Election of the Bishop

The Twenty-third Assembly of the Upstate New York Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Upstate NY Synod Assembly
June 3 - 5, 2021

Grounded in Christ Jesus; Growing in Witness; Giving from our Abundance; Graced for the sake of the world
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Responsibilities of the Synodical Bishop

Excerpts from:
THE OFFICE AND MINISTRY OF THE BISHOP IN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
A Shared Vision of Episcopacy and a Relational Agreement

I. RESPONSIBILITIES
For the purpose of this document, it is appropriate to summarize the responsibilities of synodical bishops as defined in the churchwide constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (10.31.a.). Their responsibilities as elected leaders of their synods include:

A. Worship and Spiritual Oversight
The synodical bishop, as the synod’s pastor, regularly leads worship in congregations and in other gatherings of this church and, through a variety of activities and contacts, teaches the Christian faith, and provides spiritual leadership and oversight in the synod.

B. Pastoral Care
The synodical bishop, as the synod’s pastor, bears major, but not sole, responsibility for the pastoral care of congregations and rostered leaders. Providing for Word and Sacrament ministry on the territory of the synod is fundamental to this care. Pastoral care often is exercised through the many activities and contacts bishops have with the people and organizations of the synod, and through organizing the structures that are necessary to the synod’s life and mission.

C. Mission Planning
As the chief executive of the synod responsible for the oversight of its life and work, the bishop is the chief planner for its life and mission, giving ongoing attention to the use of all its resources.

D. Mission Interpretation
The bishop is the primary spokesperson for the synod in respect to its mission, theology, and life, both internally and externally. It is understood that others may be given specific interpretative assignments.

E. Mission Administration
Bishops also are the chief corporate and executive officers of their synods. In order to give fuller attention to other aspects of their responsibilities, it is understood that they often will exercise this leadership by delegating major administrative tasks to others who are accountable to them.

F. Ecumenical Relations
Bishops are the chief ecumenical officers of their synods and are a sign of the unity of the Church, between their respective synods and other denominational families and ecumenical organizations. It is understood that bishops may name other persons to assist them in maintaining contacts and in carrying out specific ecumenical and interreligious tasks.

G. Liaison
Synodical bishops, by virtue of their office, have high visibility across this whole church. Their contacts with each other and with the churchwide units, organizations, agencies, and institutions of this church form a vital network.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SYNODICAL BISHOP marked by collegiality. Through this network the bishops together support this church’s cohesiveness and public witness to the mission of the Church in service to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This relational agreement among bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is designed to assist the bishops in their collegial relationships and contacts with one another in support of that witness.
Excerpts from:
THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UPSTATE NEW YORK SYNOD

Regarding the Election of the Synodical Bishop

S9.04
The bishop shall be elected by the Synod Assembly by ecclesiastical ballot. The initial steps for the ecclesiastical ballot for the election of a bishop will follow the provisions of S/CR9.04.

- Three-fourths of the votes cast shall be necessary for election on the first ballot conducted at the Assembly.
- The second ballot shall be limited to the seven persons (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes on the first ballot. Two-thirds of the votes cast on the second ballot shall be necessary for election.
- The third ballot shall be limited to the five persons (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes on the second ballot, and 60% of the votes cast shall be necessary for election.
- The fourth ballot shall be limited to the three persons (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes on the third ballot, and 50% of the votes cast shall be necessary for election.
- On subsequent ballots a majority of the votes cast shall be necessary for election. These ballots shall be limited to the two persons (plus ties) who receive the greatest number of votes on the previous ballot.

SC/R9.04

G. Once the Assembly has been opened, each voting delegate will be given a preprinted ballot listing the candidates for Bishop of the Upstate New York Synod. Only these candidates may stand for election. Any additional names appearing on the ballot shall cause that ballot to be declared invalid.

H. Prior to the first ballot conducted at the assembly, all candidates will be introduced and those present will be invited to come to the platform.

Constitutional provisions regarding synods and the role of the synodical bishop.

ELCA CONSTITUTION CHAPTER 8.
RELATIONSHIPS

8.11. This church shall seek to function as people of God through congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, all of which shall be interdependent. Each part, while fully the church, recognizes that it is not the whole church and therefore lives in a partnership relationship with the others.

8.13. The synod shall provide for pastoral care of the congregations, ordained ministers, associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers within its boundaries. It shall develop resources for the life and mission of its people and shall enlarge the ministries and extend the outreach into society on behalf of and in connection with the congregations and the churchwide organization.

