



WELCOME

Grace and Peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! This year, the South Carolina Synod has entered into an exciting time of celebration of ministry, past, present, and future. At the 2026 Synod Assembly, we will gather to give thanks for the faithful leadership of Bishop Ginny Aebischer for her nearly eighteen years of leadership to the South Carolina Synod, both as Bishop and as Assistant to the Bishop. As Bishop Aebischer is not seeking reelection, a new bishop will also be elected during the assembly, to lead our synod into our shared future.

PURPOSE

The Bishop's Election Committee has been charged with preparing our synod for this election and inviting prayerful discernment about the needs of our church in this time. The synod constitution directs that the bishop shall be any minister of Word and Sacrament of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and that the assembly elects the bishop by ecclesiastical ballot.

The election of a new bishop requires thoughtful reflection, careful deliberation, and deep listening about the needs of the church and the world. To ensure that every voice within our faith community is heard, the Election Committee has gathered information from a synod-wide survey, as well as feedback from conference-level conversations, to create this Ministry Site Profile. The feedback received has helped identify shared hopes, challenges, and expectations for the future of our synod, its congregations, and the ELCA as a whole.

It is our hope that this Ministry Site Profile may assist voting members in considering the needs of the synod and also assist ministers of Word and Sacrament in their own prayerful discernment about whether their spiritual gifts might fit the synod's needs by serving in the role of bishop. Answers to frequently asked questions about the process will be available in the FAQ document; any other questions may be directed to committee members or sent to scbishopelection@gmail.com.

In Hope and Faith,
The Bishop's Election Committee

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

WHO WE ARE : THE SOUTH CAROLINA SYNOD IN PROFILE

OUR HISTORY

The South Carolina Synod is one of the oldest synods of the ELCA. While it marked its 200th anniversary in 2024, its roots extend even further back to German Lutheran settlement in South Carolina in the early eighteenth century. In 1803, these early congregations joined with churches in North Carolina and Virginia to form the first Lutheran synod in the South, before organizing separately as the South Carolina Synod in 1824. Its geographic boundaries have remained largely unchanged since that time, fostering long-term stability and a strong sense of shared identity, while also shaping the synod's distinctive character and patterns of life together.

The synod has a long tradition of supporting institutions and ministries on its territory and beyond, from early missionary efforts to Japan, with whom it is still a companion synod, to ministries closer to home, such as Lutheran Homes, SC Lutheran Retreat Centers, Newberry College, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Lutheridge, Lutherock, and many more.

SYNOD OVERVIEW

State Population: 5,730,000		
<i>South Carolina is the fastest growing state in the US. Its largest counties are primarily in the Upstate (Greenville, Spartanburg), the Midlands (Richland, Lexington), and the coast (Horry, Charleston).¹</i>		
County Populations (approx.):		
Greenville County: 581,000	Lexington County: 320,000	Charleston County: 419,000
Horry County: 428,000	Richland County: 426,000	Spartanburg County: 348,000
State Ethnic Demographics:		
White (not Hispanic) 62.5%	Hispanic 8%	Asian 2.2%
Black 25.7%	Multi-race 2.3%	Native American 0.7%

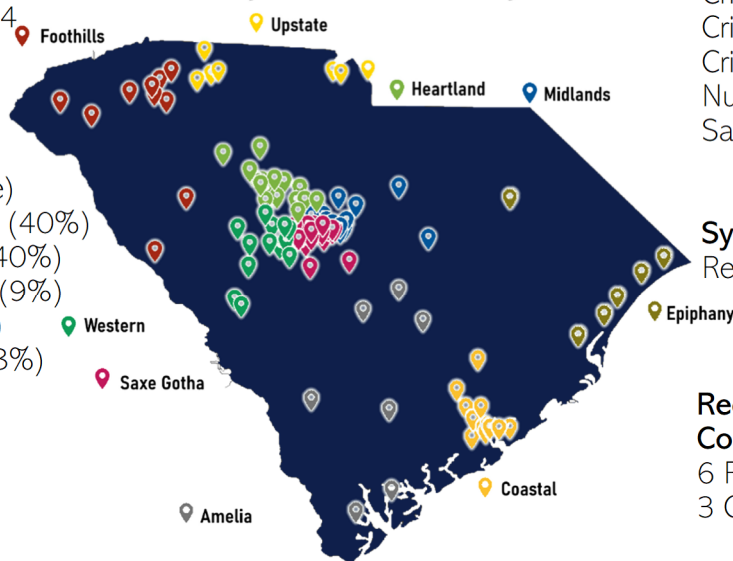
Worshiping Communities:
 Organized Congregations: 136
 (1 under development)
 Baptized Membership: 34,944
 Conferences: 9

