



Northeastern Minnesota Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

1105 East Superior Street, Upper Suite • Duluth, Minnesota 55802-2216
218/724-4424 www.nemnsynod.org Fax: 218/724-4393

A Guided Conversation on the Election of the Next Bishop

WELCOME & PURPOSE OF GATHERING

OPENING LITURGY

A leader begins the opening dialogue:

Come, Holy Spirit!

Come, Holy Spirit!

Come, breath of God and fill the minds and hearts of your people.

Come, Holy Spirit!

Come, fire of truth and kindle in us the flame of your love.

Come, Holy Spirit!

Come, font of wisdom, enlighten us and give us counsel and insight.

Come, Holy Spirit!

Come, leading spirit and guide our discerning.

Come, Holy Spirit! Come, Holy Spirit! Holy Spirit, come!

Hymn

A leader concludes the opening with the following prayer:

Almighty God, you have given your Holy Spirit to the church to lead us into all truth. Bless with the Spirit's grace and presence we the people of the Northeastern Minnesota Synod as we prepare to elect a bishop. Keep us steadfast in faith and united in love, that we may manifest your glory and prepare for the way of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

ELECTION OF A SYNOD BISHOP

Reference the governing document provisions for details on bishop elections (ELCA constitutional provisions 8.11, 8.13, 8.16; Synod Constitution, Chapter 6)

Modified Ecclesiastical Ballot

Timetable

- + Pre-Conference Assembly nomination process
- + Conference Assemblies: February 9, 2020 (* Snow date, February 16)
- + Bishop Nominee Forums
 - ✦ March 12, 2020 Calvary, Mora
 - ✦ March 13, 2020 St. Andrew's, Grand Rapids
 - ✦ March 14, 2020 Grace, Hermantown
- + Synod Assembly, May 1-3, 2020, Duluth

The *Bishop Election Glossary* and the pertinent sections of the ELCA Constitution are on the 2020 NEMN Synod Bishop's Election page of the Synod's web site.

BIBLE STUDY & DISCUSSION

SURVEY QUESTION 1

How has synod leadership assisted your congregation in the past few years?

Pastoral transitions, interim ministry, and call processes: Nearly half of the respondents noted this important connection to the synod.

Long-range planning assistance: Stewardship or mission planning, exploration of ministry collaboration or area partnerships, and guidance on constitutions and compensation guidelines were mentioned frequently.

Resources to develop and sustain healthy, vibrant congregations: Synod leadership is viewed as providing valuable support, workshops and continuing education in the areas of youth ministry, care and support of pastors and congregations, mission and outreach, the candidacy process, and training church leaders.

Direct communication: Respondents expressed appreciation for in-person visits, online communication, and synod assembly gatherings.

Read 1 Kings 19:19-21: ¹⁹So he set out from there, and found Elisha son of Shaphat, who was plowing. There were twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him. ²⁰He left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." Then Elijah said to him, "Go back again; for what have I done to you?" ²¹He returned from following him, took the yoke of oxen, and slaughtered them; using the equipment from the oxen, he boiled their flesh, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

Read 2 Kings 2:9-12: "When they had crossed [the Jordan], Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." ¹⁰He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." ¹¹As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. ¹²Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces."

Discussion Questions

Although pastoral and bishop transitions *might* be accompanied with fireworks such as when Elijah passed his mantle to Elisha, things are usually a bit calmer, yet still laden with questions and concerns. How do you think God helped Elisha deal with his new prophetic role?

How does the Holy Spirit guide congregations and synods experiencing transitions to new pastoral leadership?

How can the bishop and synod office partner with a congregation seeking a new pastor or exploring ministry opportunities?

SURVEY QUESTION 2

In what ways can the synod leadership be a partner in addressing the future issues and needs of your region and context?

Relationships with congregations: Responses overwhelmingly expressed a continued need for strong, listening-centered relationships between synod leadership and congregations. Emphases included synod visibility, theological communication, educational tools and trainings, congregational assistance, and adult and youth programming. The ability to maintain focus on unity in Christ in the midst of honoring diverse perspectives is necessary and appreciated.

Exploring vibrant/creative ways to do ministry in a changing culture: Respondents articulated a need for creative ways of being church throughout the synod. Changing culture and declining demographics underlie an articulated need for synod leadership to help congregations explore new ministry partnerships and collaborations for congregational vitality and ministry.

Pastoral Vacancies: Challenges in filling pastoral vacancies, gaining interim ministers in transition, affordability to call a pastor, and raising up seminarians were strong themes. Respondents expressed wishes to re-imagine and explore new ways to provide pastoral leadership to congregations.

Justice Issues: Respondents expressed a need for synod leadership to partner with congregations to theologically understand and address justice issues locally and globally. Issues related to food and housing insecurities, chemical dependency, mental health, immigration, Native American reconciliation, racism, violence, and environmental care were common.

Read Matthew 9:16-18: “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. ¹⁷ Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”

Discussion Questions

What are some of the ways we still use old wineskins in our synod?

What is the “new wine” headed our way and how can we channel it into “new wineskins?”

What is the role of the bishop in helping us discern which issues or challenges to address and then to facilitate your congregation’s response?

