

**The Calling of a Bishop:
A Report to the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin**
by the
Bishop Call Committee
May 11th, 2020

The following is the final report of the Bishop Call Committee of 2020.

Members of this committee include: Peter Antonie, Lay member of Vermont Lutheran in Black Earth; Rich Dyanchand, Lay member of Christ in Lancaster; Pastor Don Glanzer of St. Peter's, Loganville; Dan Ruge, Lay member of Luther Memorial, Madison; Pastor Holly Slater of St. Paul's Liberty, Deerfield; Pastor Jerry Tews, Retired of St. John's, Evansville; Pastor Emily Tveite of Lutheran Campus Ministry; and co-chairs, Helen Sheahan of Good Shepard, Madison and Cindy Wuttke of Christ is Sharon.

Just as call committees in your congregation give a report as to how they came to their conclusions, we think it's important to do the same.

The process that will culminate when we elect a new bishop first began to take shape over two years ago, when the synod council, following the election in 2018, thought it would be good to appoint a group to think about our election process – never thinking, of course, that we would be doing it again this soon. But a Bishop Election Task Force was appointed in June of 2018 to review how elections are done and make recommendations about improving the process. They reported their work at the September 2019 Synod Council meeting, just after the council had learned that we would be holding an election in 2020. Pastor Tim Hansen, from Our Savior's in Sun Prairie, chaired the group of 7 persons including: Jane Cahill Wolfgram, Synod Vice President, from Christ in DeForest; Carolyn Butts, Synod Council member from St. John's in Evansville; Pastor Felix Malpica, from Faith in Janesville, Pastor Brenda Lovick, from East Koshkonong in Cambridge; Pastor Sue Beadle, from Christ in DeForest; and Pastor Steve Kottke, Assistant to the Bishop for Leadership Support. A key piece of their report was to encourage a process that would both be broadly participatory and would include the ability to look more carefully into the past experience of potential candidates.

The Synod Council, Executive Committee, Election Task Force, and newly-appointed Bishop Peter Rogness continued conversations throughout the synod, including Bishop Rogness' meetings with leaders in all 12 conferences during the fall of 2019. In January of this year, the Synod Council approved the process that is now reaching its culmination, and appointed us, a nine-person Call Committee, a mix of lay and clergy, from all around the synod. We first met in January, just after our appointment, to lay out a work plan for the task before us.

In January and February, six Town Hall meetings were held around the synod, involving over 300 people in structured conversations describing the synod and the qualities needed in a bishop. A listening and writing team of five persons including— Pastor Dick Inglett, from Sugar Creek in Elkhorn; Mary DeYoung, past Synod Secretary, from Christ in Sharon; Pastor George Carlson, Retired Rostered Leader; Pastor Dan Feaster, from the Samaritan Counseling Center; and Ken Streit, layperson from Advent in Madison – attended each one, taking down the input from group discussions, and shaping it into two concise profile documents: One that described our synod, and one that described the bishop we seek.

Those profiles were the basis for the Nominating Caucuses that were held by all 12 Conferences in our synod in February and March. Each conference could nominate up to five persons for consideration as bishop for a potential of 60 nominees.

There ended up being 52 nominations - although 11 were nominated by two or more conferences resulting in a total of 33 individuals who were nominated. In that initial group of 33, there were 23 males, 10 females, 20 from inside our synod and 13 from outside with diverse inclusivity of race, gender, and identity. Each nominee had until March 10th to discern whether or not to be available to participate in the process.

Fifteen of the nominees chose not to move forward with the process – 13 males and 2 females declined; 10 were from inside our synod and 5 from outside, and two of three persons of color declined. That left us with 18 candidates to consider as we did our work.

Now, the ball was fully in our court to do what call committees do – contact references, review materials submitted by the candidates, and conduct interviews. We have done all of that, and we have been careful to maintain confidentiality throughout the entire process. We can now be more forthcoming about just how we went about our work.

