

Greater Milwaukee Synod Discernment and Election Process for the Selection of a Bishop – 2016

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Overview

At its 2016 Assembly, the Greater Milwaukee Synod will elect a bishop to serve for six years. In an effort to inform the nomination and election process, this policy is adopted by the 2015 Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America provides some guidance for the election of a bishop, though synods are given wide latitude in determining both election procedures and activities leading up to the election. This policy includes relevant constitutional requirements for the election of a bishop, as well as a process for giving all Voting Members of the 2016 Synod Assembly the opportunity to become acquainted with prospective nominees.

The importance of providing this background is underscored by the following passage from the ELCA's *Guidelines for Synod Bishop Elections*:

Electing a bishop is one of the most important responsibilities in the life of a synod in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and a key responsibility of the Synod Assembly. As an election, it is a process governed by the constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions of the synod; however, it is also a call process. As such, it involves discernment, from the perspective both of individual potential nominees and of the synod

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as a whole. Thus, engaging in prayerful reflection and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit are indispensable aspects of the process of nomination and election, regardless of the particular provisions in the synod's governing documents.¹

The Bishop

Eligibility to Serve as Bishop

The basic requirement to serve is that the “bishop shall be a pastor who is an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.” This includes not just pastors currently rostered in the Greater Milwaukee Synod, but any pastor in the ELCA.

Beyond this basic requirement, a prospective bishop must have “broad skills in pastoral care and preaching, administrative leadership, and the ability to lift up the vision for the Synod and its ministry.”²

Additional information on desired traits for an ELCA bishop will be provided to members of the synod as part of the Discernment and Election Process. In short, the duties of the bishop include having primary responsibility for the ministry of Word and Sacrament in this synod; to ordain, commission, consecrate or install rostered leaders in this synod; to exercise leadership in the mission of this church; to oversee and administer the work of this synod; to maintain the roster of this synod; and to make appointments for certain posts.

Term of Office

Bishops are elected to six-year terms³, with election to two consecutive terms possible in the Greater Milwaukee Synod.⁴ The term of office for the bishop elected at the 2016 Synod Assembly will begin September 1, 2016.⁵

Structure

Synod Council

The Synod Council shall be responsible for the initial approval of the Discernment and Election process for the Bishop. Prior to the appointment of the Elections Committee, the Synod Council Secretary shall respond to any questions regarding process, and the Synod Council Executive Committee shall respond to any other concerns.

Elections Committee

All aspects of the discernment and election process shall be managed by an Elections Committee consisting of eleven members, seven of whom shall be lay members of the synod, and four of whom shall be rostered clergy in the synod. The Elections Committee shall be appointed by the Synod Council no later than Thursday, September 24, 2015. The chair shall be one of the lay members of the Elections Committee.

¹ ELCA *Guidelines for Synod Bishop Elections*, January 2012, p. 1

² South-Central Synod of Wisconsin *Process for Nominating and Electing a Bishop*, 2013

³ Greater Milwaukee Synod Constitution, Provision †S8.51.

⁴ Greater Milwaukee Synod Bylaws, Provision S8.51.01.a.

⁵ Greater Milwaukee Synod Constitution, Provision S8.52.

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All correspondence or other communication from sponsors or nominees shall be through the Elections Committee, with no involvement in any aspect of the process by synod staff. The Synod Council shall maintain oversight of the Elections Committee. Once created, the Elections Committee will be responsible for submitting reports for each Synod Council meeting on the progress of the committee.

All members of the Elections Committee shall affirm in writing existing synod Anti-Fraud and Operational Ethics policies, and shall also agree in writing not to participate in the discernment or nomination process as either a sponsor, a prospective nominee or a nominee.

In addition to working toward the election of a bishop, the Elections Committee will also retain responsibility for other elections at the 2016 Synod Assembly. Except for elections to fill vacancies, the only other elections scheduled at the 2016 Assembly will be for the synod's Discipline Committee.