8.16. In faithful participation in the mission of God in and through this church, congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization—as interdependent expressions of this church—shall be guided by the biblical and confessional commitments of this church. Each shall recognize that mission efforts must be shaped by both local needs and global awareness, by both individual witness and corporate endeavor, and by both distinctly Lutheran emphases and growing ecumenical cooperation.
CONSTITUTION FOR SYNODS CHAPTER 8. OFFICERS

†S8.12. As this synod’s pastor, the bishop shall be an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament who shall:

a. Preach, teach, and administer the sacraments in accord with the Confession of Faith of this church.

b. Have primary responsibility for the ministry of Word and Sacrament in this synod and its congregations, providing pastoral care and leadership for this synod, its congregations, its ordained ministers, and its other rostered leaders.

c. Exercise solely this church’s power to ordain (or provide for the ordination by another synodical bishop of) approved candidates who have received and accepted a properly issued, duly attested letter of call for the office of ordained ministry (and as provided in the bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).

d. Commission (or provide for the commissioning of) approved candidates who have received and accepted a properly issued, duly attested letter of call for service as associates in ministry; consecrate (or provide for the consecration of) approved candidates who have received and accepted a properly issued, duly attested letter of call for service as deaconesses; and consecrate (or provide for the consecration of) approved candidates who have received and accepted a properly issued, duly attested letter of call for service as diaconal ministers of this church.

e. Attest letters of call for persons called to serve congregations in the synod, letters of call for persons called by the Synod Council, and letters of call for persons on the rosters of this synod called by the Church Council.

f. Install (or provide for the installation of):
   1) the pastors of all congregations of this synod;
   2) ordained ministers called to extraparish service within this synod; and
   3) persons serving in the other rostered ministries within this synod.

g. Exercise leadership in the mission of this church and in so doing:
   1) Interpret and advocate the mission and theology of the whole church;
   2) Lead in fostering support for and commitment to the mission of this church within this synod;
   3) Coordinate the use of the resources available to this synod as it seeks to promote the health of this church’s life and witness in the areas served by this synod;
   4) Submit a report to each regular meeting of the Synod Assembly concerning the synod’s life and work; and
   5) Advise and counsel this synod’s related institutions and organizations.

h. Practice leadership in strengthening the unity of the Church and in so doing:
   1) Exercise oversight of the preaching, teaching, and administration of the sacraments within this synod in accord with the Confession of Faith of this church;
   2) Be responsible for administering the constitutionally established processes for the resolution of controversies and for the discipline of ordained ministers, other rostered leaders, and congregations of this synod;
   3) Be the chief ecumenical officer of this synod;
   4) Consult regularly with other synodical bishops and the Conference of Bishops;
   5) Foster awareness of other churches throughout the Lutheran world communion and, where appropriate, engage in contact with leaders of those churches;
   6) Cultivate communion in faith and mission with appropriate Christian judicatory leaders functioning within the territory of this synod; and
   7) Be ex officio a member of the Churchwide Assembly.
i. Oversee and administer the work of this synod and in so doing:

1) Serve as the president of the synod corporation and be the chief executive and administrative officer of this synod, who is authorized and empowered, in the name of this synod, to sign deeds or other instruments and to affix the seal of this synod;

2) Preside at all meetings of the Synod Assembly and provide for the preparation of the agenda for the Synod Assembly, Synod Council, and the council’s Executive Committee;

3) Ensure that the constitution and bylaws of the synod and of the churchwide organization are duly observed within this synod, and that the actions of the synod in conformity therewith are carried into effect;

4) Exercise supervision over the work of the other officers;

5) Coordinate the work of all synodical staff members;

6) Appoint all committees for which provision is not otherwise made;

7) Be a member of all committees and any other organizational units of the synod, except as otherwise provided in this constitution;

8) Provide for preparation and maintenance of synodical rosters containing:
   a) the names and addresses of all ordained ministers of this synod and a record of the calls under which they are serving or the date on which they become retired or disabled; and
   b) the names and addresses of all other rostered persons of this synod and a record of the positions to which they have been called or the date on which they become retired or disabled;

9) Annually bring to the attention of the Synod Council the names of all rostered persons on leave from call or engaged in approved graduate study in conformity with the constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions of this church and pursuant to prior action of this synod through the Synod Council;

10) Provide for prompt reporting to the secretary of this church of:
    a) additions to and subtractions from the rosters of this synod and the register of congregations;
    b) the issuance of certificates of transfer for rostered persons in good standing who have received and accepted a properly issued, duly attested, regular letter of call under the jurisdiction of another synod; and
    c) the entrance of the names of such persons for whom proper certificates of transfer have been received;

11) Provide for preparation and maintenance of a register of the congregations of this synod and the names of the laypersons who have been elected to represent them; and

12) Appoint a statistician of the synod, who shall secure the parochial reports of the congregations and make the reports available to the secretary of this church for collation, analysis, and distribution of the statistical summaries to this synod and the other synods of this church.
SECTION B: BISHOP
Nominees for the Office of Bishop
In Alphabetical Order

THE REV. LAURA DALY
Name of Nominee: Laura Daly
Date of Ordination: 12/5/2005
Current Position: Pastor

Congregational Membership: Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church, Horseheads

Education and Earned Degrees (with institutions and years, most recent listed first)
HarvardX Series World Religions Through Their Scriptures 2020-2021Certificate
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia 2002 - 2005 MDiv
SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry 1989-1991 MS GIS
Cornell University 1985-1989 BS Ag.
Engineering Amherst Central High School 1985 Learned to read and write at St. Mary’s Infant School in Ardleigh, Essex, UK; Mrs. Piaskowska 1973

