

Dear Friends,

In September of 2020 at our annual Assembly, the Allegheny Synod will be calling our next Bishop. The Bishop-elect will begin their term of service on January 4, 2021. As a Synod, and as individuals, we are in a time of discernment. This document will aid those pastors who are discerning if God is inviting them to be open to the call of Bishop.

What is an ELCA Bishop

It is important to note the polity of this church structures the role of the Bishop very differently from that of other Christian traditions who retain the Episcopal office. The call of the Bishop is not to control the assets of the Synod, but the Bishop, in many ways like a pastor, is called to walk with the people of God and to advise them as best as they can in situations that arise within the congregation. All major decisions are in the hands of the congregation. A fuller description of the constitutional requirements and duties of the Bishop can be found in the Allegheny Synod Constitution S8.10 - S8.16.01

Gifts and Skills for the call of Bishop

Strong Faith. The work of the Bishop requires a strong commitment to one's faith—which may seem like it goes without saying. Much of the work of the Synod office and the Bishop will require the Bishop to rely on the power and strength of the Holy Spirit.

Relational. The Bishop needs to have strong relational skills and empathy. The people of God should know the Bishop loves and cares for them—even in the most difficult of times. The love the Bishop has for God's people will help carry them through when times are tough. The Bishop should be a person who can build trust through relationships. The Bishop cannot play favorites with members or congregations and must be willing and able to be in places where they are not known well as well as places where they feel at home. The Bishop will need a high level of confidentiality in many situations that arise in the call to this office. The Bishop has a staff and that requires a team mentality.

Administrative. Much of the work of the Bishop is in administration. A person who pays attention to detail, derives some joy in completing paperwork, and is highly organized would do well as Bishop. The Bishop will be a member of several Synodical committees (Assembly, Candidacy, Finance, Leadership, Reconciliation, Mutual Ministry, Synod Council) and has oversight of all committees. The Bishop will manage staff (Assistant, DEM, and Office Manager). Time management is a key gift for this call. Financial management and oversight are a large part of the call to Bishop. The Bishop works with the Finance Committee to develop budgets, manage investments, and oversee policies and procedures related to the Synod's finances as well as attending Finance Committee meetings. The Bishop takes an active role in Candidacy, Mobility, Assignment and First Call Theological Education. The Bishop will relate to our partners in a variety of ways including sitting on boards and committees of ALSM, Camp Sequanota, Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State, United Lutheran Seminary, PA Council of Churches and others.

The Allegheny Synod office utilizes the Microsoft suite of software. The Bishop should be fluent in Word, Publisher, Power Point, and Excel. The Bishop will be trained to use the Synod database system with ACS Technologies. Proficiency with social media is a plus for the Bishop.

Conflict Management. The Bishop should have good conflict management skills and be a negotiator or mediator. The work of the Synod Office is almost opposite of the work of a pastor in a congregation. In a congregation 75-85% of a pastor's time is spent proactively attending to the ministry of the congregation—planning and leading services, preparing for and teaching classes, visiting the sick and homebound and working with members on outside projects. About 15-25% of a pastor's time is spent managing conflict or dealing with problems that arise. In the Synod Office, it is opposite—75-85% of the Synod staff's time is spent dealing with conflict and problems and 15-25% of time is spent being able to be proactive and developing new ideas and ministries. With 114 congregations, challenges arise on a weekly basis that require the attention of the Bishop and the Synod staff.

Listener. The Bishop needs to be an active listener. Much of the work in the Synod office requires active listening to discern the best way forward. Confidentiality is paramount for the Bishop.

Communicator. The Bishop is responsible to write articles for the Lutheran Letter, seasonal messages to the Synod, letters to leaders, ecumenical partners, and ELCA churchwide partners. The Bishop oversees the communication from the Synod office and works with staff to create congregational resources for promotions and events. While much of the work in this call is supporting and promoting, the Bishop also is an idea person. The Bishop receives 100s of email per week and is required to read supporting material for board meetings, committee meetings, and other work.

Healthy Boundaries. The ability to say no is a unique gift and skill for a Bishop. It is natural to want to be all things to all people, but it is not possible. Developing healthy boundaries is one of the most important parts of the call of Bishop. This office is very demanding; without good boundaries, the Bishop will burnout and God's people will suffer. The Bishop will convene a Mutual Ministry Team. A key question to ask oneself consistently as the Bishop is: What is best for the Synod?

