



Eastern North Dakota Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

**Bishop Election Process**  
Biographical Forms for Nominees

**Rev. Joel Baranko**

1. Current Position
  - Lead Pastor - Lutheran Church of the Cross, West Fargo (15 yrs)
2. Congregation Membership
  - Lutheran Church of the Cross, West Fargo
3. Date and Year of Ordination
  - June 9, 2007
4. Previous Positions
  - Solo Intern Pastor - 2 pt rural parish Wellsburg & Ackley Iowa (1 year)
  - Solo Pastor - rural congregation Our Savior's, Outing MN (4 years)
5. Education and Earned Degrees (with institutions and years, most recent first)
  - Master of Divinity - Wartburg Theological Seminary 2007
  - Bachelor of Arts - Concordia College 2003
6. List up to five (5) current or past synod or churchwide activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.
  - Synod Council - Eastern ND Synod
  - Synod Assembly Planning Team - Eastern ND and Northeastern MN Synods
  - Book of Faith Synod Advocate - Northeastern MN Synod
  - Young Clergy National Gathering Planning Team – ELCA
7. List up to five (5) current or past community-related activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.
  - Co-launched the Grace Garden, a YWCA supportive housing complex for women and children escaping homelessness and domestic violence.
  - Co-launched West Fargo Eats, the largest congregation-based food pantry in ND.
  - Recipient of the MN Council of Churches Most Innovative Ministry Award
  - Former Volunteer Emergency Medical First Responder and Firefighter
8. What gifts would you bring to the office of bishop of this synod? (1,000 characters maximum)
  - Love for Jesus and his church.
  - A rich prayer life.
  - Clarity of purpose.
  - Awareness of my blindsides.

- 20 years of congregational leadership with a track record of growth, innovative initiatives, and collaboration.
- A belief that the synod exists to support mission and leaders in congregations and other ministry sites. Congregations do not exist for the sake of the synod.

9. 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)

Disengagement and decline. The lack of candid and widespread conversation about rampant decline in our synod is hindering our inability to be attentive to how the Holy Spirit might stir in us vision strategies for how to address it. Our synod, in a very real sense, is in crisis. Yet, we continue to conduct ourselves, year-after-year, as if nothing was happening, nothing is at stake. Over the past 10 years: 42% decline in mission support (inflation adjusted) and 41% decline in worship attendance.

I would focus synod staff, activities, and resources around 2 strategic areas.

1. EVANGELISM: Transformative power of life with Jesus.
  - a. Youth and young adult outreach and discipleship.
  - b. Caring for the lonely, lost, and forgotten.
2. LEADERSHIP SUPPORT
  - a. Care for our rostered leaders, SAMs, etc. (pastoral, trustworthy, accountable).
  - b. Development for Evangelism areas a & b.

10. Describe your leadership style. (1,000 characters maximum)

Visionary & Strategic. I seek to survey the landscape, discern needs, assess resources, marshal collaborators, cast vision, and go for it.

Executive: I am decisive and high achieving. Expectations and accountability matter. I seek to empower and believe good order to be a means, not an end. I highly value direct communication and deep listening.

Theologically Focused: Servant and Gospel-driven. The speed of the leader sets the speed of the team. I uphold the cross and resurrection to be leadership principles.

High capacity for joy, fun, and fellowship. I am known to include what I call a “yeehaw factor” my work and life.



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**Rev. Amy Eisenmann**

1. Current Position
  - Pastor at Bethel Lutheran Church, Wahpeton
2. Congregation Membership
  - Bethel Lutheran Church, Wahpeton
3. Date and Year of Ordination
  - September 6, 2008
4. Previous Positions
  - Lead Pastor at Bethlehem Lutheran, Cedar Falls, IA (Jan 2000-Nov 2004)
  - Pastor at St. Mark's Lutheran, Palo, MN (Sept 2008-Feb 2011)
  - Associate Pastor at Holy Cross Lutheran, Sioux Falls, IA (March 2011-Jan 2013)
  - Pastor at St. Matthew's Lutheran, Thompson, ND (Jan 2013-Jan 2020)
5. Education and Earned Degrees (with institutions and years, most recent first)
  - Master of Divinity, Luther Seminary (2008)
  - Master of Arts-Christian Education, Luther Seminary (2003)
  - Bachelor of Arts-Youth and Family Ministry, Midland Lutheran College (2000)
6. List up to five (5) current or past synod or churchwide activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.
  - Served as Dean of Laurentian Conference in NEMN Synod.
  - Served as Dean of Grand Forks Conference in EAND Synod.
  - Served on 2 Synod Ministry Review Teams in Eastern ND.
  - Served on EAND Synod Assembly Planning Team.
  - Served on First Call Committee in NEIA Synod.
7. List up to five (5) current or past community-related activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.
  - Serving as church liaison to Wilkin County Mental Health Board.
  - Working on the steering committee to bring Love INC to the Twin Towns (Breckenridge and Wahpeton).
  - Served on the Cedar Valley Interfaith Council, working together so that all denominations and faiths might have voice at the table.
  - Served on EWALU Bible Camp Board in Strawberry Point, Iowa.
  - Grew up as a double pastors' kid and have served calls in 4 different synods.