Previous Positions (Congregations served, special calls, etc., most recent listed first)
Dean of the Southern Tier Conference 2016 - Present
Pastor Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church in Horseheads, NY 2016 - Present
Circuit Rider preaching every Sunday in Lutheran and Episcopal congregations 2011-2016.
(Multiple simultaneous PT jobs in local schools, businesses, and Homeschooled one year)
Pastor St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran in Spencer, NY 2005-2010
Senior Database Architect Edgewater Technology in Wakefield, MA 1995-1996
Member of the Technical Staff TASC in Reading, MA 1990-1994

Statement of your faith journey: The Holy Spirit throws iron frypans and I fall backwards. The rest is scrambling. In a non-anxious manner. Contrast called me. Meaning called me. Life in the face of meaningless death. Ritual echoed in non-church spaces. Ethics called me-as the pastor and his wife of a wealthy see-n-be-seen church absconded with the memorial fund. Joy called me when I moved from the bitterness and post-scatandal backbiting of the wealthy congregation to a tiny, bi-lingual, money-poor congregation the next town over, rich in enthusiasm, encouragement and love. Lutheran tradition called again, this time in contrast to the LDS church in Salt Lake City. After listening to the Mormon missionaries, so excited about their faith, and responding with what I remembered of mine, I dug out old confirmation materials (this was before Google) to see if I’d made it up. Ritual called when I went to the latest of three services (the contemporary one!) at the only Lutheran church in town and failed to recognize the music or the liturgy or even some of the words used. I had to go back and figure it out. The shape of the ritual was there, using wildly different expression. Curiosity called me. In the face of proclaimed certainty...uncertainty, perceived and experienced. We need each other. We need each other to be different. Wildly different. We need to be unsettled, confused, perhaps even offended by each other’s ways of life and experiences and approaches to the Gospel. Because contrast calls us back to the Gospel with new eyes. When we listen with respect to those whose journey does not look like our own we gain new perspectives on both the Gospel and our own efforts to follow Jesus.

Statement of vision for the Synod: We are in a liminal, foggy time. I can’t see any better than you can and we have no taillights to guide us. We do have God with us in the fog as God was with Peter, James and John in the cloud on the mountaintop. We have the ground of this state and our knowledge of her people, communities, history, challenges and possibilities, under our feet. Our Synod is geographically big, with lots of internal variation. What brings life, excitement, and healing to Albany won’t work in Jamestown. Visions that fire enthusiasm in Eggertsville may not be feasible in Elmira. Then again, interpreted through a different set of life experiences, they may. Build on each other’s differences. Let go of who we thought we were and ask who God is calling us to be, each in our own context, and as a network of idea-sharing across contexts. We can be more than the sum of our parts. If. We. Can. Sit. Together. Listen. Together. Let some things go and grieve together. Lift some up and celebrate together. The Racial Justice Task force is
doing good work in this area and I look forward to the work of the Gender Justice Task Force. We are learning to accept gifts and guidance from siblings we have not listened to in the past. In the fog it is less risky to say “I can’t see clearly, can we walk slowly, together; tell me your story. I will listen.” In the clear light of day visionaries spin visions and leaders charge ahead building strategic plans to rocket us toward defined goals. With all the spinning, rushing, building and rocketing we fail to notice the pain we inflict, the ideas we ignore; our momentum covers a myriad of mistakes. We don’t have momentum now. Now is the time to examine where we are. Catch up on paperwork, examine workflows so that when the fog lifts we are ready to move. In the meantime, listen like thieves. Hear our Black, Brown, and Asian siblings, our siblings along the gender, sexuality and ability spectrums, our siblings in recovery or not, our housed and un-housed siblings. Open our hearts. Notice who is here. And who isn’t. Grieve. Allow ourselves to be moved by love. Listen for others doing the same, examining who they are and what they can bring to community—the hungry, the un- or underemployed, imprisoned, recently released, folks bound by addiction, dysfunction, lack of shelter, those who don’t fit into demographic checkboxes; the organizers, activists, candidates, movers and shakers, the retired, the children. We’re all in the same fog. Yearning to live into a future we cannot perceive. We stand in good company with Jesus’s disciples. Not seeing a clear way forward. Listening for the new thing God is doing. We need each other’s gifts, ideas, songs, endurance, hope, pain, lamentation and love. We preach Christ crucified. Not some ideal. Not rugged independence. Not purity or cancel culture. Not building, mountain or barn. Not one single perfect vision. Christ Crucified, the power and the wisdom of God. What does that vision look like from where you are? Can we network, resource, and combine our perspectives together in a vibrant mosaic?

