the Synod Assembly to be considered a nominee for bishop.

Who elects the bishop?

The bishop will be elected by the voting members at the 2025 South Dakota Synod Assembly. Voting members include lay members elected by congregations, ministers of Word and Sacrament under call on the roster of the Synod, ministers of Word and Service under call on the roster of the Synod, officers of the Synod, Synod Council members, rostered ministers of Word and Sacrament from a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been declared and established by a Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA under call or contract in a congregation of the Synod, rostered ministers of Word and Sacrament serving as interim pastors under contract to a congregation of the Synod, Synodically Authorized Ministers (SAMs) certified by the South Dakota Synod and under contract to a congregation of the synod.

How is the bishop elected at the Synod Assembly?

The bishop election process is described in Continuing Resolutions *S9.04.A18* and *S9.04.B18*.

What is an Ecclesiastical Ballot?

Also known as a nominating ballot, an Ecclesiastical ballot is a means by which nominations for the office of bishop are made by casting a vote. On the first ballot, any minister of Word and Sacrament

on the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is eligible. Individuals lifted up during conference assemblies are not automatically nominated. They must be nominated (names written) on the first ballot. On the nominating (first) ballot, three-fourths of legal votes cast are needed for election.

If no election occurs, the second ballot consists of all those nominated, minus pastors who remove their names from consideration. On the second ballot, three-fourths of votes cast is needed for election.

After the nominating ballot, the election process shall follow the steps outlined in *S9.04.B17*.

Ballot	Names Included	Votes Needed to Elect
First Ecclesiastical (nominating ballot)	Any minister of Word and Sacrament on the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is eligible. NOTE: Names lifted up during conference assemblies are <u>not</u> automatically nominated but must be nominated on the first ballot in order to move forward.	$\frac{3}{4}$ legal votes cast (75%)
Second	Ministers of Word and Sacrament nominated on the first ballot who have not withdrawn their names.	$\frac{3}{4}$ legal votes cast (75%)
Third	Seven nominees (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes cast on the second ballot.	$\frac{2}{3}$ legal votes cast (66.7%)
Fourth	Three nominees (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes cast on the third ballot.	60% legal votes cast
Fifth	Two nominees (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes cast.	Majority of legal votes cast (50%+1)

Who can be nominated? Who can serve as the bishop of the South Dakota Synod?

Any minister of Word and Sacrament in good standing on the roster of the ELCA can be nominated. The candidate is not required to be rostered in the South Dakota Synod nor reside within the Synod's geographical boundaries.

In accordance with the *South Dakota Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions* (S9.12), nominees for bishop are required to complete and sign a disclosure form and a form authorizing a background check.

Will there be an opportunity to hear from the nominees during the election process?

Although the pastors lifted up during the Conference Assembly process are not yet nominated, they will be invited to complete biographical information forms, which will be posted to the Synod website prior to the Synod Assembly (April 2025).

Following the second ballot, biographical forms for the seven nominees (plus ties) will be available for voting members.

Prior to casting the third ballot, the seven nominees (plus ties) each will have 5 minutes to address the assembly on a subject of their own choosing.

Prior to casting the fourth ballot, the three nominees (plus ties) will participate in a question-and-answer period. Each nominee will be asked the same 5 pre-determined questions and have a maximum of 2 minutes to respond to each question.

Who will conduct the Synod Assembly during the bishop election process?

A representative from the ELCA, Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, will conduct all aspects of the bishop election process during the Synod Assembly.

What is the term of office for the bishop?

The term of office is six years, with a two-term limit. (+S8.51)

Is there a job description for the office of bishop?

Chapter 8 of the *South Dakota Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions* outlines the responsibilities of the synod bishop. The bishop serves as the synod's pastor and is called to administer 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 South Dakota Synod.

How can individuals and congregations learn more about the bishop election process?

Information will be posted to the synod website. Information will be shared during the February 23, 2025, conference assemblies.

The [*South Dakota Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions*](#) is a resource. It can be found under the **Resources** tab on the synod website or at <https://sdsynod.org/congregations/constitutions/>. The election process is described in S9.04.01, S9.04.02, S9.04.A18, S9.04.B18, and S9.04.10. The office of the bishop is described in S8.10-S8.14. Voting members of the Synod Assembly are defined in S7.21, S7.21.A07, S7.21.B17, S7.21.C17, S7.21.D17, S7.21.E22, and S7.21.01.

What is the role of the Bishop Election Committee?

The Bishop Election Committee supervises the process of nomination and election of the bishop. The committee has final authority for all matters pertaining to the election. (S9.04.10)

Who are the members of the Bishop Election Committee?

The Bishop Election Committee consists of three persons appointed by the Synod Council. Committee members are Carla Borchardt, Sioux Falls; Rev. Michael DeKraai, St. John's Lutheran, Webster; and Rev. Carla Nelson, Grace Lutheran Church, Sturgis.

Questions about the election process and be sent to the Bishop Election Committee at bishopselection@sdsynod.org.