

# **THE BISHOP ELECTION PROCESS**

## **Introduction and Frequently Asked Questions**

To members of the South Carolina Synod:

After nearly eighteen years of faithful service to the South Carolina Synod as both Bishop and earlier as Assistant to the Bishop, Bishop Ginny Aebischer has announced that she will not seek reelection in 2026. We give thanks for her wise, compassionate, and steady leadership during these many years of ministry.

As a result of Bishop Aebischer's decision, the South Carolina Synod Assembly will elect a new bishop at its meeting on June 11–13, 2026, in West Columbia, South Carolina. The election of a bishop is a significant responsibility entrusted to the assembly and is a vital moment in the life of our synod.

Because a bishop is called to serve as both pastor and chief executive officer of the synod, this election is first and foremost a call process—rooted in prayer, discernment, and deep listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The process is governed by the South Carolina Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions, but it is carried out in faith by the whole people of God.

To guide the synod through this process, the Synod Council has appointed a Bishop's Election Committee. Much like a call committee in a congregation, this committee is responsible for preparing the synod for the election and for inviting broad, prayerful participation across the community. All members of the South Carolina Synod - rostered ministers, lay leaders, and congregational members - are invited into this season of discernment.

This document provides an overview of the bishop election process and responds to frequently asked questions. In combination with the 2026 Bishop Election Ministry Site Profile described below, it is intended to help both voting members of the Synod Assembly and the wider synod community understand the process and participate faithfully and confidently.

If you have additional questions, please contact a member of the Bishop's Election Committee at [scbishopelection@gmail.com](mailto:scbishopelection@gmail.com).

In Hope and Faith,  
The Bishop's Election Committee

Ms. Cindy Davis, Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Charleston  
Mr. Kenny Hastie, St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Columbia  
Rev. Dr. Wayne Kannaday, Living Springs Lutheran Church, Columbia  
Rev. Ginger Litman-Koon, All Saints Lutheran Church, Mt. Pleasant  
Dr. Susan McArver, Incarnation Lutheran Church, Columbia  
Deacon Chris St. Clair, Joy Lutheran Church, Moore

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### When will the election of a new bishop for the South Carolina Synod take place?

Bishop Ginny Aebischer has indicated that she will not seek reelection for an additional term. Therefore, a new bishop will be elected at the South Carolina Synod Assembly, meeting from June 11-13, 2026, at the Brookland Baptist Banquet and Conference Center, 1066 Sunset Blvd., West Columbia.

### Why is the election of a bishop considered a “call process”?

Although the election follows constitutional procedures, it is fundamentally a spiritual process. Voting members of the Synod Assembly and potential nominees seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern the needs of the synod and to ask whom God is calling to serve as bishop in this time and place. Prayerful reflection and thoughtful conversation are essential throughout the process.

### What are the major steps in the bishop election process?

The steps in the process include:

- 1. The appointment of a Bishop's Election Committee**

The Synod Council appointed this committee, made up of a representation of pastors, deacons, and lay persons from across the synod, in late August 2025.

- 2. Listening and Discernment**

The Bishop's Election Committee invited all members of the synod, including pastors, deacons, laypersons, and synodical ministry partners, to reflect on the strengths, challenges, and future direction of the synod through a synod-wide online survey in late 2025 and listening sessions held with rostered ministers in all regional conferences of the synod in early 2026.

- 3. Development of a Synod Ministry Site Profile (MSP)**

The committee used the input from the surveys and listening sessions to shape the 2026 Bishop Election Ministry Site Profile document, which describes the synod's hopes, challenges, and priorities.

- 4. Reflection and Prayerful Consideration**

Members of the synod are invited to reflect on the findings of the synod's Ministry Site Profile. In addition, rostered Ministers of Word and Sacrament are encouraged to prayerfully consider whether they might possess the spiritual and leadership gifts identified in the Profile for the synod's new bishop.

- 5. Synod Assembly Election**

The bishop will be elected by ecclesiastical ballot at the 2026 Synod Assembly June 11-13, 2026, in West Columbia, SC.

- 6. Installation of New Bishop**

The new bishop will officially take office on September 1, 2026 and be installed on October 24, 2026.