Other information you consider important to share with us:

We are not who we think we once were. And I’m not going to provide a shiny vision for the Synod’s future, because that is up to each of you. You have the privilege and the responsibility to be making decisions about your faith journeys together—what is God calling you to do and who is God calling you to be? What is God calling you to release responsibly? [“you” == y’all at the congregational level]

Each of you, both individually and congregation-ally, has a vision for the future. We get to take all those visions and piece them together in a mosaic that will create something more than any single vision can accomplish. We need color, texture and contrast, so we can’t all have the same vision. Some edges will be chipped and pruned to allow others to squeeze in. Ask yourself, “if I didn’t have to be in this particular church on Sunday morning, how & where would I dance with the Lord?”

Imagine you had never been to church. You knew nothing of all the different ways people told you they always were (as I get older I know that “always” is a profound misremembering). What might you imagine getting involved with to deepen your study of scripture? What activities would tune your ears to God and your hearts and minds to God’s people? What covenant written on your heart is crying out to be lived through your hands, feet and labor in the world? If all you can imagine is what you already have, fantastic. Listen to those with different life experiences and visions. You’ll be richer for the experience.

I am thrilled by the work of the Racial Justice task force, and the beginnings of the Gender Justice task force. Both of these lift up how our life experiences shape our view of church and scripture. I’ve had familiar scripture turned upside down by listening to the experience of someone not like me. This is not an intellectual exercise-you can’t get this from a book. This is incarnational ministry—we have to feel this in our gut, bear the shock of realization, the shame of ignorance, the pain of rejection; our hearts need to weep, we need to be vulnerable, the way we are with family...because we are family...In all its variation & dysfunction. If we cannot engage in that, if we persist in honoring, supporting, hearing, gathering with only those who like it our way, have “always” done it our way, and share our acceptable expression of our values...we will end up lonely and afraid. Perhaps we already are.

You know your neighborhoods. You know your congregations. Who is not there? I propose a practice of listening...for and to those who are NOT part of the mosaic. Imagine your current congregation. Who is there? Who is not? Who in your neighborhood is hurting? Do you know? Listen. Get curious. We’re all hungry for contact. Learn about people you encounter. NOT to bring them to church, but to hear how they are. Who they are. The last year has brought so many changes. Listen to people you’ve never listened to. Jesus’s ministry met people where they were and listened.

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THE REV. LEE MILLER, II

Name of Nominee: The Rev. Lee M. Miller II
Date of Ordination: June 20, 1998
Current Position: Senior Pastor, Holy Trinity
Congregational Membership: Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Buffalo, NY

Education and Earned Degrees (with institutions and years, most recent first)
Doctor of Ministry (in progress) – United Lutheran Seminary 2020-present
Master of Divinity, 1998 – The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia
Bachelor of Arts, English (Education Minor), 1991 – State University of New York at Albany

Previous Positions (Congregations served, special calls, etc., most recent listed first)
Senior Pastor (2012-Present) Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Buffalo, NY
Lead Pastor (2004-2012) St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, Philadelphia, PA
Dean, Niagara Frontier Conference, UNYS (2016-present)
VOICE Buffalo, Board Member (2020-present)
Niagara Lutheran Health System – Greenfields, Board Member (2019-present)
Lutheran Charities of Western New York, former Board Member
Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, former Synod Council member, former Executive Committee member
Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Candidacy Committee
New Jersey Synod, former Synod Council Member (circa 2002-2004)

Statement of your faith journey:

“Why?” is the first question I remember asking as a child. Why? “Why do we go to church every Sunday?”
Baptized into Christ’s body at First Lutheran Church in Jamestown, NY, raised by surrogate grandmothers at First
English in Lockport, and taught by faithful teachers at St. Stephen’s in Syracuse, I learned the answer to my first
“why’s?” “Because, Jesus loves you,” was the response. God loves you, God loves the whole world, all God’s people,
no exceptions. “God Loves You” was my first working definition for the Gospel.

During college in Albany, I stepped back from congregational life; my faith questions had changed. Now my question
was “where is God?” In those days, God sought me out, gathered me into the community at Holy Spirit in Albany.
There, among the faithful congregation I was reminded, “God is here.” God is with us. This became my next
understanding of what the Gospel means. God loves you. God is here!

Today, my questions have changed again. What’s next? Now that we have been saved by grace through faith, what’s
next? If God did die on the cross so that all people might live abundantly, what’s next? If God’s goal is that the whole
cosmos would know God’s love, what’s next? I have been meditating on Paul’s definition of the gospel in Romans “It
is the power of God for salvation” (Rom. 1:16). The Gospel is the power of God at work in the world for salvation, for
liberation. How awesome is that?!

We, the baptized, have been reminded again and again of God’s love for us, we have proclaimed God’s presence,
God’s power to show up and transform the lives of individuals, communities, and the world, and we believe that the
good news is the power of God at work in the world (today!) for salvation. Thanks be to God! What’s next?
Statement of vision for the Synod

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, called and commissioned as followers of Jesus, and reconciled to God, creator and reformer of all life, the role of the synod in my view is to: raise up, equip and support healthy leaders. To cultivate and empower vibrant ministries; and to coordinate, connect and encourage partnerships within the Synod, Churchwide, and global Body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

I vision a synod which takes on the very real challenges we face together as a church with a creative spirit of adventure. It may be that we are more akin to the church of the first few centuries after Christ, than the last few centuries when the church has been at the center of culture.

