

The Election and Call of the Bishop of the New Jersey Synod

June 5-7, 2025

Bishop Profile: The Office and Ministry of the Bishop

The New Jersey Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seeks the Holy Spirit's guidance in electing and calling a bishop for the New Jersey Synod. The role of the bishop is defined theologically in the Lutheran Confessions and given institutional shape in the constitution of the New Jersey Synod, Chapter 8. (Various citations from the constitution are referenced below. In addition, each nominee will be required to have a background check.)

The responsibilities listed in the synod constitution are quite extensive, yet are the "minimum requirements" for the bishop's call. We also want to ask: what are the particular gifts, skills, knowledge, and experiences that might best serve the New Jersey Synod over the coming years? What are the characteristics of the leadership that the Spirit may raise up among us?

There will be a time in the election process at assembly when nominees will have the opportunity to answer questions from the voting members. The following outline summarizes some of the key aspects of the bishop's role:

1. Proclaim Word and Sacrament (the means of grace in Christ) as an expression of the one public office of ordained ministry.

Timothy Wengert in Priesthood, Pastors, Bishops, pp. 65, 75, 100, points out that the Confessions consider the ministry of the bishop to be equivalent to that of a "head pastor" in a city or town. How might the bishop serve as "chief pastor" of Word and Sacrament for the synod?

2. Teach the apostolic faith of the church.

How does the bishop foster dialogue and lead conversation about what it means to be Christian (and Lutheran) in this time and place, in relation to the witness of the history and theology of the church's tradition?

3. Have primary responsibility for the ministry of Word and Sacrament in this synod and its congregations, providing pastoral care and leadership for this synod, its congregations, its ministers of Word and Sacrament and ministers of Word and Service. (S8.12.b.).

Pastoral care involves both support and admonition (law and gospel). How does the bishop's role include practicing mercy and forgiveness and yet also providing for good order in consideration for the health of the whole church?

4. Ordain approved candidates for various ministries (or provide for these actions in accordance with the constitution), attest letters of call, and install ordained and other leaders.

What are the most helpful characteristics of a bishop's work with the call process? How does the bishop build up and encourage the varied ministries across the synod?

5. Lead in fostering support for and commitment to the mission of this church within this synod. (S8.12.g.2.).

This may include the ability to lead planning for the overall mission of the synod, to publicly interpret this mission both internally and externally, and to help gather the necessary resources for our mission as a synod. How might the bishop help elicit new visions for mission in the midst of a changing culture?

In preparation for the Bishop Election in June of 2025, this document provides an overview of the Office and Ministry of the Bishop of the New Jersey Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Synod members are encouraged to use this information to inform their conversations about their vision for the synod and their expectations for the next Bishop.

--New Jersey Synod ELCA Transition Team



6. Practice leadership in strengthening the unity of the Church and in so doing be the chief ecumenical officer of this synod.

The ELCA has full communion relationships with six church bodies: The Moravian Church, The Episcopal Church, The Reformed Church in America, The United Church of Christ, The Presbyterian Church U.S.A and The United Methodist Church. Additionally, bi-lateral dialogues are currently being pursued with the African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Disciples of Christ, Mennonite, Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. What should the bishop's priorities be in fostering these connections?

7. Be responsible for administering the constitutionally established processes for the resolution of controversies and for the discipline of rostered ministers and congregations of this synod; (S.8.12.h.2).

What are the personal gifts and skills of delegation needed to carry out this responsibility?

8. Serve as a liaison and link to the wider church across the ELCA and around the world.

The bishop relates to various ministries, including campus ministry, social service ministries and agencies, outdoor ministries, global missions, etc. Approximately four to eight weeks of the bishop's time each year are involved in working directly with the ELCA and its regions (more time in years with a churchwide assembly). The bishop covenants with other bishops and church leaders to foster collegial and accountable relationships. How might a new bishop set priorities for managing the demands of the role?

9. Oversee and administer the work of this synod... (S8.12.i.).

The office of bishop involves many administrative duties, including exercising appropriate legal authority; preparing for synod assemblies and the synod council; acting in conformity with the constitution; supervising other synod officers and synod staff; appointing and serving on committees; and maintaining rosters. The position involves a great deal of collaboration, supervision, and leadership. How can assistants to the bishop, the synod council, and the administrative staff best collaborate in accomplishing the synod's work?

10. Advocate and encourage governmental and societal leaders toward the greater establishment of justice.

This may include fostering inclusiveness within the synod's ministries and public witness in line with the church's social statements and Scriptural foundations. How does the bishop's "public witness" reflect on the mission of the New Jersey Synod overall?

The Bishop's Term of Office

The bishop is elected to a six-year term. In the New Jersey Synod, there are no term limits.

The Election of a Bishop

New Jersey Synod Constitution S9.04

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 received the greatest number of legal votes on the third ballot, and 60 percent 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 received the greatest number of legal votes on the previous ballot.

The Ecclesiastical Ballot

- On the first ballot the name of any eligible individual (on the ELCA clergy roster) is submitted by each voting member.
- The possibility of election exists on any ballot by achieving the required number of votes cast by voting members of the assembly applicable to a particular ballot.
- Spoken floor nominations are precluded.
- The first ballot is the nominating ballot if no election occurs on the first ballot.



New Jersey Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

njsynod.org

www.facebook.com/njsynod