

# **Discernment & Conversation Guide for Pre-Identification of Bishop Candidates**



Sierra Pacific Synod  
committed to being re-formed

## **Discernment & Conversation Guide for Pre-Identification of Bishop Candidates**

In this document you will find a conversation guide to equip your Conference discernment for identifying potential nominees for the office of bishop of Sierra Pacific of the ELCA.

Please follow this guide as you see fit. We believe the Holy Spirit is at work in our relationships, conversations, and prayers. We encourage you to work through this guide in small groups within your congregation or other ELCA assemblies.

You may take as much time as you wish to walk through this process. However, this study guide is designed to take a minimum of 60 minutes to complete in order to allow thoughtful conversation and involvement of all participants. Thank you for your dedication and involvement in the future leadership for the Sierra Pacific Synod of the ELCA.

### **Opening Prayer**

*“And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless.” - Philippians 1:9-10*

Good and gracious God, we give you thanks for this day and this opportunity to gather as both servants and leaders of your church. Today we commit ourselves to a process of deep discernment as we consider potential nominees for the office of bishop in the Sierra Pacific Synod. You know where we all are in our journeys of faith. You also know the challenges we have faced over the past three years. We seek your healing and we repent of where we have harmed our siblings in Christ. You know our deepest longings for the future of the Church. You know the challenges our Synod is facing in the coming years. Guide our conversations, thoughts, and prayers this day. Help us find agreements and help us to disagree respectfully and with a curiosity to understand differing views. And Lord, ultimately, let your will be done in our decisions. Come, Holy Spirit, Come. Amen.

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### **Part 1: The Role of a Bishop**

1. Read together the General Responsibilities of the Bishop document in your packet.
2. *Group Discussion:* Were there any responsibilities listed that surprised you? Which items would you want the bishop of Sierra Pacific to consider the highest priority? Why?
3. Consider the list of characteristics, traits, and gifts below. Circle the 3 items on that list that you believe are the most important characteristics needed to fulfill the responsibilities of bishop.
4. Think on the responsibilities that were of the highest priority for you and your group as you choose these 3 items. If you can think of any gifts that are not included on this list, please add them here as well.
5. *Group Discussion:* Share your top characteristics with each other and discuss why you chose them. Were any characteristics chosen more often among your group? Why do you think that is?
6. Look at your own list of 3 characteristics. After discussion, are there any changes you wish to make to your list?

**Group Discernment:** Work through your lists and decide on the top 3 characteristics for your group. Make sure to consider any items people came up with outside of the written list. Write those 3 items somewhere all can see and set it aside.

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### General Characteristics, Traits and Gifts to Consider for the Role of Bishop\*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has deep a faith</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Loves the Church</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is trustworthy, courageous, honest, and acts with integrity</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has been an effective congregational leader</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has a pastoral presence</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is theologically grounded</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is focused on God's mission for God's church</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Speaks for the poor and marginalized</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Possesses emotional maturity and compassion while able to navigate criticism (thick skin)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is a team builder and stewards human resources well</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Models patience and resilience</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is a good listener and is approachable</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is a lifelong learner and teacher</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is flexible and receptive to change</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is able to discern priorities and act accordingly</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Knows how to create systems for change and has ability to delegate</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Versed in conflict management</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has shown aptitude for problem solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has significant intercultural awareness and experience and sensitivity</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Possesses administrative skills</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Likes to travel (in non-Covid realities)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has sound and healthy home life and relationships; can balance work and personal life</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Brings wisdom, insights, and understands the complexity of the church</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Doesn't let ego get in the way of the calling</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has strong verbal and written communication skills</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Understands parliamentary procedure</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is skilled at running efficient meetings</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is technologically skilled</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Understands the struggles of small congregations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is well versed in redevelopment of congregations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Understands the issues facing the Church and synod</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Strategic planner and thinker</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has strong sense of justice, and rooted in ethical decision making</li> </ul>
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*\*This is by no means a comprehensive list of attributes one might consider in identifying a nominee for bishop. Perhaps you will come up with even more as you engage in conversations and discernment!*