I vision a church where adaptive leadership is a requirement – acknowledging the fear of loss, taking time to listen and learn, and being collectively creative in forming the new things God has in store.
I vision a synod where partnerships are essential (Romans 12:4-5) – not only congregational cooperation but religious and secular partnerships, ministry with non-profits, community organizations, schools, food pantries, ecumenical and inter-faith organizations, religious and private partnerships.

I vision a church where together we work towards dismantling sexism, racism, ableism, bigotry, and a white supremacist worldview as a part of our baptismal response to “reject sin and renounce all the forces of evil” of our world. I vision a synod where this work is not a “program” of the church, but is core to our culture, the DNA of our church, an essential part of how we live out our salvation.

I vision a synod which will look different in five years, in ways we do not yet know, but I vision a church to which God is faithful, and which has the gifts and power to change our world with God’s amazing love.

Other information you consider important to share with us:

This past week marked one-year since the pandemic exploded in our nation and our gathered community dispersed into a wilderness of physically-distanced, face-covered, appearances, and digital gatherings of God’s faithful people. Through these once-unimaginable days, we have grieved so much, and for so many. We have also found new ways to love one another, our neighbors, those in need, and even ourselves, as God loves us. I look forward to when we will be able to gather together soon both to remember and give thanks for those who have died, and to celebrate and give thanks for God’s presence through tremendous times.

We have learned a lot as church in this time, just as everyone has learned so much. We have been reminded that some meetings really can be an email (or a phone call) and some phone calls are made brighter with faces on a screen. We have been reminded that each one of us is a member of the church, and together we have the power to impact the world, make change for the sake of our neighbors, and stand alongside siblings who cry out for justice. We have been held together by a loving and sustaining God. We have not lost hope. We have not let go of faith. We have not closed. Rather the Holy Spirit has bound us together and re-formed us, in real and variant ways. How will we adapt our thinking, our strategies, our ministries to navigate the uncharted terrain that is before us? I expect we will use all of our God-given, Jesus-led, Spirit-driven gifts to show God’s love to the world.

I believe that to do all that the Holy Spirit is inspiring us to do requires us to be as healthy as we can be, as individuals, communities and church together. It has been my goal during the pandemic to take 30-minutes each day for self-care in the form of exercise. I love to run, but everybody enjoys their own thing. Caring for our physical and mental health is important for each one of us. If I were to be elected Bishop, I might ask you, “what are you doing for yourself?” as an encouragement to take time for self-care, and even for having a little bit of fun along the way. Healthy individuals, forming healthy congregations and communities, form a healthy synod, where each part of the body continues to grow. Thanks be to God!
THE REV. DERON MILLEVILLE

Name of Nominee: Rev. Deron J. Milleville

Date of Ordination: June 26, 1998

Current Position: Parish Pastor

Congregational Membership: Good Shepherd Lutheran Church – Glenville, NY

Education and Earned Degrees: (with institutions and years, most recent listed first)

- Niagara University – Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education – 1989-1993
- Niagara County Community College – Liberal Arts – 1984-1986

Previous Positions (Congregations served, special calls, etc., most recent listed first)

- St. Paul Lutheran Church, Bolivar, OH – Internship site 1996-97
- Trinity Lutheran Church, Akron, NY – Interim Supply Pastor May-August, 1996
- Old Trinity Lutheran Church, Columbus, OH – Field Education site 1994-95
- St. Peter’s Lutheran Church and School, Sanborn NY Director of Music 1980-94

Statement of your faith journey:

February 27, 1966; I was a mere 20 days old when I was welcomed into the family of God in Baptism at St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in Sanborn, NY. St. Peter’s is a faith community I would call my faith home for the next 28 years where I was nurtured in those gentle baptismal waters into a life of faith, doubt, more questions, confidence and an assurance of God's love. It was here that I learned to trust God. It was here I learned about faithfulness and stewardship. Along the way I was a student at the parochial church school that I attended for 8 years. This special place was home to baptism, confirmation and ordination and final liturgies for my parents. But it was more than a building it is where God's people served and worshiped. This special place was where I led the church's song for over 13 years as director of music. Church wasn't a second home it was an extension of home.

Simultaneously, I was nurtured in the faith in a loving Christian home where our faith was lived and openly discussed. Some of my earliest memories are of my mother praying with me and singing the great hymns of faith and her voice reciting Luther's Morning Prayer frequently and a Dad that lived his faith daily. As a child my siblings often played church at home. I alternated between being pastor and musician. I loved them both. Early on a seed was planted for a call to ministry. During a pastoral vacancy a list was made of the talents and skills we wished for in our next pastor and I looked at the list and said; "I can do those things or learn the ones I don't know." About a year later I was at Trinity Lutheran Seminary. There my vision of God was expanded. There I saw a forgiving grace-filled God who always welcomed us home. There I saw and learned that God calls all kinds of people to this mission of faith in lots of cool ways. Most of all I saw that we can't control God's favor and God's vision of love and that grace is bigger than our human perspective can fathom.

