

Sierra Pacific Synod, ELCA The Bishop Election Process

Come, Holy Spirit!

With these words all members of the Sierra Pacific Synod are invited to pray for and discuss the election of our next bishop, which will occur online at the Synod Assembly, May 6 – 8, 2021. We invite your prayer and thoughtful participation in the process.

Electing a bishop is one of the most important responsibilities in the life of the synod and a key responsibility of the Synod Assembly. As an election, the process is governed by the [Sierra Pacific Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions](#); however, it is first and foremost a call process. As such, it involves discernment, from the perspective both of individual potential nominees and of the synod as a whole. Therefore, engaging in prayerful reflection and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit are indispensable aspects of the processes of nomination and election.

The election of a bishop is a spiritual, rather than political, process. Members of the synod, especially voting members at the synod assembly, and potential nominees seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to understand the needs of the synod and discern whom God is calling to leadership at this time, in this place.

What is the process for electing a bishop?

The process for electing a bishop consists of several steps. This process, which will culminate in the election of a bishop at the 2021 Synod Assembly, has already begun. A Synod Site Profile Task Force was assembled in spring 2019, which conducted a synod study over the summer of 2019. The Task Force presented its findings to the Synod Council at the September 2019 meeting, and the results were subsequently posted on the synod web site in October 2019 (<http://spselca.org/index.php/bp-election>). With the postponement of the 2020 Synod Assembly and as a follow-up during the tumultuous times of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Synod Council engaged the services of [LEAD \(Living Every Day As Disciples\)](#) to initiate a series of listening sessions throughout the synod, the findings of which will supplement the Synod Site Profile.

At the conference gatherings held throughout fall 2019 and again in early 2021, congregations and individual members of the conferences had the opportunity to review the Synod Site Profile, take part in listening sessions led by a core team of lay and rostered synod members trained by LEAD, and were invited to identify ministers of Word and Sacrament who have the desired and necessary gifts for the office of bishop. Names lifted up at these gatherings were sent to the synod's Nominating Committee, who contacted potential nominees to ascertain their interest and to obtain biographical information from those interested in being considered a possible nominee. This information has been made available on the synod web site prior to the Synod Assembly. The pre-identification at the conference assemblies was not a nomination process.

The conference gathering discernment was not a nomination process. A minister of Word and Sacrament whose name was lifted up at a conference gathering will still need to be nominated on the ecclesiastical (first) ballot at the Synod Assembly to be considered a nominee for bishop.

Who elects the bishop?

The bishop will be elected by the voting members at the 2021 Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly. Voting members include lay members elected by congregations and synod-authorized worshipping communities, ministers of Word and Sacrament under call on the roster of the synod, ministers of Word and Service under call on the roster of the synod, officers of the synod, Synod Council members, youth from the Synod Youth Committee, retired rostered ministers chosen to be voting

members, rostered ministers of Word and Sacrament from a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been declared and established by a Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA under call or contract in a congregation of the synod, and rostered ministers of Word and Sacrament serving as interim pastors under a letter of agreement approved by the bishop of the synod.

How is the bishop elected at the Synod Assembly?

The bishop election process is described in the [Sierra Pacific Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions](#) S9.04. and S9.04.01.

What is an ecclesiastical ballot?

Also known as a nominating ballot, an ecclesiastical ballot is a means by which nominations for the office of bishop are made by casting a vote. On the first ballot, any minister of Word and Sacrament on the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is eligible. Individuals lifted up during conference gatherings are not automatically nominated; they must be nominated (name written) on the first ballot. On the nominating (first) ballot, three-fourths of legal votes cast is needed for election.

If no election occurs, the second ballot consists of all of those nominated, minus pastors who remove their names from consideration. On the second ballot, three-fourths of legal votes cast is needed for election.

After the nominating ballot, the election process shall follow the steps outlined in S9.04.

Ballot	Names Included	Votes Needed to Elect
First, Ecclesiastical (nominating) ballot	Any minister of Word and Sacrament on the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is eligible. <i>NOTE: Names lifted up during the conference gatherings are not automatically nominated but must be nominated on the first ballot in order to move forward.</i>	3/4 legal votes cast (75%)
Second	Ministers of Word and Sacrament nominated on the first ballot who have not withdrawn their names.	3/4 legal votes cast (75%)
Third	Seven nominees (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes cast on the second ballot.	2/3 legal votes cast (66.7%)
Fourth	Three nominees (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes cast on the third ballot.	60% legal votes cast
Fifth	Two nominees (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes cast on the fourth ballot.	Majority of legal votes cast (50% +1)

Who can be nominated? Who can serve as the bishop of the Sierra Pacific Synod?