### What is the 2026 Bishop Election Ministry Site Profile document, and who prepared it?

The synod's Ministry Site Profile (MSP) is a document that reflects the shared discernment of the synod regarding its mission, context, challenges, and hopes for the future. It serves a role similar to that of a Ministry Site Profile used by congregations calling a pastor or deacon.

The Bishop's Election Committee prepared the synod's Ministry Site Profile using input from a synod-wide online survey open to all members of the synod and listening sessions held at Conferences for rostered ministers around the synod. The Profile was approved by the Synod Council. The document will be widely shared in the spring of 2026 on the synod's website, through its eNews, and other venues.

The synod's Ministry Site Profile will assist voting members in their consideration of the needs of the synod as they prepare for the election. It will also assist ministers of Word and Sacrament in their own prayerful discernment about whether they may be called to allow their names to go forward at the Assembly.

### **Will there be a formal pre-identification process?**

Some synods of the ELCA utilize variations of a "pre-identification process" as part of their practice in electing a bishop, raising up the names of possible candidates for the office of bishop in advance of a synod assembly.

The South Carolina Synod is emphasizing instead that the selection of its new bishop is more of a discernment process than an identification process. The synod encourages a time of reflection and prayer by all involved, both rostered ministers and laypersons throughout the synod.

Pastors who wish to discern if they might be open to the call to the office of bishop should thoughtfully review the synod's Ministry Site Profile document for its discussion of the hopes, dreams, and challenges of the synod at this time, as well as the spiritual and leadership gifts sought in the new bishop. In addition, prayerful reflection on the questions included on the biographical form distributed to candidates after the second ballot (Appendix A) provides an opportunity to reflect on a pastor's own personal experiences and gifts, as well as on their priorities for ministry.

### **Who is eligible to be nominated to serve as the bishop of the South Carolina Synod?**

Any minister of Word and Sacrament in good standing on the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is eligible for nomination. Nominees are not required to be rostered in the South Carolina Synod or to reside within its boundaries at the time of election. A background check, to be completed as soon as possible after an election, is required.<sup>1</sup>

### **What is the role of the bishop in the synod?**

Chapter 8 of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the South Carolina Synod (CBCR)* outlines the responsibilities of the synod bishop. The bishop serves as the synod's pastor and is called to preach, teach, administer sacraments, 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, providing oversight and coordinating the ministries of the synod, while also supervising the leadership of other officers and staff. These duties take unique shape within the mission, goals, context, and structure of the South Carolina Synod. The specific details of these responsibilities are found in CBCR S8.1.2.

### **What is the term of office for the bishop?**

The bishop is elected to a six-year term and may be reelected.<sup>2</sup>

### **Who votes in the bishop election?**

The bishop is elected by the voting members of the South Carolina Synod Assembly. Voting members include:

- All ministers of Word and Sacrament and ministers of Word and Service under call on the roster of the synod
- Lay voting members elected by congregations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions, South Carolina Synod, ELCA*, S9.12 (hereafter *CBCR*). This document can be found under the Resources tab on the synod website (scsynod.com), or by [clicking this link](#).

<sup>2</sup> *CBCR*, S8.51a.

<sup>3</sup> Each congregation is entitled to at least two voting members, as described in *CBCR S7.21.A21* and *S7.26.A20*.

- All retired ministers of Word and Sacrament and ministers of Word and Service on the roster of the synod in attendance at the Synod Assembly
- All rostered ministers on leave from call in attendance at the Synod Assembly
- All rostered ministers granted disability status in attendance at the Synod Assembly
- Synod officers
- Synod Council members
- Others as defined in the *Synod Constitution*.<sup>4</sup>

### How is the bishop elected at the Synod Assembly?

Voting members of the Synod Assembly will elect the bishop by ecclesiastical ballot, as outlined in the *Synod Constitution*.<sup>5</sup>

### What is an ecclesiastical ballot?

- In an ecclesiastical ballot, the first written ballot functions as a nominating ballot: any voting member may submit the name of any eligible minister of Word and Sacrament for the office of bishop. Spoken nominations from the floor are not permitted.
- Nominees from the first ballot may remove their names for consideration only before the second ballot.
- Subsequent ballots narrow the field until a nominee receives the required number of votes for election, as described in the table below.
- The required percentage of votes decreases with each ballot, as specified in the *Synod Constitution*.