Size of congregations:
 (Average Worship Attendance)
 50 or less: 55 congregations (40%)
 50-150: 55 congregations (40%)
 151-250: 11 congregations (9%)
 250+: 4 congregations (3%)
 No data: 11 congregations (8%)

Rostered Ministers:
 Word and Sacrament: 268
 Word and Service: 34

Mission Funding/Spending Plan
Total: \$2,471,956

CONGREGATIONS AND CONFERENCES OF THE SC SYNOD²



Synod-Authorized Worshiping Communities:
 Christ Community, North Charleston
 Cristo Rey, Gaston
 Cristo Rey, Pelion
 Cristo Rey, West Columbia
 Nuestro Salvador, Greenville
 Sagrada Familia, Columbia

Synod Outreach Ministry:
 ReCenter, Greenville

Reconciling in Christ Congregations:
 6 RIC Congregations
 3 Congregations in Discernment

OUR MINISTRY PARTNERS:

LuMin Campus Ministry
Lutheran Services Carolinas
Lutheran Homes of SC
NovusWay Ministries (Lutheridge,
Lutherock, Luther Springs)
SC Lutheran Retreat Centers

Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary
Lutheran Disaster Relief (LDR) Carolinas
Newberry College
SC Women of the ELCA
SC Lutheran Men in Mission
SC Synod Children, Youth & Family
SC Christian Action Council

OUR COMPANION SYNODS:

Evangelical Lutheran Church of
Colombia
Evangelical Lutheran Church in
Tanzania (Southwest Diocese)
Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church



GIFTS AND CHALLENGES OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA SYNOD

Those who seek to help build God's kingdom among us will find much (and many) to work with. Respondents to synodical surveys and conference listening sessions documented a wide range of gifts and strengths present across our synod, among them our traditions of generous hospitality, meaningful worship, strong music ministries, active community outreach, and commitment to the wider Church. They also noted our synod's longstanding partnerships with its institutions, its multigenerational communities, outreach programs, and involvement in interfaith justice initiatives. Skilled leaders and volunteers in all congregations and ministry settings are valued as assets.

As we "walk together," the South Carolina Synod effectively becomes more than the sum of its parts. Collaboration and unity manifest through assemblies, conferences, and shared resources that generate spiritual energy and timely ministries. This synod's commitment to youth and young adults is reflected in vibrant programs and vocational formation for discipleship in the world (*diakonia*) through camps, retreats and campus ministries. While honoring its historic gifts, adaptability and resilience allow the synod to evolve, positioning it to serve effectively for generations to come.

Anticipating our next chapter, leadership expectations are high, with many looking to the bishop for vision, decisive action, and pastoral care. As is true across the Church, the new bishop of the South Carolina Synod faces several key challenges: declining membership, reduced participation, and financial instability, all set against a backdrop of societal polarization and church transition. Congregants are concerned about the sustainability of ministries and thus seek innovative engagement while preserving traditions. There is a strong call for greater inclusivity and diversity in leadership and worship, with an emphasis on welcoming all backgrounds and generations. Financial concerns call for creative stewardship and transparent communication.

SPIRITUAL AND LEADERSHIP GIFTS SOUGHT IN OUR NEW BISHOP

Across written surveys and in-person conference conversations, members of the synod, both lay and rostered, named a number of common traits and practices they seek in a new bishop. These characteristics, building upon the strengths already present in our current leadership, reflect both the spiritual gifts desired in a bishop and the leadership capacities needed in this particular season of the Church's life. Participants' responses may be summarized as follows:

A STRONG PASTORAL PRESENCE

A pastoral bishop who listens effectively, offers genuine care, and is visibly present across the synod, not only in times of crisis, but in the ordinary rhythms of congregational and rostered ministry. This includes deep concern for the well-being of pastors and deacons, including attention to mental health, burnout prevention, and sustainable patterns of ministry, and leadership that advocates for and models balance.