Any minister of Word and Sacrament in good standing on the roster of the ELCA can be nominated. The candidate is not required to be rostered in the Sierra Pacific Synod, nor reside within the synod's geographical boundaries.

In accordance with the [Sierra Pacific Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions](#) (†S9.12. and S9.12.A19.), nominees for bishop are required to complete and sign a disclosure form and a form authorizing a background check.

Will there be opportunity to hear from the nominees during the election process?

Although the pastors whose names were lifted up during the conference gatherings and who agreed to have their names go forward as possible nominees are not yet nominated, they have been invited to complete biographical information forms which will have been posted to the synod website prior to the Synod Assembly. These forms are a way for voting members to have more information in advance of the 2021 Synod Assembly. After the assembly passes the “Standing Rules of Order for the 2021 Assembly,” this information with the list of names will be removed from the synod website. A traditional ecclesiastical ballot will then be used for the bishop election. Voting members are welcome to download or print this information in advance of the assembly.

Pursuant to Synod Constitution S9.04.01.d., any person receiving votes on the ecclesiastical (first) ballot who did not previously submit written biographical material will be invited to do so immediately, and that information will be made available to the voting members of the Assembly prior to the second ballot.

Prior to casting the third ballot, the seven nominees (plus ties) each will have five minutes to address the assembly.

Prior to casting the fourth ballot, the three nominees (plus ties) will participate in a question and answer period.

Prior to casting the fifth ballot, the remaining two nominees (plus ties) each will have five minutes to address the assembly.

Who will conduct the Synod Assembly during the bishop election process?

As the churchwide representative assigned to our Synod Assembly, Mr. Bill Horne, Vice President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, will conduct all aspects of the bishop election process during the Synod Assembly.

What is the term of office for the bishop?

The term of office is six years, and a bishop may be re-elected (†S8.51). Our Synod does not have a limit on the number of terms a bishop may serve.

Is there a job description for the office of bishop?

Chapter eight of the [Sierra Pacific Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions](#) outlines the responsibilities of the synod bishop. The bishop serves as the synod’s pastor and is called to administer sacraments, preach, provide pastoral care, advise, ordain, advocate, interpret, and serve as the synodical ecumenical officer. The bishop also serves as the synod’s chief executive and administrative officer, coordinating the ministries of the synod and supervising the leadership of other officers and staff. These duties take unique shape within the mission, goals, context, and structure of the Sierra Pacific Synod.

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

Information will be posted to the synod website as it becomes available and will be updated as needed. A specific section of the synod website is devoted to the bishop election:

<http://spselca.org/index.php/bp-election/>.

The [Sierra Pacific Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions](#) is a fundamental resource. It can be found under the Resources tab, then Documents, then Synod Documents tab on the synod website <http://spselca.org/>. The election process is described in S9.04. and S9.04.01. The office of the bishop is described in S8.10. – S8.15.

What is the role of the Bishop Election Committee? Who are the members of the Bishop Election Committee?

At its February 2020 meeting, the Synod Council appointed a Bishop Election Committee to supervise the process of nomination and election of the bishop. Committee members include The Rev. Chad Adamik, St. Paul's Lutheran Family, Carson City, NV; Ms. Lucy Allen, Our Saviour's, Fresno, CA; The Rev. Clark Brown, St. Timothy's Monterey, CA (chair); Ms. Pat Cash, *ex officio* (Nominating Committee); Ms. Gail Kiyomura, *ex officio* (Synod Vice President); Ms. Sue Michaelson, *ex officio* (Elections Committee); Mr. Jeff Pennington, *ex officio* (Synod Secretary).

Who can be contacted for questions or further information about the bishop election?

Several people are available to answer your questions:

Pastor Clark Brown, Chair

Bishop Election Committee

spsbishopselection@spselca.org

Gail Kiyomura

Synod Vice President

synodvicepresident@spselca.org

Jeff Pennington

Synod Secretary

synodsecretary@spselca.org

The election of the bishop is a call process. Prayer is the foundation of this process where both the Synod Assembly voting members and nominees seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to understand the needs of the synod and discern whom God is calling to leadership.

Come, Holy Spirit! Guide our hearts and minds that we may receive a faithful servant who will care for God's people and equip us for our ministries, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**