Ballot	Names Included	Votes Needed to Elect
First ecclesiastical (nominating) ballot	Any minister of Word and Sacrament on the roster of the ELCA is eligible. Nominees may remove their names for consideration <b>only before</b> the second ballot.	$\frac{3}{4}$ legal votes cast (75%)
Second	Ministers of Word and Sacrament nominated on the first ballot who have not withdrawn their names	$\frac{3}{4}$ legal votes cast (75%)
Third	Seven nominees (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes on the second ballot	$\frac{2}{3}$ 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 and subsequent	Two nominees (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes cast on the fourth ballot.	Majority of legal votes cast (50% plus 1)

### Will voting members have opportunities to learn about nominees?

Yes. After the second ballot, the seven nominees with the highest votes (plus ties) will submit biographical forms which will be distributed to the assembly before the third ballot (Appendix A). These seven nominees will also be invited to address the assembly directly prior to the third ballot, with speaking limited to three minutes each. Prior

<sup>4</sup> Voting members are defined in *CBCR S7.21; S7.22.01; S7.22.02; S7.23; S7.23.01; S7.24; S7.25; S7.26; S7.26.A20; S7.27; S7.27.01, and S7.28.*

<sup>5</sup> The full bishop election process is described in *CBCR S8.11, S9.04 and S9.04.A94.*

to the fourth ballot, the three persons (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes on the third ballot will be invited to respond to specific questions chosen by the Bishop's Election Committee before the assembly.

### **Who will preside over the election during the Synod Assembly?**

A representative of the ELCA will preside over and conduct all aspects of the bishop's election during the assembly.

### **When will the new bishop take office and be installed?**

The newly elected bishop will officially take office on September 1, 2026. ELCA Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry will install the new bishop on Saturday, October 24, 2026. The Bishop's Election Committee will plan and oversee this worship service.

### **What is the compensation range for the position of bishop?**

Compensation for the newly elected bishop will be established using the South Carolina Synod Compensation Guidelines for Rostered Ministers<sup>6</sup>, with an additional \$10,000 to be added to the base salary to reflect the additional responsibilities of this role.

### **What other expectations does a new bishop need to consider?**

It is expected that the new bishop will reside within the boundaries of the South Carolina synod after election, be a member of a South Carolina Synod congregation, and maintain an office within the Synod office building, located in Columbia.

The bishop of the SC Synod also serves on a variety of boards ex-officio and has major travel and time commitments related to the work of the synod and the ELCA.

### **Where can I find additional official information about the process?**

The *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the South Carolina Synod* serve as the primary governing documents for the election process. They can be found under the Resources tab on the synod website (scsynod.com), or by [clicking this link](#). Additional information will be shared through the synod website, the weekly synod eNews, conference meetings, and other venues.

### **Whom should I contact with additional questions?**

Questions about the bishop election process may be directed to members of the Bishop's Election Committee at [scbishopelection@gmail.com](mailto:scbishopelection@gmail.com).

*Thanks to our friends at the South Dakota Synod ELCA for allowing the use of their synod's FAQ document as a resource for developing our own.*

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<sup>6</sup> Available at the SC Synod website: <https://scsynod.com/call-process/>.

## Appendix A

### Official Biographical Information Form For Bishop of the South Carolina Synod – 2026 Election

Completed biographical forms will be collected from the top seven nominees (plus ties) at the Assembly.  
The completed forms will be distributed to the assembly before the third ballot.

1. Name:
2. Current Position:
3. Congregation Membership:
4. Date and Year of Birth:
5. Date and Year of Ordination:
6. Previous Positions:
7. Education and Earned Degrees (with institutions and years, most recent first):
8. List up to five (5) current or past synod or churchwide activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod
9. List up to five (5) current or past community-related activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.
10. What gifts would you bring to the office of bishop of this synod? (1,000 characters maximum)
11. What do you see as the principal challenge to this synod in the next six (6) years, and how would you address it? (1,000 characters maximum)
12. Describe your leadership style. (1,000 characters maximum)