The Elections Committee shall work with the Synod Assembly Committee, prior to the Synod Assembly, to ensure that adequate time is incorporated into the agenda to facilitate counting ballots, allowing withdrawal of nominees, contact of absent nominees, completion and dissemination of biographical information, question and answer periods, speeches, and other activities involved in the election process.

The Office of the Presiding Bishop and the Office of the Secretary will endeavor to keep lines of communication open with the Elections Committee. Conference calls between representatives of the Churchwide organization and the Elections Committee should take place to review the nomination and election process and issues relating to it. In addition, within approximately 30 days of the Synod Assembly, the churchwide representative at the Synod Assembly and the Elections Committee and/or Executive Committee should confer.

Website

The Elections Committee shall use a dedicated portion of the synod website, under its control, for purposes related to the election of the bishop. It shall include background information on the process, the timeline for all related activities, and updates on the process and those involved in the pre-Assembly Discernment Process. The website shall also include live-streaming capabilities and e-mail service for Committee members.

Funding

Funding for all aspects of the Discernment and Election Process shall be from the synod's restricted Assembly fund. In the case that additional funds are required the Synod Council may allocate those funds to support this process.

Discernment Process

Sponsorship of Prospective Nominees

Members of the clergy eligible to serve as bishop may participate in the pre-Assembly Discernment Process if they are sponsored by any voting member of a congregation which is a member of the Greater Milwaukee Synod, ELCA. Congregations, clusters or other entities or

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groups may ***not*** sponsor prospective nominees. Prospective nominees may ***not*** sponsor themselves. Sponsors may sponsor no more than one prospective nominee.

Sponsorship forms shall be made available by the Elections Committee no later than Monday, December 1, 2015. Completed forms must be returned to the Elections Committee no later than 5:00 pm, Monday, February 29, 2016. Information on who has been sponsored shall not be made available by the Elections Committee until the close of the sponsorship period. The Elections Committee shall not report the names or number of sponsors for qualifying prospective nominees.

The Elections Committee shall notify prospective nominees by mail or e-mail within one week of the deadline for sponsorships (Monday, March 7, 2016) that they will be included in the pre-Assembly discernment process, if they desire to be included. Prospective nominees will then have until 5:00 pm, Friday, March 18, 2016 to return a form indicating their desire to participate or not, and to provide such additional biographical information as is requested by the Elections Committee if they choose to participate.

The names of and background information for prospective nominees will be posted to the Elections Committee website no later than Friday, March 25, 2016, along with a schedule of pre-Assembly forums (see below). This information will also be provided to Voting Members of the 2016 Synod Assembly with other pre-Assembly materials.

It is worth noting that individuals participating in this process are not called candidates, nor are they called nominees. Individuals involved in the process shall be known as prospective nominees. Nomination only occurs during the balloting process used by the synod in the election of the bishop.

Background Checks

All prospective nominees shall complete a self-disclosure form provided by the Elections Committee at the time at which they agree to participate in the pre-Assembly Discernment process, and shall agree to background checks to be conducted at an appropriate time before or during the Synod Assembly, consistent with the ELCA-mandated background check requirement in the synod constitution:

Background checks and screening shall be required and completed for persons nominated as synodical officers prior to their election, if possible, or as soon as practical after their election. The specific procedures and timing of background checks and screening shall be determined by the Synod Council.⁶

Pre-Assembly Forums

[The process] involves discernment, from the perspective both of individual potential nominees and of the synod as a whole⁷. . . If informational meetings or forums will be held, it is important

⁶ Greater Milwaukee Synod Constitution, Provision †S9.12.

⁷ ELCA *Guidelines for Synod Bishop Elections*, January 2012, p. 1

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*to ensure that they be scheduled throughout the synod in a way to maximize synod-wide exposure and opportunity for input from both rostered and lay persons.*⁸

In an effort to fulfill this synod's obligation to treat the election of the bishop as a call process involving "the synod as a whole," the synod shall offer opportunities for voting members, not just of the Synod Assembly, but of congregations as well, to hear from individuals who have been sponsored and have chosen to participate in the pre-Assembly Discernment Process.

