

Sierra Pacific Synod Profile

Congregation Discussion
Questions

Congregational Discussion Questions

- Synthesis of conversations around Synod
 - Current and future direction of our Synod
 - About the leader we seek in our next bishop
- Similar to questions asked of candidates for bishop
- Join the conversation
- Discuss at spsprofile.wordpress.com

Discussion Questions

- *Bishop's Ecclesiastical Duties*
- *Call Process*
- *Care for the Pastors*
- *Communication*
- *Diversity*
- *Finances*
- *Geography*
- *Healthy, Multiplying Congregations*
- *Identity*
- *Leadership Development*
- *Sexuality*
- *Staffing of the Bishop's Office*
- *Synod Structure*

Bishop's Ecclesiastical Duties

- Ecclesiastical duties assigned to Bishop
 - Three National Bishop's Meetings per year
 - Synod Council work and meetings
 - The Professional Leaders' Conference
 - Conference Deans' Meetings
 - Crisis and Conflict Response
 - Ordinations
 - Synod Assembly preparation and participation
 - Requests to serve the larger Church
 - Region 2 consultations
 - Region 2 mobility conferences
 - Chief Ecumenical Officer of the Synod
- 50 to 70% of the Bishop's time

Bishop's Ecclesiastical Duties

(Questions)

- What do you think should be the priorities of the Bishop's time, especially in light of the ecclesiastical duties and activities specific to the Bishop?
- As you think about the work of the Synod, what functions and activities do you think should be handled by the Bishop personally?

Call Process

- Connection with Bishop and staff
- Mostly positive comments, but significant negative responses
- Complaints about length of time for process
- Currently 30 congregations in call process
 - 21 seeking solo pastor
 - 4 seeking associate pastor
 - 5 seeking lead pastor or co-pastor

Call Process (Questions)

- If your congregation were entering into a call process, what would you need and expect from Synod staff?
- What steps do you think could be taken to make the call process more efficient?
- What creative solutions can you envision for small, rural congregations who find it difficult to fill the pulpit?
- What do you think might be done to increase the pool of prospective candidates for openings in the Sierra Pacific Synod?

Care for the Pastors

- Need care for pastors - not necessarily by Bishop
- Sense of detachment from Synod staff
- Ambivalence about role of bishop in dealing with pastors and their families.
- Should the bishop be strong in administration or should the bishop be strong in pastoral care?

Care for the Pastors (Questions)

- How might the Synod staff, as well as congregations, support your pastor and your pastor's family?
- What programs or ideas might create a stronger pastoral relationship between the bishop's office and pastors?
- Being bishop calls for a great deal of interaction and team building. What skills and experience do you think are most essential for this task?

Communication

- Broadest and most pervasive theme
 - Crucial issue in and of itself
 - Key factor in other areas
- Appreciate communications channels
 - Website
 - Byte of Synod
 - Visits from the Bishop or staff
- Communication mostly identified as inadequate or irregular
- Four essential areas
 - Face-to-face communication
 - Digital/electronic communication
 - Information dissemination
 - Conceptual/contextual communication addressing mission and purpose.

Communication (Questions)

- What communication from the Synod might be helpful to you as a congregation and as individual members of the Synod?
- What would inspire you to engage in the mission and purpose of the Synod?
- What kind of personal connection would you like to have with the Bishop and Synod staff?
- How do you think that connection might be best accomplished in our geographically dispersed Synod?
- What kind of digital technology might best assist in communication between your congregation and the Synod office?
- How might the Synod office best make synodical and national resources available to your congregation?

Diversity

- One of our greatest strengths & one of our major challenges
- Diverse geographically, politically, theologically, culturally, and in matters dealing with sexuality and sexual orientation
- Majority of congregations are less diverse ethnically and socio-economically
- Our self-understanding that we are diverse sometimes blinds us from seeing the ways in which we are not

Diversity (Questions)

- How would you define “diversity” both in our congregations and in our mission field?
- What do you consider to be the greatest blessings and greatest challenges of our diverse Synod?
- How shall we, as a Synod, remain focused on our mission?

Finances

- Synod has a finite amount of financial resources
- Allocated to programs, events, staffing, overhead, and mission.
- Some churches withhold financial giving

Finances (Questions)

- What do you think should be the priorities for the allocation of the financial resources of the Synod?
- What major or minor changes do you think need to be made to the Synod's budget and budgeting process?
- How do you think the Synod staff ought to respond to congregations who choose to withhold financial giving from the Synod?
- How would you like to be informed by the Synod office about the use of your financial giving?