8. What gifts would you bring to the office of bishop of this synod? (1,000 characters maximum)

Administration-I have a desire to streamline processes & procedures for the ease of all. Working smarter, not harder is essential. Recognizing some churches have limited resources and others are blessed abundantly, I'd help churches work together in new ways across current boundaries and borders. Encouragement- I love to take time to truly hear and see people and let them know that their hard work is seen and appreciated. Whether we are talking about pastors, SAMS, lay leaders, youth, or retired clergy and families, all parts of our synod need a place to feel seen, heard, and cared for. I bring a passion and energy for helping our leaders find renewal and our lay people find empowerment. Creativity-we live in a world that is changing fast, so we need to think outside the box and find ways to use the gifts we have differently. I bring with me a love of seeing God work in new ways while still appreciating tradition and history.

9. 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)

I firmly believe that one of our principal challenges is the ever-changing world we live in. We constantly are finding ourselves having to pivot in ministry and think differently. As communities change quickly, we must adapt to stay relevant. We need to prioritize relationships and to learn and live together in a respectful environment. We need to focus on our unity and how we might work together for the good of all. As bishop of Eastern North Dakota, I would work to strengthen relationships both within churches in our synod and with the wider community. We need to truly listen to what our neighbors are doing well, and instead of competing, work together for the good of our community. I would prioritize caring for our rostered leaders, SAMS, and lay leaders alike. If we care for them, they can care better for those they are called to serve. Synod staff and I would focus on celebrating gifts of all people within our synod, and encouraging ways to use those gifts for the good of all.

10. Describe your leadership style. (1,000 characters maximum)

I tend to be a relaxed, conversational leader and preacher. I believe that we can learn from each other, and that we are stronger together than we are as individuals. I am organized, enjoy the planning process, and like to be involved in things from the ground up. I tend to listen first and then ask questions, as a way of hearing others' stories. I believe our stories and experiences make us who we are, and if we listen to each other's stories, we can better understand where others are coming from. I enjoy helping involve others in the process of ministry. Each person has gifts, and helping them discover, develop, and utilize their gifts is an honor as a leader in the church. I love that the more folks we have involved, the more gifts that can be shown, and the more gifts that can be shown, the more complete picture of God and his love we are able to see!



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**Rev. Carter Hill**

1. Current Position
  - Lead Pastor, Grafton Lutheran Church - Grafton, ND
2. Congregation Membership
  - Grafton Lutheran Church - Grafton ND
3. Date and Year of Ordination
  - May 21, 2017
4. Previous Positions
  - Lead Pastor of Administration and Parish Life - Prairie Lutheran Parish (American Lutheran, Stanley ND; Bethlehem Lutheran, Ross; Faith Lutheran, Palermo; Knife River Lutheran, rural Stanley), October 2016 - February 2021
  - Interim Leader - English Lutheran Church, Hazen ND, May 2016 - September 2016
5. Education and Earned Degrees (with institutions and years, most recent first)
  - Doctor of Ministry in Missional Leadership, Palmer Theological Seminary, St. Davids, Pennsylvania, (in progress)
  - Master of Divinity, Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, 2016
  - Bachelor of Arts in English Education, University of North Dakota, 2012
6. List up to five (5) current or past synod or churchwide activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.
  - Lutheran Youth Board President for the Western North Dakota Synod, 2004 – 2009
  - Dean, Western Prairie Conference, Western North Dakota Synod, 2018–2021
  - Event Planner, Western North Dakota Synod Rostered Leaders Conference, 2019
  - Camp of the Cross, Garrison, ND – \_Capitol Campaign Committee, 2017-2019
7. List up to five (5) current or past community-related activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.
  - Grafton Area Chamber of Commerce Board - Grafton, North Dakota. 2024 – Present
  - Theater Director, Park River Area Schools, 2022 – Present
  - Vice President, Grafton Christian Ministerial Association, 2021- Present
  - Oversight of community assistance funds for neighbors in need through the ministerial association, and the operating of a local food pantry, and secondhand store that supports community members in need.