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE

A leader who can project a compelling, hope-filled, and theologically grounded vision for the synod, moving beyond institutional maintenance toward faithful innovation and renewed purpose. This includes an openness to rethinking structures, exploring new models of ministry, and examining rules or assumptions that may inhibit mission in a changing cultural and ecclesial landscape.

COLLABORATIVE, COLLEGIAL, AND TEAM-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

A team-building leader who builds upon existing collegiality to cultivate trust, equips others for shared responsibility, delegates wisely, and empowers staff, councils, and lay leaders for shared leadership.

CLEAR AND CONFIDENT LUTHERAN IDENTITY

An articulate public voice who can express what it means to be an ELCA Lutheran Christian with theological clarity and public confidence, representing the South Carolina Synod within the wider ELCA while also helping the synod live more fully into a shared sense of our mission.

CAPACITY TO LEAD THROUGH CONFLICT AND DIFFERENCE

A bishop who can hold disagreement honestly, set healthy boundaries, and emphasize unity without requiring uniformity, all while guiding the synod forward together with integrity and grace.

COMMITMENT TO CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY AND NEW LEADER DEVELOPMENT

A bishop who focuses on strengthening and accompanying congregations in their diverse contexts, supporting resilience, experimentation, and faithful local ministry, not merely managing decline. This includes strong support for developing lay leadership and creating pathways for future leaders, recognizing that the future of the Church depends on shared ministry and emerging gifts.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR OUR NEW BISHOP

CURRENT SYNOD STAFF:

Bishop

Rev. Virginia "Ginny" Aebischer

Assistants to the Bishop

Rev. Richard "Rick" Carter

Deacon Kimberly Heindl

Director for Stewardship

Rev. Osborne "Ozzie" Herlong

Children & Youth Coordinator

Deacon Deborah Poole

Synod Accountant

Charlene Fink

Director of Communications

Neal Fischer

Assembly Manager

Wendy Davidson

Executive Administrator

Deborah Slice

LDR Disaster Coordinators

Rev. Ray Sipe

Rev. Ruth Ann Sipe

LDR Response Coordinator

Kelli Fulmer

Deacon for Health and Wholeness

Deacon D'Etta Broam

Director for Evangelical Mission

Rev. Ginny Aebischer & Rev. Rick Carter (Grant funded, shared)

OTHER PARTNERS:

ELCA Regional Gift Planner

Stephanie Burke

ELCA Church Council Member

Rev. Leroy Cannon

SYNOD COMMITTEES:

Synod Council

Executive Committee

Finance Committee

Personnel Committee

Constitution Committee

Property Committee

Communications Task Force

Mutual Ministry Committee

Consultation Committee

Committee on Discipline

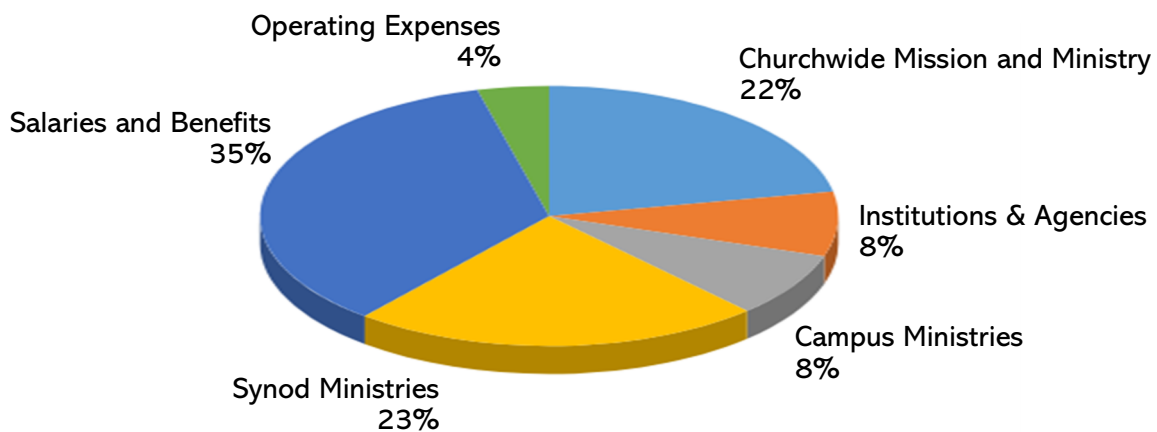
Audit Committee

Mission Endowment Fund

Lifeline Fund Distribution Team

MISSION FUNDING/SPENDING PLAN 2026-2027

Churchwide Mission and Ministry	ELCA Support is 22% of unrestricted congregational support.	\$ 566,000
Synod Ministries		
Category 1: Supporting ministers' growth in faith, contextual ministry skills, and collegial connection		\$ 97,150
Category 2: Equipping congregational lay leaders for leadership in today's church		\$ 101,000
Category 3: Partnering with congregations to raise up new rostered ministers and lay leaders		\$ 33,500
Category 4: Strengthening synod staff and Synod Council through shared resources and connection		\$ 324,000
Other: ELCA Regional Gift Planner, ELCA Region 9 Archives, Discretionary		\$ 20,281
		\$ 575,931
Salaries & benefits		\$ 856,000
Institutions & Agencies		\$ 191,200
Campus Ministries		\$ 190,000
Operating Expenses		\$ 92,825
TOTAL		\$2,471,956



OTHER FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Synod Mission Endowment Fund: Grants are awarded annually by committee to fund mission development & for special expressions of God's love in the world.

Synod Vitality Endowment Fund: Annual withdrawals may fund new starts, innovations, stewardship, and congregational vitality within the synod.

PRACTICALITIES

Compensation:

Compensation for the newly elected bishop of the South Carolina Synod will be established using the South Carolina Synod Compensation Guidelines for Rostered Ministers³, with an additional \$10,000 to be added to the base salary to reflect the additional responsibilities of this role.

Other Benefits:

The synod provides the following benefits for the bishop:

Health insurance: Coverage for the bishop and family through Portico

Retirement: A 12% retirement contribution through Portico

Leave: Vacation, sick, family, extended, and compassionate leave

Reimbursements: Synod-related mileage at IRS standard mileage rate, certain professional expenses, & cell phone

OFFICE & OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

It is expected that the new bishop reside within the boundaries of the SC Synod, be a member of a SC 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.



OUR MISSION: Equipping church leaders to develop impactful faith communities and disciples of Jesus.

OUR VISION: Every person in South Carolina experiences God's love and grace.

UPCOMING KEY DATES

The following are important events that the new bishop will need to incorporate into their calendar after the election.

ELCA New Bishops' Formation School: June 28 – July 1, 2026 in Chicago

Synod Council Retreat: August 22, 2026

SC Synod Bishop Term of Office Begins: September 1, 2026

ELCA Conference of Bishops: Sept. 22-26, 2026 (Lutheran Center, Chicago)

SC Synod Bishop's Installation: October 24, 2026

SC Synod Rostered Ministers Fall Convocation: October 26-28, 2026 at Lutheridge, Arden, NC

ELCA Youth Gathering: June 28-July 2, 2027, Minneapolis, MN

Churchwide Assembly: August 7-11, 2028, Des Moines, IA

Future ELCA Conference of Bishops Gatherings:

Mar 9-13, 2027 (Eaglewood Retreat Center, Chicago, IL) & Sept. 28-Oct. 2 (Lutheran Center, Chicago, IL)

Mar 7-11, 2028 (Eaglewood) & Sept. 26-30 (Lutheran Center)

Mar 6-10, 2029 (Eaglewood) & Sept. 25-29 (Lutheran Center)

March 12-16, 2030 (Eaglewood) & Sept. 24 – 28 (Lutheran Center)

ENDNOTES

¹ Population and Demographic Data is from the US Census Bureau website.

² Synod data is from the 2024 SC Synod Data Toolkit and the 2025 Assembly Bulletin of Reports

³ See 2026 SC Synod Compensation Guidelines for Rostered Ministers Appendix A