We have met together 14 times, most of them 3-hour meetings, 3 in-person and the rest via Zoom. Over 800 emails have been exchanged. Subgroups of three, or triads, were created and met a number of times to prepare, interview, and debrief assignments. Each committee member was assigned to be a contact for 2 candidates which involved multiple emails and phone calls to guide each candidate through the process. Overall, this process has been described by committee members as intensive, thorough, rewarding, and fun!

Each of the 18 candidates submitted a 12-page “Bishop Candidate Profile” that was adapted from the Rostered minister profile that many of you are familiar with. We developed a “rubric” – a lens through which we would read the profiles and rate each candidate with an eye toward how well they seemed to match with the bishop profile that had emerged from the Town Hall meetings.

Each candidate’s profile asked for 5 references. Every reference was called - five for each candidate times 18 candidates means 90 reference calls were made, many of them lengthy. We also developed a tabulation sheet for rating those reference calls. We determined that no one would be eliminated on the basis of paper and references only- we would interview all 18. Each of our triads conducted individual 45-minute interviews with six of the 18 candidates.

After those first interviews, the whole committee came back together to hear reports from each triad and to begin the process of winnowing toward the final “4-6” candidates which was our charge. We compiled our thoughts and ratings; we discussed racial equity and diversity, and it became very clear that we had before us a group of very fine pastors, skilled and dedicated. We knew this would be hard, but in a very good way! At the end of this session we

decided we would invite nine candidates back for a second interview with the entire committee. Those interviews were completed over three days near the end of April.

Then came the very difficult discussion to come to our decision. We observed several times that though we had used rating systems for discussion and comparison, giving this a bit of feel of a science, it was also just as much an art form. In the end, it often came to intangibles. Maybe, we thought, that is how the Holy Spirit works. Do your best work, then pay attention to which way the spirit seems to be blowing in your midst.

And, perhaps one of our committee members said it best as we were deliberating over these final nine when she said, "I want every one of the people we put forward to be someone I could be very excited to vote for!"

In the end we feel we've accomplished this. These are the candidates who excited us the most. Make no mistake – all the other candidates are also very gifted, fine leaders. The candidates we are recommending seemed the strongest - Different in experience and style and gifts; but all with demonstrated gifts for leadership in the church. It should be noted that after we made our final decision, one male candidate did withdraw. The world has changed since he initially agreed to go forward in the process, and he feels his call is to stay in his current ministry.

When this announcement is done, you will find on our synod's website two pieces on each candidate that will help you begin to know them better.

- a) Each has been asked to prepare a five-minute video to introduce themselves. Had we been in assembly on May 1 you would have heard them in person, but you know what has happened to that plan!
- b) We are also posting written material from their submitted Bishop Candidate Profile for your review.

On May 22 at 11:00 a.m. the Bishop Election Task Force will post a 90-minute forum, asking questions drawn from our bishop profile. In June, another forum will be held, this time with questions you are invited to submit to the Task Force.

The date of our Assembly and election will be announced once we know when we will be able to gather in a multi-site format.

Before we announce the candidates for Bishop of the South Central Synod of Wisconsin, we would like to thank the Bishop Election Task Force, the Synod Executive committee and Synod Council for recommending us for this committee; each of the 33 nominees and 18 candidates; the synod office staff of Deacon Vicki Hanrahan for coaching us on Zoom interviews; Robyn Zimmerman for being our tech support and scheduling our meetings as well as helping us with Dropbox; and Bishop Peter Rogness for being our guide and gentle centering presence. Finally, thank you for listening. It has been our privilege to do this work.

The Bishop Call Committee puts forth these candidates for the position of Bishop of the South-Central Synod:

Pastor Ramie Bakken, Candidacy Manager/Coordinator for Missional Leadership for our ELCA Region 5

Pastor Stacie Fidler, at St. John's in Rock Island, IL

Pastor Naomi Garber, Interim at First English in Platteville, WI

Pastor Joy Mortensen-Wiebe, at St. Luke's in Slinger, WI

God's blessings to each of them as they move forward on this journey.

Respectfully submitted,

The Bishop Call Committee of 2020