8. What gifts would you bring to the office of bishop of this synod? (1,000 characters maximum)

I would bring vision, creativity, strong leadership, and the ability to connect with people. In both of my calls, I have helped congregations clarify their mission and move toward a more hopeful and life-giving future. In my current call, there was not a clear path driving the congregation forward and little to unite the people around a shared sense of purpose. By helping the congregation name its strengths and embrace a common vision, we have grown into a healthier, more mission-focused community. I believe I would bring encouragement and support to pastors in a rapidly changing church environment, along with a deep commitment to being present with and attentive to the congregations and leaders of this synod.

9. 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)

I believe the principal challenge facing this synod in the next six years is whether we are willing to respond faithfully to the church as it is now rather than continue operating from models built for another time. We are a largely rural synod serving many congregations with limited resources and not enough pastors, yet we often remain tied to centralized structures that can feel distant from ministry on the ground. Some congregations may never again have a full-time called pastor, and the synod must be honest enough to face that reality while still helping those communities remain vital, connected, and faithful. I believe we need to think radically differently about how the synod is staffed and how support is offered. My hope would be for this synod to become a model for how other synods can thrive in a deeply rural setting: relational, flexible, creative, and close to the people and congregations it serves.

10. Describe your leadership style. (1,000 characters maximum)

My leadership style is grounded in trust that God is always at work, even in seasons of uncertainty and change. I believe the Holy Spirit is still leading, renewing, and calling the church forward. Change can be fearful, but it is also what keeps us alive. Because of that, I try to lead with both courage and hope. I am deeply relational and connect easily with people, but I also lead with vision, creativity, and strong administration. I work to help congregations name their strengths, clarify their mission, and move toward a faithful future together. I do not believe leadership is about preserving old systems simply because they are familiar. I believe it is about prayerful discernment, honest reflection, and trusting God enough to follow where God is leading next. I strive to lead in a way that is pastoral, honest, direct, collaborative, and life-giving.



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**Rev. Tessa Moon Leiseth**

1. Current Position
  - Bishop, Eastern North Dakota Synod
2. Congregation Membership
  - St Mark's Lutheran Church, Fargo
3. Date and Year of Ordination
  - June 21, 1998
4. Previous Positions
  - Interim Senior Pastor, Horace Lutheran, Horace ND (2019-2020)
  - Interim Senior Pastor, Christ the King Lutheran Church, Moorhead MN (2018-2019)
  - Country Coordinator - ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission / Missionary, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa (2012-2017)
  - Campus Pastor, Concordia College, Moorhead, MN (2008-2012)
  - Associate Pastor, Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, East Bethel, MN (2000-2006)
  - Youth and Family Pastor, Abiding Savior Lutheran Church, Mounds View, MN (1998-2000)
  - Summer Chaplain, Red Willow Bible Camp, Binford, ND (1996)
5. Education and Earned Degrees (with institutions and years, most recent first)
  - Luther Seminary, M.Div., 1998
  - Concordia College, B.A., Art History, 1992
6. List up to five (5) current or past synod or churchwide activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.
  - Bishop / Member of EaND Synod Council
  - Member of the ELCA Conference of Bishops
  - Chair of the Conference of Bishops Liaison Committee to the ELCA Service & Justice Unit
  - ELCA Global Mission
  - Coaching Network, EaND Synod
7. List up to five (5) current or past community-related activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.
  - Board of Regents, Oak Grove Lutheran School
  - Board of Regents, Concordia College
  - Community book club member
  - Parent theatre volunteer

– Young adult mentor

8. What gifts would you bring to the office of bishop of this synod? (1,000 characters maximum)

I am a clear proclaimer of the Gospel. I serve with a pastor's heart and approach ministry seeing and expecting the good in others. I am described as compassionate, faithful and humble. I am looked to for my non-anxious and positive presence. I bring gifts of wisdom, experience, and leadership to the office of bishop. I am steeped in congregational, synod, churchwide, and global mission experiences. These shape my vision for our church. I am both strategic and practical. I am always rooted in what has been and looking to what is possible. I see the big picture and look to the future while recognizing what needs to be accomplished today. I see patterns, connections, and capacities and can lead a group to consider ways forward within complexities of challenges and competing priorities. I am also comfortable when answers are not known or clear. I am a child of this Synod. I love Eastern North Dakota, its congregations, and especially its people. I have a heart for service and the church.

9. 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)

A principal challenge will be the ongoing complex need for growing capacity and adaptation in the midst of decreasing and changing resources. Examples include the Good News of Jesus competing for attention in an arena filled with distraction, skepticism, isolation, and fear; a decline in the availability of rostered ministers, especially for rural calls; and ongoing grief over the loss of the church of the past.

And yet, the Holy Spirit continues to work through people, our gifts, and our lives. Being church, and being church together, in this context will require continued agility and adaptation for congregations and individuals (both lay and clergy) as well as significant trust, resourcing and imagination. As bishop, I would continue to support this synod with adaptive change, new resources, creative thinking, collaborative partnerships, strong accompaniment and encouragement, an unwavering commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and faith in the work of the Holy Spirit among us.