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### **Part 2: The Role and Ministry of the Synod**

1. Read over the “What a Synod Does” document in your packet.
2. *Group Discussion: Were there any responsibilities of Synod you did not know about before? Why do you think the Synod is responsible for these things?*
3. *Are there any responsibilities you consider a higher priority than others? Why?*
4. **Group Discernment:** *Prioritize together the responsibilities of the Synod. Write these down next your top 3 characteristics for bishop and set aside.*

### **Part 3: Identifying Names for the Role of Bishop**

To whom shall the office of bishop be entrusted?

In this section, you will find questions and considerations to guide you in identifying potential nominees for bishop of Sierra Pacific of the ELCA. Please use any or all these questions to allow the Holy Spirit to guide your discernment. As you list as many names as you can think of for these questions, please remember that any Rostered Minister of Word and Sacrament for the ELCA in good standing may serve the role of Synodical Bishop. They do not have to currently reside in Sierra Pacific Synod to be nominated for bishop. Think of as many names as you can for each question.

1. What character traits and qualities are important in one who is called to serve and steward the office of bishop?
2. Who models a strong witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ with a deep sense of the mission that God’s faithful people are called to share?
3. Who is grounded in Lutheran theology and yet can embrace and witness to God’s expansive love in diverse settings?
4. Who has administrative skills amongst a wide array of gifts to create and maintain a competent and vital team on the synod staff and among other synod leaders?
5. Who is emotionally competent to handle the most difficult of human relationships and controversy in disciplinary matters that will affect people’s lives in profound ways?
6. Who has the physical stamina to meet the rigor of the calling and yet, can set personal boundaries for selfcare?
7. Who casts a compelling vision for the future while recognizing and honoring the past, considering context, identity, and culture?

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**Group Discussion:** Did any names come to you for multiple questions? Why did you consider this person? What gifts do you see in this person? How well do you think this person fits the list of 3 characteristics, prioritized responsibilities of the synod, and 3 ministry priorities your group listed? Why?

**Group Discernment:** For each name discussed above, please take a moment to pray over this Rostered Minister of Word and Sacrament. You can use the prayer below or use your own. Afterwards, you must decide on up to 3 names for your conference to submit as a potential nominee for the office of bishop.

Please remember a few things as you complete this process:

- When your conference has nominated up to 5 names, the Dean will submit them to the Bishop's Election Committee. The committee will then reach out with necessary paperwork to the pre-nominees.
- Individuals who are Synod Assembly voting members from their congregation will also have the opportunity to submit one name in the 1st ecclesial ballot of the assembly. The names of pre-nominees will not automatically appear on the 1st ballot, so a pre-nominee would need to be nominated by a voting member on the 1st ballot. Submitting a name for nomination does NOT guarantee this person will be a nominee for the office of bishop. They may decide to remove their name from consideration.
- **Prayer for each potential nominee:** Lord, bless and guide the vocation of *name of potential nominee* as we consider identifying them for the office of bishop of Sierra Pacific Synod. Guide our conversation over them. Help us consider the many gifts and talents they have to offer as well as a vision for the future and mission of your church. May the Holy Spirit be active in each of our minds and hearts today. Amen.

### **Closing Prayer:**

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." - John 14:27*

God of all peace, wisdom and understanding, we thank You for this time together. We thank You for the chance to dig deeper into the work of the ELCA and to find our place in it. We thank You for the chance to wrestle with the future of the church and its leadership. We thank You for the vocation of Pastor \_\_\_\_ (*potential nominee* you

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*decided on*). As we prepare to nominate this person that could fulfill the office of bishop of Sierra Pacific, be with them.

Guide their discernment as You have guided our own. May we go forth from this process in joy and in the peace only You can provide. Be with us in the months ahead as we continue this journey together. Amen.