The synod shall sponsor four forums (or sets of forums, if required because of the number of prospective nominees) at geographically diverse locations. Each prospective nominee will be expected to participate in forums at each location.

Each prospective nominee will be allowed to make a statement of no more than five minutes at each forum. Prospective nominees will be asked questions by the forum moderator, who may include questions from the audience, with all candidates having the opportunity to respond to any question posed during that forum.

One location shall be centrally located in the City of Milwaukee, with the other three locations to be south, west and north of the City of Milwaukee, located so that, to the extent possible, no congregation in the synod will be more than 30 miles from a forum location. The Elections Committee shall also make every effort to provide live online streaming for at least one forum or set of forums.

These forums shall take place no earlier than Friday, April 1, 2016 and no later than Sunday, May 15, 2016. In no case shall a forum take place at the congregational home of any prospective nominee.

Synod Assembly

Election

The election of the bishop shall be conducted by the representative of the churchwide organization at the Synod Assembly in the manner spelled out in the synod's constitution, as follows:

The bishop shall be elected by the Synod Assembly by ecclesiastical ballot. Three-fourths of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election on the first ballot. If no one is elected, the first ballot shall be considered the nominating ballot. Three-fourths of the legal votes cast on the second ballot shall be necessary for election. The third ballot shall be limited to the seven persons (plus ties) who received the greatest number of legal votes on the second ballot, and two-thirds of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. The fourth ballot shall be limited to the three persons (plus ties) who receive the greatest number of legal votes on the third ballot, and 60% of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. On subsequent ballots a majority of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. These ballots shall be limited to the two persons (plus ties) who receive the greatest number of legal votes on the previous ballot.⁹

⁸ ELCA *Guidelines for Synod Bishop Elections*, January 2012, p. 4

⁹ Greater Milwaukee Synod Constitution, Provision S9.04.

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Upon completion of the first ballot, any person who received a vote will be considered a nominee, and their name will appear on the second ballot, unless the nominee withdraws their name at the Assembly. Nominees must meet the basic requirement to serve which is that the “bishop shall be a pastor who is an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.” The Elections Committee shall be responsible for verifying rostered status for each nominee. Withdrawals from the pre-assembly process are not considered valid withdrawals from the ecclesiastical ballot.

The Elections Committee shall use only paper ballots for the first, second and third ballots, due to the limitations of the synod’s electronic voting system. Subsequent ballots may be conducted by paper ballot or by the use of the synod’s electronic voting system, at the discretion of the Elections Committee.

Nominee Statements

Following the second ballot, the remaining seven nominees (plus ties) will have the opportunity to address the Assembly with statements of up to five minutes each, including their response to one question provided by the Elections Committee. There will not be an opportunity for questions from the Assembly of the nominees at this stage.

Following the third ballot, the remaining three nominees (plus ties) will respond to questions posed by the Elections Committee. The Committee may choose to solicit questions from Voting Members of the Assembly prior to the second ballot for use following the third ballot.

Summary of Dates

Thursday, September 24, 2015		Deadline for Appointment of Elections Committee Members
Tuesday, December 1, 2015		Sponsorship Forms Available
Monday, February 29, 2016	5:00 pm	Sponsorship Deadline
Monday, March 7, 2016		Deadline to Notify Prospective Nominees
Friday, March 18, 2016	5:00 pm	Deadline for Prospective Nominees to Confirm Participation
Friday, March 25, 2016		Prospective Nominees Names and Bios Posted on Website. Forum Dates Set by Election Committee.
Friday, April 1, 2016		Beginning Date for Forums
Sunday, May 15, 2016		End Date for Forums
Thursday-Saturday, June 2-4, 2016		Bishop Election using Ecclesiastical process at 2016 Synod Assembly