10. Describe your leadership style. (1,000 characters maximum)

My natural leadership style is contextual and adaptive. I show up fully, listen actively and deeply, and seek to first understand. I trust local wisdom and believe God is already at work in the situation. I seek common ground and utilization of people's gifts. I ask curious questions so others can articulate their perspectives, ideas, and hopes. I pay attention to those who do not have voice or opportunity. I seek input for idea generation and development, as well as in decision-making.

Knowing there isn't always time for collaboration, I am willing and able to set direction, make decisions, and move plans forward. I am able to make hard decisions and follow through. I make sure progress is made while remaining adaptive. I try new things and pivot as needed, believing there is always more to learn from each other and from a situation. I accompany and support people and organizations in expanding their vision and capacity, while also nurturing them spiritually.



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Biographical Forms for Nominees

**Rev. Kristina Weber**

1. Current Position
  - Senior Pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church (2013 - present)
2. Congregation Membership
  - Trinity Lutheran Church, Jamestown, ND
3. Date and Year of Ordination
  - October 26, 1997
4. Previous Positions
  - Associate Pastor, St. Luke's Luth., Park Ridge, IL (2006-2013)
  - Interim Pastor, Lutheran Church of the Reformation and St. James Lutheran (Minneapolis Area Synod) (2004-2005)
  - Associate Pastor, Family of Christ Lutheran, Chanhassen, MN (2001-2004)
  - Pastor, Toivola-Meadowlands Lutheran Parish, (Hope, Toivola and First, Meadowlands, MN) (Northeastern MN Synod) (1997-2001)
5. Education and Earned Degrees (with institutions and years, most recent first)
  - MBA, (Master of Business Administration) University of Jamestown (2025)
  - Certificate (Nonprofit Management) Axelson Center at North Park University (non-degree, 2008-2010)
  - MDiv, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (1997)
  - BA, St. Olaf College (1992) (Major: Religion)
6. List up to five (5) current or past synod or churchwide activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.
  - Eastern North Dakota Synod Council Executive Team, Secretary (2016-2020), Interim Secretary (2024-2025)
  - EAND Synod Committees: Generosity 2026, Consultation 2022 to present, Constitution 2020, Compensation Guidelines 2018, Campus Ministry 2018
  - Lutheran Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Representatives Network, (Churchwide Board Treasurer, 2013-2017)
  - Synod Assembly Planning Committees (2003, 2007, 2008)
  - Facilitator: Healthy Congregations (2004, renewed credentials 2019) and Bridge Builders - Conflict Resolution Teams (2002-2005)
7. List up to five (5) current or past community-related activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.
  - Christians in Action Ministry founding member NDChristiansAct.org (2021-present)

- Community Band member, 2025 and 2026
- Volunteer at and fan of Class B basketball tournaments, 2014-present
- Sunday Night Suppers - meal ministry, 2012-2013
- Sunshine Kiddie Care - founding board member, nonprofit child care center, Meadowlands, MN, (population 100) 1999-2001

8. What gifts would you bring to the office of bishop of this synod? (1,000 characters maximum)

- Strategic Thinking - I look for the big picture and identify the steps needed to get from where we are to where we need to be.
- Relationships - I thrive when connecting people with one another. Together we can inspire faith in Jesus Christ and support our neighbors.
- Curiosity and love of learning - My MBA emphasis was finance and social media marketing. I talk with people who connect with congregations through online experiences. <https://www.st-johnslutheran.org/#/sabbatical-essays/>
- Grounded in Faith - I trust the Holy Spirit to guide each step of the journey.

9. 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)

The next six years will look nothing like the past six years. How the Church gathers, how the Church worships, how the Church serves, how ministry is funded have changed and will continue to change. I invite each congregation in the EAND Synod to dare to seek new ways to cooperate and address ways to better connect and act as the body of Christ for the sake of our neighbors.

I draw on 28 years of congregational ministry serving in two-point solo, associate, interim, and senior pastor roles. I listen to colleagues and siblings in Christ who help me see the Church from the perspective of people with experiences that differ from my own.

10. Describe your leadership style. (1,000 characters maximum)

When I identify the opportunity - I invite other leaders to see the possibilities. We invite expanding participation in the blossoming of a new creation. We refine plans together. I say, "Here's a starting point. It can only get better from here."

When someone else identifies the challenge - I listen and ask thoughtful questions. I discern my role (to fix, to confront, to redirect, to step to the side). I invite participation from people who can impact the situation in positive ways.

I pay attention to the process so it is fair and faithful. I express gratitude.