

CHOOSING A BISHOP

QUESTIONS TO ASSIST IN PREPARATION

Leader's Guide

INTRODUCTION

Many people across this church long to talk with others as they consider the responsibility of electing a bishop. You have a key role in this conversation. A climate of respect, openness, and integrity is essential. Your carefulness is crucial for establishing an atmosphere where prayerful, thoughtful, and honest discussion may take place.

As you prepare to lead a group discussion about "Choosing A Bishop," begin prayerfully. Take time to acknowledge your own thoughts, hopes, concerns, and expectations. You may want to meet with other group leaders and conduct a discussion similar to that which you expect to lead.

Be sure that you understand your assignment. If you are asked by your synodical leadership to facilitate conversation with the specific intent of surfacing names of nominees for bishop, whether for synodical bishop or presiding bishop of this church, be sure that you are comfortable with that assignment. Ask for whatever clarity you need from those who are asking you to lead this discussion. What is the expected outcome: names of nominees; priorities for leadership; and so forth. If possible, everyone involved in the group discussion should know this in advance.

It is best to meet in groups no larger than 10-12 persons. If your group is larger, you may wish to break into smaller sets for discussion. If possible, have each group provide a report to be shared with others.

Be sure that you understand the process by which this church, and your synod, conducts an election of bishop. The churchwide process is described in the resource, "Choosing A Bishop." If your synod is conducting an election of a synodical bishop this year, be sure to understand the specific details of your own synod's election process. Ask your bishop, the synodical vice president, or other members of the Synod Council. The process is described in your synodical constitution (S9.04.). It will be important to provide written copies of this to everyone in your group. Your synod also may have other narrative descriptions of your nomination and election process. Provide these for everyone, as well.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Bring copies sufficient for everyone in the group to have:

- ☐ *"CHOOSING A BISHOP: QUESTIONS TO ASSIST IN PREPARATION"*
- ☐ *Photocopied materials from the ELCA churchwide constitution, Chapter 10 and Chapter 13, and your synodical constitution, Chapter 8*
- ☐ *Other written materials from your synod describing the nomination and election process (if your synod is conducting an election of bishop this year)*
- ☐ *Copies of the service of Installation of a Bishop (Occasional Services, pages 218ff., used with permission)*
- ☐ *Bibles*
- ☐ *Writing paper*
- ☐ *Easel, paper, and markers*

In advance, ask someone to serve as recorder. Seek the group's permission to record and share their work with others. Agree upon levels of confidentiality. Clarify for the group the plans for sharing and using their work within the conference or synod. Provide opportunity for "minority reports."

If your synod is conducting an election this year, explain the role of this conversation in the nomination and election process. How will this conversation contribute to that process?

If your conversation is primarily in regard to the election of a presiding bishop, explain how this conversation will be used, perhaps as material for consideration by your synod's voting members to the Churchwide Assembly.

While it is important to establish an honest, open climate, seek to encourage constructive and strategic thinking.

GETTING STARTED

Begin your conversation with prayer, using the litany provided in “CHOOSING A BISHOP.” Encourage the group to continue in an attitude of openness to God’s Holy Spirit, promised whenever Christians gather in Jesus’ name, at work through the listening and speaking of God’s people.

Continue with a brief introduction, explaining the process and the points raised above. Clarify the “ground rules” and expectations. Have participants introduce themselves very briefly. Encourage a spirit of respect and openness. It may be helpful to explain that the intention of the resource and of this process is not to encourage any particular nominations, or kind of nominations; rather, the intent of this resource and of your conversation is to encourage broad, honest, thoughtful, and prayerful decision-making.

Read through the resource one section at a time, taking time for discussion of the pertinent questions as they appear. Encourage a time of silent reading and reflection before inviting comment about each section.

As agreed, be sure to record comments, questions, and concerns. You do not need to seek consensus, although at some points you may determine whether the group shares some ideas more strongly than others. If your synodical

nominating process expects a certain outcome, be sure to provide that information.

You will want to give primary attention to those sections about, “What is the office of bishop?” and “What is our mission together?” Depending on the group’s interest you may wish to suggest a subsequent conversation with more time for consideration of questions about the election process.

Your group may or may not feel comfortable naming names of potential nominees. If your synod is expecting this outcome, a process for gathering these names will have been described to you. In other cases, you may give members the option of providing written as well as verbal responses. You may provide information about where further nominations or ideas may be sent following the conclusion of your group discussion. It is not inappropriate for members of the group to speak on behalf of a nominee.

When your conversation is finished, and you have agreed about what will be shared with others, conclude your session with prayers of intercession for this church, for its leaders, for its mission, and for God’s Spirit to enlighten and...*guide the minds of those who shall choose a bishop, that we may receive a faithful servant who will care for God’s people and equip us for our ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*