

Frequently Asked Questions about the 2024 Election of a Bishop For the Alaska Synod

Please join us in prayer as we prepare for the election of the next bishop in 2024. The bishop election process is an opportunity for us to discern the needs of the synod and who God is calling as our next leader to walk with and guide us.

1. What are the top priorities of the synod?

The Alaska Synod's Guiding Principles, which were discerned throughout 2023 from feedback provided by more than 70% of the synod's congregations are:

When we are at our best, you will find us:

- Listening to the Spirit and following Jesus
- Engaging each other with humility, honesty, respect, courage, and grace
- Celebrating our diversity through full participation, decision-making, and leadership
- Sharing our resources across the Alaska Synod so that ministries thrive
- Taking risks and being open to working in new ways for the sake of the Gospel
- Equipping and supporting resilient, creative lay and ordained leaders
- Working for justice and serving God's creation across the Alaska synod and beyond
- Living out and sharing the love of Jesus wherever we are

2. Who can serve as the bishop of the Alaska Synod?

Candidates for bishop must be an ELCA minister of Word and Sacrament, as defined in section 8.11 of the Alaska Synod Constitution (which you can find on the synod website), though they need not be serving in the Alaska Synod. That person may serve up to two consecutive six-year terms. Nominees for bishop are required to sign a disclosure form authorizing a background check.

3. Is there a job description for the Office of Bishop?

Chapter 8 (sections S8.11 - S8.14) of the Alaska Synod constitution (which is available on the synod website) outlines the qualifications, responsibilities, and term of office for the bishop. In summary, the Bishop serves as:

- The synod's pastor and is called to administer sacraments, preach, provide pastoral care, ordain, install, advise and counsel, interpret and advocate, and serve as the synodical ecumenical officer;
- The synod's chief executive and administrative officer, overseeing and administering the work of the synod; and
- Supervising the leadership of other officers and staff.

4. Who elects the bishop?

The bishop will be elected by voting members of the Synod Assembly—lay members elected by the congregations of this synod together with all ordained pastors and deacons under call on the rosters of this synod, retired pastors and deacons still living in the synod, the Officers of the Synod, and the Synod Council.

5. When will the next bishop of this synod be elected?

The bishop will be elected at the next Synod Assembly, which is set for April 26-28, 2024, at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Anchorage, Alaska.

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

Informational sessions for congregations will be held prior to Assembly (via Zoom). Information will be sent to voting members of the Synod Assembly just prior to assembly. All materials will also be shared on the Synod website.

Another resource is the Synod constitution and bylaws. Constitution Section S9.04 (S9.04.01 - .03) specify the nomination and election procedure. Sections S8.10 - S8.15 outline the qualifications, responsibilities, and term of Office of the Bishop. Sections S7.01 - S7.32 relate to the Synod Assembly.

7. What opportunities will be available to learn more about pastors willing to serve as bishop?

Information about pastors who have shared their willingness to be considered for nomination will be posted to the Synod website from 03/15/24 through 04/25/2024. Please note this information will be removed just prior to the assembly to avoid any semblance of campaigning.

8. What is the process for nominating candidates for bishop?

Candidates for bishop are nominated at the Synod Assembly during the 1st Ballot (also known as the the 'Ecclesiastical' or 'Nominating' Ballot) of the Bishop Election.

If a voting member intends to nominate an ordained ELCA pastor for bishop at the Synod Assembly, please note that advance preparation in contacting a 'pastor of interest' and preparation of the biographical information are in the pastor's and the assembly's best interest.

1. Please speak with the individual in advance to confirm that they are willing to stand for election to the office of bishop. If they consent to the nomination, ask them to complete the candidate's biographical information and consent for background check/disclosure forms as found on the Synod website. These forms and other information are made available to help guide and inform any pastor who is discerning the possibility of call to the office of bishop.
2. Come to the Synod Assembly with contact information that includes the correct spelling of their name, name of the congregation or institution currently served by them, email address, and phone number. There is limited time to contact nominees at synod assembly and any information you can share will aid the assembly in this important work.

If, on the first ballot, the individual is among the top seven, the completed biographical information form will be distributed to voting members before the second ballot. The background check/disclosure form will permit the required background checking process to begin immediately following the Synod Assembly if the individual is elected bishop.

9. Can a congregation instruct its voting members how to vote at the Synod Assembly?

No. Each voting member of the Synod Assembly acts on behalf of the Synod, rather than on behalf of the congregation that selected them to be a member of the assembly. There are various ways in which the voting members are representative: balance of women and men, 60 percent laity, and proportionate numbers of voting members from the smallest to largest congregations. The governing documents of the ELCA and the Alaska Synod of the ELCA refer to members of the assembly as “voting members” rather than “delegates.” The Office of the Secretary of the ELCA explains that this term was chosen to reflect the understanding that the Synod Assembly is an assembly of the people of the church, some of whom have been duly granted voting responsibilities for governance and election on behalf of the synod, and voting members are not politicized delegates.

10. What is the role of the Bishop Election Committee?

The Synod constitution provides for a Bishop Election Committee to oversee the nomination and election process, working in cooperation with the Vice President of the Synod and the Assembly Operation and Election Committees. The committee is impartial and guided by the constitution to prepare congregations and voting members to be informed participants in the election.

Members of the 2024 Bishop Election Committee are available to answer your questions and can be reached through the Alaska Synod Office or by emailing them directly at akvisionelca@gmail.com

2024 Bishop Election Committee:

Leslie Swenson, Christ Lutheran Church - Fairbanks, AK; AK Synod Council Vice President and Bishop Election Committee/Council Liaison

William Bahleda, Synodically Authorized Minister at Island of Faith Lutheran Church - Wrangell, AK; Southeast Cluster

Tracey Buie, Our Savior’s Lutheran Church - Nome, AK; Seward Peninsula Cluster

Adam Bryant, Lutheran Church of Hope - Anchorage, AK; Southcentral Cluster

Rev. Rick Cavens, Pastor at Good Shepherd - Wasilla; Knik Cluster

Marge Stoneking, Synodically Authorized Minister in training at St. Mark Lutheran Church - Anchorage, AK; Southcentral Cluster

Angie Wohlford, Christ Lutheran Church - Fairbanks, AK; Interior Cluster