



South-Central Synod of Wisconsin
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

To: People and congregations of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin

From: Interim Bishop Peter Rogness

Date: Friday, February 14, 2020

Re: **Profile of the Synod, Profile of the Bishop We Seek**

On October 1, 2019, I began as the interim bishop, to serve during the transition time leading to the election of the synod's new bishop, scheduled for June 20, 2020. We put in place a process intended, as stated at our recent Town Hall meetings, "to lay the strongest possible foundation for the successful tenure of our next bishop." That foundation depended on broad input from around the synod. The result of that input is the two profiles that are presented here. This cover letter will give some basic information about this synod, and note the process that follows, based on these profiles.

I. Basic Information describing the synod in 2020.

- Size and Location: Our synod, located in the 12 counties in south central Wisconsin, is the 12th largest of the 65 synods in the nearly 3.5 million member Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
- Statistical Data and Trends. To both cite statistics and note trends, we offer the following statistics from 2018, with the comparative statistic from 10 years earlier (2008) in parentheses, and 30 years earlier [1988] in italics and brackets:
 - Congregations: 138 (150) [153] with 86,911 (109,138) [110,272] baptized members
 - Average weekly worship attendance = 130 (169) [218]
 - Average congregational mission support to synod/ELCA = 3.1% (3.7%) [6.6%], with a total percentage of giving beyond the congregation to all causes of 7.3% (10%) [13.6%]
 - Demographic of synod congregations = 94% white (98.67%) [98.3%]; demographic of the twelve counties = 85% white.

To summarize: this synod is following the general trends of our denomination and religious life in the country, a pattern of slow/steady decline. The one statistic that is different is the growth – still slight, but comparatively significant – in the percentage of persons of color in our congregations, moving from 1.3% to 6% in 10 years.

II. The Process.

- Between January 5 and February 9, 2020, over 300 people gathered in six Town Hall meetings, from over 90 congregations across the synod, over 70% lay people. Five scribes took nearly 100 pages of notes. The Profiles that follow reflect this broad input.
- Conferences will gather in Nominating Caucuses between February 22 and March 8. Those who will attend should be guided by these two profiles as they consider nominations for bishop.
- Similarly, the Bishop Call Committee will do their work guided by the "Profile of the Bishop We Seek." They will recommend to the synod 4-6 nominees for consideration and election.

I am grateful to all who attended the Town Hall meetings, and to the scribes, Rev. George Carlson, Mary DeYoung, Rev. Dan Feaster, Rev. Dick Inglett, and Ken Streit, who have taken the insight of the Town Hall attendees and moved it into these Profiles. I trust the Spirit, who has guided the life of the church, is present in this work, and in our movement ahead.

The South-Central Synod of Wisconsin – a 2020 Profile

Over 300 people from across the synod have shaped this profile of the Culture, Environment, and Mission Context of church life within our Synod.

- a. The Center point of our life and mission. Nearly all groups voiced in varying ways this one central theme: The center of our activity and reason for being is the proclamation and invitation we share to invite people into a relationship with the God we have met in Jesus Christ. All the good things that we do within our community and congregations are reduced to social activities if not anchored in the Gospel we believe and proclaim. It is this God who sends us into the world to do all else we do.
- b. Church and society – the broad picture. Many acknowledged the decline of the former centrality of church life within society, reflected in membership and worship statistics over time. The church as focal point of community life and provider of many social services has changed.
- c. Local church and local community. Many described important ecumenical and community involvements, a sign of significant vitality. The people of this synod value presence and service in the community.
- d. Resistance to change. People have and still come to church because what they have found there is valuable. But former patterns of church life do not connect as previously. Many congregations cannot maintain their past institutional strength. New models are needed, and resistance to give up what has been treasured in the past is a real threat to future vitality.
- e. Our geographic diversity. About half our baptized members are in the greater Dane County (Madison) area, and half in outlying areas, predominantly rural. Voices from outside Madison often feel they are less synodically connected than those closer to Madison. There is desire for better relationships and service throughout the synod.
- f. Our cultural diversity. People across the synod expressed a desire and readiness to become a church that is more inclusive of the diversity in our midst – race, ethnicity, sexual identity, generations, etc. – and voiced a need for tools to help move in that direction.
- g. Our place in the religious landscape. Many spoke of our culture being dominated by the dual forces of secularism on the one hand – people walking away from the religious life altogether – and a narrow, judgmental fundamentalism on the other. There is desperate need for an understanding of God as being a God of grace and welcome; in short, the center of our faith is at the center of our society's need.
- h. Our communities need our churches to infuse life. Needs abound – from increased polarization and division to the pressures of rural decline.
- i. Relationship between congregations and synod. Unusually high/frequent turnover of bishops over 30 years has resulted in a lack of long-term familiarity and connection between the synod/bishop and both rostered and lay people in our congregations.
- j. What congregations and leaders said they need from the synod. The discussion got very practical: **assistance in equipping and training in administration, planning, and other hands-on areas of church life; **connections with other congregations and resources that could strengthen local ministry; **familiarity – confidence that the synod office and leadership know who we are and what life in our place is like; ** assistance in times of transition, conflict, future choices, respectful behavior in polarized times.

The Bishop We Seek – A Profile

By Constitution, the Bishop must be an ordained clergy person in good standing on the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Conference Caucuses will gather between February 22 and March 9 to make nominations, which will go to the Bishop Call Committee; the Committee will send 4-6 nominees for consideration by the Assembly election to be held June 20, 2020.

What follows is a profile that emerged from the six Town Hall Meetings and the 300+ persons who participated.

Bishop as healthy person in faith and life

- We seek one who, as the synod's pastor, will readily and easily share their own faith, making clear in speech and writing that their walk with God is central to who they are.
- We seek one who models healthy balance between servant leadership and self-care.
- We seek one who is emotionally healthy and self-aware.

Bishop as relationship-builder

- The bishop should place high priority on familiarity with rostered and congregational leaders, and those relationships should be caring and informed. We should be confident that when we engage with the bishop and staff, they know us. We want them present with us as often as they can be.
- The bishop should have familiarity with life in both urban and rural congregations and communities.

Bishop as organizational steward

- We seek one who has demonstrated the ability to provide administrative and financial oversight.
- We seek one who is an effective head of staff; one who knows their own strengths and is able to build a staff using the complementary strengths of colleagues.
- The bishop must steward the roster, both giving pastoral support to rostered persons and having the skills and resources to deal appropriately in discipline matters.

Bishop as communicator

- We seek one who has demonstrated skill in speaking before large and small groups of people, and whose written communication is informative, engaging, and regular.

Bishop as Lutheran visionary

- We seek one who is grounded in a Lutheran theology of grace.
- We seek one who connects us ecumenically with other denominations and interfaith relationships.
- We seek one who can be an interpreter and advocate for positions our church takes within society's life as we advocate for justice and the common good. We seek one who will speak on these issues in a way that opens the door for local pastors and leaders to also address them.
- We seek one who has a vision of what the future may hold for the synod, without pushing their own agenda but listens well to others.

Bishop as attendant in the midst of change

- In many places the old models are no longer working. We need a bishop and staff who can assist us in exploring future choices.
- We seek one who can be both a sounding board and a catalyst for the possibility of new models.