SURVEY QUESTION 3

What are the greatest mission opportunities for the Northeastern Minnesota Synod in the next six years?

Outreach and empowerment of members and congregations: Both new and existing members were often mentioned in responses.

Outreach to those who may feel marginalized in society: Accompaniment of those on their faith journey, ministry with refugees and migrants, reconciliation with Native American and LGBTQ communities, and ministry with youth and young adults were also response areas.

Health and wholeness: Health care, housing and the homeless, the environment, hunger, drug use, and mental health were mentioned by several respondents.

Read John 10:14-16: “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

Read Deuteronomy 14:28-29: “Every third year you shall bring out the full tithes of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns; ²⁹the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake.”

Discussion Questions

Who are the “other sheep” today who also need to hear the voice of the good shepherd?

Who are the “resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows” in our synod’s communities today who need our ministry? Give specific examples from your community.

Assuming you could raise the necessary funds, what is the one thing you would do to reach out to those in need in our synod? How could the bishop assist you in this outreach?

SURVEY QUESTION 4

What do you want the Northeastern Minnesota Synod to be known for?

A welcoming, inclusive, compassionate synod for all people: An overwhelming number of respondents expressed their desire for the Northeastern MN Synod to be a welcoming synod for all people. Respondents also expressed their wishes for robust outreach in our communities, vibrant congregations with solid missional presence locally and globally, visible Lutheran witness and evangelism, strong lay and pastoral leadership in congregations, and a boldness for innovation and creativity into the future.

Read Luke 10:29-37: “But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of

him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ ³⁷He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Discussion Questions

What is surprising in this familiar story about a Samaritan who gives help to an injured man?

How are being welcoming, inclusive, and caring related to outreach to others in your town and our synod?

What is your congregation doing, or could do, that would bring the news media to your church to report on the good being done?

How could the bishop help your congregation in these efforts?

SURVEY QUESTION 5

What are the two to three biggest challenges that await the next Bishop?

Embracing and encouraging faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ: Promote adaptability in leadership in accordance with the teachings and constitution of this church.

Balancing the administrative, organizational, and pastoral care responsibilities: Respondents mentioned both the synod and wider church, including conflict resolution, long-range organizational planning, and financial vitality.

Engaging leaders and congregations: Assist in strengthening faith formation and developing vision toward adaptive ordained and lay ministry, especially in the context of a church experiencing a declining and aging membership with limited resources.

Partnering with congregations and leaders: Proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in our congregations and in our communities, especially among those on fringes.

Read Acts 18:1-4,18, 24-28: “After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together—by trade they were tentmakers. ⁴Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks... ¹⁸After staying there for a considerable time, Paul said farewell to the believers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila... ²⁴Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. ²⁵He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately. ²⁷And when he wished to cross over to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. On his arrival he greatly

helped those who through grace had become believers, ²⁸for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus.”

Read Luke 5:1-11: “Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ²he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” ¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.”

Discussion Questions

It was probably a radical idea that Priscilla would be an equal partner with Aquila in Paul’s ministry. In a time of dwindling financial and people resources within a congregation, what radical, new, and novel partnerships might we forge?

How can the bishop and synod staff be most helpful in finding the right pastor for your congregation?

Supposing for the last 100 years your congregation has had white, male pastors and your church council is presented with a qualified, serious candidate who is a woman, LGBTQ, black, Native American or Hispanic. What assistance and advice would you seek from the bishop to present the candidate to your congregation?

SURVEY QUESTION 6

What are the top three to four gifts and skills you are looking for in the next Bishop?

Administration / organization / teamwork as well as welcoming / compassionate / inclusive: This was the biggest category of responses.

Interpersonal, relational, and leadership skills: These were also frequently mentioned.

Theological understanding, personal faith, and preaching/teaching: Relationships with congregations, creativity, innovation, discernment, open-minded, visionary, good communication, integrity, commitment, conflict management, and justice-seeker were frequently mentioned.

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7: “The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. ²Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable,

hospitable, an apt teacher, ³not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way— ⁵for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church? ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.”

Read Titus 1:7-9: “For a bishop, as God’s steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; ⁸but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. ⁹He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.”

Discussion Questions

How are these words to Timothy and Titus reflective of the context of the early church?

What do these passages have to say about the gifts and skills identified in the survey about our synod’s next bishop? What has changed in 2000 years? What has remained the same?

WHOLE GROUP DISCUSSION

Each group will share a *brief* summary of *one* discussion question.

Read (or sing!) verse two from *All Are Welcome* (ELW 641)

“Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and true,
where all God’s children dare to seek to dream God’s reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness and as symbol of God’s grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus;
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.”

Group Discussion Questions

Change “house” and “place” to “synod.” To what prophetic mission is God calling our synod (and your congregation, and the ELCA)?

How can we partner with our next bishop “to seek to dream God’s reign anew?”

CLOSING

Hymn

Closing prayer in unison:

Almighty God, you have raised up faithful deacons, pastors and bishops for your church. May the example of their lives be a source of joy for us and a bulwark of our faith, so that we may serve you and confess your name before the world; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (TTF, p. 118)

and/or

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only knowing that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (ELW, p. 304)

L: Go in Peace, to serve the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God!

1 October 2019