Geography

- One of the geographically largest
- Large mission field whose energy can be captured for the sake of ministry
- Rich educational resources, including Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Union
- Vast area and many congregations feel disconnected
- Perceived need for nurturing of congregation-to-congregation connections

Geography (Questions)

- What are the key issues facing the Synod as a result of its large geographical size?
- How would you like to see the next bishop address these issues?
- From the perspective of your geography, what specific changes might be made to the Synod structure to address the challenges of our large geographic size?

Healthy, Multiplying Congregations

- Major focus of the Synod for past few years
 - Pray First
 - Lead by Example
 - Plan for Mission
 - Build up the Body
 - See and Speak the Truth in Love
- More new mission starts (fifteen in the past two years) than any other Synod in the country
- Large number of shrinking and aging congregations

Healthy, Multiplying Congregations

(Questions)

- Are you, as a congregation, familiar with a Synod document called, “Building Healthy, Multiplying Congregations”?
- Describe a “healthy” congregation.
- How might the bishop and Synod staff best be involved with a congregation on the edge of viability?
- How could the bishop and Synod staff best help you to engage in meaningful evangelism and outreach?

Identity

- Not always clear about identity as Lutheran Christians
- Multi-cultural, diverse, and secular region
- Unchurched don't differentiate between Christian denominations
- Recognized by work with Lutheran World Relief, seminaries, Hunger Appeals, and participation in Ecumenical or Interfaith organizations
- Part of long tradition as church of the Reformation, with strong sense of identity and spirit of pioneering

Identity (Questions)

- How would you articulate our distinct identity as Lutherans in a contemporary, secular and diverse society?
- What do our Lutheran theology and a Reformation mentality mean in 2008?
- How does our Lutheran faith speak to young families? To singles? To an aging population?
- How do we keep “passion for the faith” alive?
- How do we address societal and ethical issues from a faith perspective?

Leadership Development

- Capable leaders, both lay and clergy, are needed to pursue our mission
- Desire to attract and equip more young leaders
 - Lead in new ways with new gifts
 - Help reach a younger population

Leadership Development (Questions)

- As you consider the office of bishop, what, in your mind, is effective leadership?
- What kind of leadership do you need and expect from the bishop of the Synod?
- How, as a Synod, might we attract and equip a greater number of younger leaders?

Sexuality

- Discussions and actions around ordination of GLBT clergy contentious and divisive
- Substantial confusion about what Bishop is and is not empowered to do
- Faithful members have very different opinions
- Look to the Bishop for leadership
- Dominant message: We must “get on with it” and not be defined by this issue

Sexuality (Questions)

- What do you understand to be the key issues in the area of sexuality and how do you feel the bishop needs to address them?
- What policies, in this area, would you like to see implemented for the Synod and for the ELCA?
- What do you think should be done, by congregations and by the Synod, to address the divisiveness within the Synod over this issue?
- How might our Synod get beyond this issue rather than being defined by this issue?

Staffing of the Bishop's Office

- Currently: Bishop, 3 full-time assistants, 3 full-time support staff and one half-time ELCA deployed staff
- Diverse opinions (and lack of knowledge) about staff
- Desire Bishop and staff be present more
- Current staff possesses vast amount of knowledge about 20 years of the Synod
 - Can be both an asset and a liability
- Strong support for younger, more diverse staff, one perceived to be less bound to “the way we’ve always done it before.”

Staffing of the Bishop's Office (Questions)

- How do you understand the purpose of the Bishop's staff?
- How might the new bishop take advantage of the institutional knowledge of the current staff and, at the same time, create a “new” staff that is effective?
- In what ways do you want to see the Synod staff present in congregations? To do what?

Synod Structure

- The term “Synod” is used different ways by people
 - Expression of body of Christ through ELCA presence in northern California and Nevada
 - The office of the Bishop
- Role and structure as institution not clearly understood
- Perception that Synod office focus on addressing problems vs. creating vision for future and leading towards that future
- Synod Assembly is untapped opportunity
- Conference structure works well in some areas and not so well in others
- This Synod is unique yet the potential has not been addressed

Synod Structure (Questions)

- What does “Synod” mean?
- What vision do you have for the Sierra Pacific Synod? How might the Synod office lead toward that vision?
- What do you think should be the priorities of the bishop’s time? How might the bishop and Synod staff align those priorities with the structure and activities of the Synod?

Continue the Discussion

- <http://spsprofile.wordpress.com>
 - Blog – see what others have to say
 - More information to review and discuss