

Deacon Brenda Tibbetts
NE MN Synod Online Reflections – October 28, 2019

Seen & Unseen, Done & Left Undone...
The On-going Work of the BEC Task Force

Just about a year ago, The Rev. Chris Boerger, Secretary of the ELCA forwarded a Bishop Election Committee Toolkit to the Northeastern Minnesota Synod in preparation for the 2020 Synod Assembly and Bishop Election. Bishop Tom Aitken will be completing his second term and since we have term limits, this Bishop Election process may be more detailed and wide open in comparison to when an incumbent Bishop's name was previously on the ballot.

There are Rostered Ministers and Lay Leaders from all 5 conferences which have been appointed as the "BEC", or the Bishop Election Committee. The BEC is tasked with providing documentation, information and leadership in this discernment process. They are also tasked to be neutral. There is no "campaigning" for candidates - only open, honest answers to questions regarding discernment, the process itself, and staying on task with the process schedule.

Any ELCA Pastor in good standing throughout the entire ELCA is eligible for having their name forwarded as a nominee in this Bishop Call Process. If you are considering nominating someone, please be sure to ask that person for their permission before forwarding their name to your Conference Dean. Likewise, if you are an ELCA Pastor discerning an openness to having your name forwarded or self-nominating, I would direct you to do so through your Conference Dean, as well.

All who are following this process are invited to join in prayer during this time. You are also invited to check out the resources listed on www.nemnsynod.org and underneath "Quick Links", you will see the tab for the "2020 Bishop Election." First, read through **The Bishop's Election Glossary & Exhibit B** which describe the duties and responsibilities of a Bishop. There is a wonderful **Bible Study** complete with leader guide that can be adapted to adult forums, WELCA or Men's Bible Studies, Confirmation, council meetings, etc. You will also want to check out the data regarding our synod. This information comes directly from the ELCA churchwide office and is based on your congregation's annual parochial reports which have been submitted for 2018.

A very helpful tool for any pastor discerning an openness to having their name brought forward as a potential candidate is the "**Emotional Toolkit**." This was written by Pr. Emily Carson who was second on the ballot for the bishop election in Southeastern Minnesota. She has provided some very excellent food for thought - what happens if you are not called to be the next Bishop.

The past six months have seen the BEC hard at work: in person, via Zoom and email, to collate the results of the **BEC Survey**. Those results, demographic graphs and charts will be posted soon. Again, this is very important information for Pastors in the discernment and nomination process. Like a congregation's call process, a Synod Ministry Site Profile for the synod is being developed and we are hoping to have it posted soon. All rostered ministers and voting members need to be informed as to the opportunities and challenges facing the synod and bishop-elect.

So what does a Bishop's duties entail? Please read through the constitutional portion in **Exhibit B**. In addition to those duties listed, there are a lot of things that take place throughout the synod which require a Bishop's leadership and wisdom. Believe it or not, when working with saints/sinners in congregations, misunderstandings

take place, power struggles happen below and above the table, legal questions come up, constitutions are updated needing approval, etc.

When I was called to the synod office in 2015, I was surprised at the amount of time the Bishop expended in working with council presidents facing difficulties, follow-up with rostered ministers who were dealing with a myriad of concerns both personal and congregational, and random issues that popped up via email, phone messages or came walking in without advance notice. There is also a lot of administrative paperwork needing a bishop's attention and signature.

The old cliché (*which we know isn't true!*) is that "Pastors only work on Sunday, right?!" Well, sometimes that cliché morphs into the realm of a Bishop's work. "They only work at Synod Assembly and at Ordinations, right?!" That is not true, either! The ELCA constitution states that pastors and deacons are also expected to participate in synodical and churchwide work where it is appropriate. It is also a part of the Bishop's duties to serve on various churchwide committees, task forces and "ready benches." There are several times a year where all the Bishops from all 65 Synods participate in a Conference of Bishops in Chicago.

A part of the discernment process for any Pastor should be an awareness of the amount of travel involved throughout and beyond the synod. You will see the best of the Body of Christ in action! You will also see the underside of the church - when congregational leadership or whole congregations have forgotten or strayed from what it means to be the Body of Christ. Healthy self-care for yourself, spiritually, emotionally and physically will be extremely important.

Bishop Tom will be sharing some thoughts about his two terms at some point in the near future. Please use his thoughts as a part of your discernment process.

Nominations for potential Bishop Candidates may be brought forward to your Conference Dean beginning November 1st. The names of these nominees will not be published until sometime in late January or early February 2020. Each conference will meet simultaneously on **Feb. 9, 2018 at 3 pm** to discern the ballot with names they will forward on to the Synod Assembly. In the event of inclement weather, all would reschedule to meet the following Sunday, **Feb. 16th**. Documents for authorizing background checks and filling out a personal biography/vitae will be posted soon on the website, Quick Links, 2020 Bishop Election. On **March 13-15, 2020**, three sites have been set up for Bishop Forums, Q & A. More to come.

The Northeastern Minnesota Synod covers 13 counties. Current Conference Deans are: Lake Superior-Pr. Peter Kowitz, Proctor; Laurentian-Pr. Kevin Olson, Hibbing; Living Waters-Pr. Amanda Kossow, Cass Lake; Heartland-Pr. Mike Pancoast, Princeton; Kettle River-Pr. Brenda Wicklund, Hinckley. **Members of the NEMN 2020 Synod Bishop Election Committee are:** Chairperson: Pr. John Dietz; Co-Secretaries: Deacon Susan Williams and Mrs. Susanne Hinrichs; Pr. Joyce Piper; Mr. Mark Hollabaugh; Mrs. Amy Loken, Mr. Dave Erdman, SAM; Mrs. Jennifer Svatos; Mrs. Paula Jackson; Pr. Erika Foss; Pr. Matt McWaters; Ms. Emilee Hinrichs; Mr. Brody Johnson; Mr. Tim Johnson; Synod VP Rachel Berry serves as liaison to the Synod council, Deacon Brenda Tibbetts, Assistant to the Bishop, serves as liaison to Synod Staff. We stand ready to answer any questions you may have regarding the Call Process which leads to the 2020 Bishop Election to take place at the **Northeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly scheduled for May 1-3, 2020 at the DECC in Duluth.**

Please pray for all who may be discerning a call to have their names on the ballot. Please pray for our Synod Council and Synod Staff as they work together for the transition that is to come.

Please pray for the Northeastern Minnesota Synod that we may all listen to the Holy Spirit's leading and vision as we prepare for this major change.