Fast forward to 2017 to a sabbatical in Zimbabwe and I was awakened to see God working in ways I never dreamed. For one month my son and I were welcomed into a local family where they warmly accepted us. I learned that God has a plan for all of us. I learned that parents want good things for their children. They want them to be loved, stay healthy and have every opportunity for a better life. As with all of God's children, there is no doubt my Zim partners are siblings. Last year our parish arranged an exchange of a Zimbabwe intern for
six months. It was awesome to see not only learning on both for both parties. It was amazing to see God working and changing perceptions.

The Scripture that guides my journey of faith and ministry and even this potential call as bishop is Luke 24. The Road to Emmaus. I love the image that Jesus walks with us, especially when we don't know it, and that Jesus just keeps getting revealed - revealed in worship, in the meal and in our journeys. God just keeps unfolding before me in places and events like hearts burning within us.

**Statement of vision for the Synod:**

The election of a new bishop is a time for new leadership that includes new ideas and new energy. It is also a time to make that endless list of expectations and duties for this new person. Each of us probably has a different idea of what a bishop should do.

Putting my personal vision for the synod on paper is no easy task; especially since I am looking at it from the outside. I see the bishop's role as one of leadership, motivation and lead in interpreting and advocating its mission and theology. In announcing a vision for the synod, I need to first announce a vision for myself. My first task as bishop would be to visit every parish in the synod within the first year, possibly gathering three or four parishes in each meeting. We need to know and learn to trust each other. It was obvious to me in the Values and Priorities Report that we are a polarized synod with many ideas and priorities for the Upstate New York Synod. This short-term task will hopefully lead to a long-term vision. But we can also further clarify that long-term vision by naming the things we have in common.

Over the years of attending assemblies and conference events, I have found few things that bring out our passions and enthusiasm across the board. The one exception has been our commitment to hunger causes. Thousands of dollars have been raised year after year to break the cycle of hunger and poverty and responding to disasters. My short-term vision is to challenge and lead us to feed people. If you have a food pantry, expand it. If you have a single basket at your door put out a second basket. Create places where people eat together or community gardens are expanded.

Together as a synod we would be known for addressing hunger issues. Perhaps "Upstate is Down with Hunger." A wise person shared with me, when we work together with a common task we end up bonding. That's my hope. our people and churches bond.

As we work together with a common vision of feeding and working toward an abundance for all, food and hunger ministries will lead to other insights and new ministries; such as our important ministries of Campus ministry, gender equality and ending racism. Each congregation and leader need to keep doing the things they are called to do.

Global Ministries: This topic rolls over from my Spiritual journey. I greatly value and see incredible growth in our shared ministry with our companion synods or any international connection. I have visited and witnessed the passion for Christ in Zimbabwe, one of our companion synods. I facilitated bringing a Zimbabwe pastoral intern to my parish. Through shared ministry and day to day activity and socializing we grew as a family and strengthen the bonds between us. I can only imagine if everyone had that same opportunity to learn and grow from an international person in their parish or conference. I will continue to make that happen. Exchanging pastors will be a priority.

As bishop I will work towards creating a larger presence on social media and technology. Perhaps this looks like a monthly or quarterly video sharing of a ministry in our synod. Perhaps this will be a staff position that will be a great asset to the entire synod.

I will gather all synod team leaders and staff as a visioning day and sharing of mission and goals.
Throughout this pandemic we have seen what we can do when it is needed. We have seen ministry outside our buildings and have taken worship beyond our sanctuaries. We need to continue with out-of-the-box thinking and perspective even when the health officials say it's okay to return to our buildings. We have proven that we can think outside the box. The election of a new bishop is a time for new leadership that includes new ideas and new energy.

**Other information you consider important to share with us:**

I am a highly extroverted person who can bring people to the table. In fact, I will make it my priority to facilitate problem solving by bring a diverse group of people to the table.

I have supervised two pastoral interns: Rev. Laura Daly and Rev. Mbongeni Dube. I am currently the chair of the Town of Glenville Ethics Committee.

I serve on the Upstate Global Ministries team.

**DISCLOSURE**

In early 2009, while serving in my current Call, my marriage began to fall apart, ending in divorce. Pastors are not exempt from the trials and tribulations of a rocky marriage nor are they exempt from bitter divorce proceedings. As my marriage was ending my former wife and I were guilty of human frailty resulting in some very hurtful, adversarial encounters. My former wife made numerous accusations with the Office of the Bishop. During this time I was also in communication with the bishop. The Bishop suggested that I seek out counseling; the same therapist I continue to see today. Various accusations were made against me, such as watching too much television and including use of pornography. These accusations were shown to be without basis and resulted in no disciplinary action. This was a very difficult and emotional time for both of us. We sought reconciliation through marriage counseling, prayer and study. Unfortunately, it became clear that our marriage was ending.