Adaptable. No two days are alike in the office of the Bishop. The Bishop should be able to adapt to change quickly and be able to prioritize issues and concerns. The Bishop needs to be self-motivated and think on her/his feet.

Authentic. The people of the Allegheny Synod don't stand too much on pretense and value and appreciate someone who is authentic and real. The Bishop should be true to her/himself and meet people with love and respect. They may not agree with all your positions, but they will know that you are sincere.

Legal Issues

Newly elected Bishops attend the New Bishop Formation Event at the ELCA Churchwide Offices in Chicago prior to beginning their term. Newly elected Bishops spend several days with the General Counsel and Associate General Counsel of the ELCA learning about proper procedures and processes involved in legal matters of the church. The Bishop does not have to be a lawyer, but the Bishop does have to know when to consult and call in the legal counsel of the ELCA, and when to be in contact with Synodical legal counsel.

Legal issues the Bishop may deal with include sexual misconduct, financial misconduct, sexual harassment, property issues, constitutional issues, and others. When a misconduct occurs, the Bishop must be able to deal with issues fairly and without bias. Often, misconduct requires the Bishop to discipline people for which a great deal of affection exists.

There is joy in the call

While the Bishop and the Synod staff deal with conflict, misconduct, and reconciliation issues that often stem from transition, there is joy in this call. The joy of being the Bishop to the Allegheny Synod comes from seeing how God is at work in and through God's people here; seeing the way our rostered leaders selflessly give of themselves and in the acts of grace and mercy congregations consistently carry out. The Bishop has a birds-eye-view and gets to see the many ways Jesus is at work in and through the people of the Allegheny Synod

The Allegheny Synod supports our partner ministries in many ways. Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries, Camp Sequanota and Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State benefit from a wide variety of gifts from our members. It is a joy to see our partners grow and flourish because of the compassion and kindness of our members.

Partner Ministries

As the Bishop of this Synod, there are responsibilities to the greater ELCA, our ELCA Region 8, partner ministries, and occasionally being asked to participate in local, state, and national events.

ALSM. The Bishop of the Allegheny Synod fills seats on the boards of two of our partner ministries. The Bishop is on the Board and Executive Committee of Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries (ALSM). This responsibility includes monthly meetings plus additional meetings which may arise to meet the needs of the organization. The Bishop should support ALSM events and functions throughout the year such as the annual dinner, the golf outing, dedication of new facilities, etc.

Camp Sequanota. The Bishop holds a seat on the board of Camp Sequanota. The Sequanota Board meets six times a year. Board members are encouraged to support fundraising events and activities for the camp.

United Lutheran Seminary. The Bishop may participate at ULS as a guest preacher, Bishop in residence, and guest instructor. In addition to that, ULS invites Bishops to campus for a three day visit every year.

Stewardship of Life Institute (SOLI). The Bishop may serve as the Region 8 representative to the Stewardship of Life Institute. SOLI focusses on stewardship support and education for the entire church. Essentially SOLI is a grant awarding body. The team gathers two or three times a year for 2 days of meeting and deliberation in Gettysburg.

ELCA. The Bishop is a member of the ELCA Conference of Bishops. The COB gathers two times a year for a week to 10 days of meetings in Chicago. The Bishops discuss the business of the church and offer feedback to members of the Churchwide Organization and to the Church Council on upcoming initiatives and programs. As a member of the Conference of Bishops, the Bishop will serve on a committee that supports the Churchwide Staff. The Bishops Academy is held every two years.

Appalachian Ministry Task Force. The ELCA Appalachian Ministry Task Force was a group who helped the church chart a way forward with ministry in the Appalachian Region. This group has concluded and given birth to the Symposium on Evangelical Lutheran Appalachia – an organization which plans to hold annual conferences on issues affecting the region and to bring people together.

Ready Benches. Bishops are invited to join 'Ready Benches' which are groups of Bishops who learn about and can be resources for the church around specific issues.

PA Council of Churches. The Region 8 Bishops share responsibility for sitting on the Board of the PA Council of Churches which meets twice a year in Harrisburg.