As the dissolution of our marriage entered into the legal phase, I found myself in need of financial assistance to secure an attorney to protect my son. I discussed this with a parishioner in my current congregation. In this context, concerns were raised about my financial dealings with members of the congregation. The conversations followed proper channels, first going to the Congregation Council and then to the Office of the Bishop. Following best practice, confirmed by the consultation with the Bishop's representative, financial propriety was maintained. I was able to acquire appropriate funds through family members to get through the divorce process. No money was ever exchanged between myself and Good Shepherd or any of its parishioners. Our divorce was finalized in February of 2011 resulting in custodial custody of our son remaining with me and my former wife continued to reside in Pennsylvania. Throughout the entire ordeal I struggled with my own sexuality. I now live my life as a single, gay father and child of God.

Anyone who has served as a staff supervisor or executive has faced the unpleasant task of letting go an employee. Pastors must also be part of this process. In the course of my service to my current congregation various incidents occurred with a, now former, Director of Music which resulted in allegations of harassment made against me. The allegations were baseless and no disciplinary action resulted.

The separation and eventual divorce was a particularly difficult period during my ministry. I did make use of Samaritan Counseling Services. I have learned from these experiences to trust my instincts, be proactive in dealing with conflict, to collectively, as a team address conflict and to work toward healing and consensus. I have learned to be bold in my proclamation of our Lutheran theology, not only in preaching, but in practice. I have learned firsthand the importance of holding individuals accountable and ultimately myself in being the agent of change and leadership.

I have matured in my ministry because of all the challenges I have faced. Each of these challenges has prepared me for whatever task God has in store. The challenges have made me a more compassionate parent, pastor, supervisor and child of God. With growth comes the need for self-reflection which leads to a seasoned leader of the Priesthood of All Believers. I believe my growth has helped shape and prepare me for future challenges in my ministry.
THE REV. AILEEN ROBBINS

Name of Nominee: Aileen Robbins

Current Position: Pastor

Date of Ordination: 10/23/1998

Congregational Membership: Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rochester

Education and Earned Degrees (with institutions and years, most recent listed first)
M. Div., Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg 1998
BA, Shippensburg State College, Shippensburg, PA 1984
Diploma, David Glasgow Farragut American High School, Rota Spain 1979

Previous Positions (Congregations served, special calls, etc., most recent listed first)
Pastor, Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rochester 2007 - Present
Pastor, St. Pauls Evangelical Lutheran Church, Penn Yan 1998 – 2007
Transitional Pastor, Concordia Lutheran Church, Kendall, 2018 - Present
Transitional Pastor, Lutheran Church of Concord, Rochester 2015 - 2018
Transitional Pastor, Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church 2013-2015
Transitional Pastor, St. John's Lutheran Church 2010-2013
Transitional Pastor, St. John's Lutheran Church, Penn Yan 2004-2006

Statement of your faith journey:
My early years would have been described in my south-central PA home as "normal." Church was what we did on Sundays preceded by Sunday School taught by one of my relatives. As I became older, Youth Group consumed Sunday evenings. Faith was what extended family did. We moved from the communion table to my grandmother's dining room table. Church was part of the fabric of life.

In 1978, when I was a junior in high school, my father took a job in southern Spain and suddenly church was different. The congregation at the military chapel was made up of many denominations; worship itself changed form on a regular basis. My Sunday School teachers were people for whom I babysat. My family of faith grew beyond the boundaries of blood kin.

I attended Messiah College, a small Christian College in PA, with a strong Anabaptist foundation. The two Lutheran students, of whom I was one, were suspect, the integrity of our faith constantly questioned. Two years into my college education I switched to Shippensburg State College, a school with no underlying theological foundation. Yet, I had a lovely Methodist roommate and faith was part and parcel of our life as we took turns attending the local Methodist and Lutheran churches and arguing theological differences in the cafeteria over lunch.

After college I married, had two children, taught Sunday School, directed VBS, became an assisting minister and attended Bible studies. All of these things led me to a conversation with my pastor about a vocation in the church--any vocation but pastoring! My Pastor's voice joined a chorus of voices from my past, encouraging me to follow Jesus' call to ordained ministry. The final push was the day a conservative Baptist friend said to me, "Aileen, I can't believe I'm saying this but you would make a great pastor!"

These experiences have taught me much about the grace of God and have been instrumental in how I meet the challenges of ministry. My life has been a tapestry of people who have shared with me stories of how their lives were formed and transformed by experiences of the living God. No matter the tradition, each of these voices spoke to me from hearts that were held by God.

When I had the privilege of taking a sabbatical in 2017, I chose to walk the Camino in northern Spain with my father. For the uninitiated, the Camino is a pilgrimage beginning in France that extends to the Atlantic Ocean shore of Galicia.
My father and I walked 442 miles, beginning in Pamplona. During the month we walked, these stories of faith from my early life came back to me in a flood. As I sat in churches listening to liturgy in a language not my own, welcomed to the Catholic altar for communion, shared meals and coffee with peoples from around the globe, I reflected on how this was the sort of community through which God has always spoken to me. My journey continues as I meet new people, engage in conversations and enter into worship with the people of God wherever they may be found.

**Statement of vision for the Synod:**

How can we have a vision for moving forward when we don't even know into what we are heading? It would be lovely to place before you a well-formed statement saying exactly where we will be in five years, but the reality is we are just now emerging from a storm we never saw coming. Like the aftermath of a hurricane, we need to clear away the rubble before we can start rebuilding. To make matters worse, we aren't even on the same page about what just happened or where we are at this moment in time. We are blown all over the map politically, socially and in response to the pandemic. We have been isolated from one another; distanced from the liturgy and the language that binds us together. Unable to see one another in full bodily form, we are as polarized as we have ever been. And so, it is time to clear away the rubble.

When a storm ravages a property, its entirety needs cleaning up. The first step is a discerning what is salvageable, what is necessary. Assessing first what needs pruning and carrying away. Naming those things that make the landscape hazardous and the body unhealthy. In surveying our Synod we have much naming to do. Racism. Sexism. Attachment to the way it's always been. Some demolition will be required; walls that have been separating others from the love of Christ and the mutual consolation of the Christian community, old wallpaper that hides a multitude of sins.

Next is our wondering about what is worth keeping; those things that build us up. Our commitment to following Christ. Our work in the world. Our love of scripture. The strength of our worship and sacraments. As we begin the rebuilding phase, all hands will be needed on deck. There are master carpenters among us and skilled laborers who can accomplish the rebuild and train others to work beside them. There are interior decorators among us who bring a critical eye to the process, making sure that our tables are big enough to comfortably accommodate a place for everyone, the acoustics in each room appropriate to allow listening, windows wide open to give us a clear view of God's kingdom in the making.

The finishing touches are no less important and require the work of yet other disciples. The planting of seeds to grow lush gardens, a home to all manner of creatures. Well placed lights shining brightly creating a welcome. Well stocked cupboards that can feed a multitude. This is our task as we move into a future that is bright with the presence of the triune God in our midst.

We are the Body of Christ in Upstate New York. We have been assailed by storms and we are built on a rock that will not crumble. We are a church with a beautiful story of a people created in God's image, graced with a Savior who was willing to descend into the depths of hell for our salvation, and a Spirit who constantly inspires us both through the word of God and through the community of faith. We are strengthened by our common witness to respond in love and mercy to the needs of the world. We are the church of Jesus Christ. As we begin to clear away the rubble, the Spirit is calling us into a new and amazing reality together.

**Other information you consider important to share with us:**

The work that has brought me the most joy in ministry has been the work which has been collaborative and relational. My transitional pastoral work has included closing the Lutheran Church of Concord and merging that congregation in lifegiving ways with Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church in Greece, where I currently serve. I also had the privilege of working with Rev. Amy Walter Petersen to write a covenant between Christ the Good Shepherd and Resurrection Lutheran Church as they joined together in shared ministry.

I particularly enjoy the difficult work of processing the past and prayerfully considering what a new and hopeful future can look like. Celebrating successes and the ways that God has worked through congregations with an eye to how God can continue to use those same people in exciting ways in new situations is particularly exhilarating. It has been for me like sifting through the aftermath of a storm and finding a family picture perfectly preserved, or a locket on a gilded chain; things that take on new meaning and bring hope after devastation.

Messiah, the church where I serve, has been no stranger to tackling difficult, yet meaningful, tasks. After a two-year intensive period of study, prayer and conversation, we became a Reconciling in Christ Congregation in 2011. In this past year we have opened ourselves up to reflective conversations around race and joined with four other Greece
churches to form an anti-racism task force. We have also opened up our building as an emergency food cupboard in conjunction with Food Link, learning as we go how best to serve our friends and neighbors. The disciples in this congregation have been inventive, resourceful partners in ministry.

As part of my commitment to Christ’s church, I have served two terms on Synod Council, attended the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 1999 and served on the board of Lake Chautauqua Lutheran Center. Those experiences have afforded me the opportunity to learn about our “on the ground” ministries around the Synod, to support disciples at a young age, and engage in meaningful work beyond the boundaries of Upstate New York.

Four interns have shared their wisdom with me over the years. I have learned much from them as they stretched their wings and found their unique voice in parish ministry or discerned, as one did, that they were not called into ordained ministry. Each of them was serving at a detached site, allowing me to form relationships with the parishes they served. In addition to my call as an ordained minister, I have also been called to be a wife to Matthew for 36 years, a mother to two daughters and a grandmother to three adorable grandchildren. I enjoy gardening, cross stitch, cooking as well as walking and reading for pleasure.
THE REV. VIVIANE THOMAS-BREITFELD

Rev. Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld has withdrawn her candidacy for bishop due to recent family health concerns.
Election of the Bishop

The Twenty-third Assembly of the Upstate New York Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America