

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FORM:

NOMINEE FOR BISHOP OF THE NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD

1. Name: Ryan Hersch

2. Current Position: Senior Pastor

3. Congregation Membership: Atonement Lutheran Church,
Wyomissing

4. Date and Year of Birth: September 7, 1976

5. Date and Year of Ordination: September 27, 2003



6. Previous Positions:

- Pastor-Redeveloper, Alleluia Lutheran Church, Phoenix, Arizona (2003-2008)
- Pastor-Redeveloper, Ascension Lutheran Church, Paradise Valley, Arizona (2008-2017)
- Senior Pastor, Atonement Lutheran Church, Wyomissing (2017-present)

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

- Studied Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary
- Master of Divinity, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (1999-2003)
- Bachelor of Arts in history, Western Washington University (1995-1999)

8. List up to five (5) current or past synod or churchwide activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.

- Attended Developer/Redeveloper School at Churchwide (2003)
- Served as dean of the Northeast Valley Conference of the Grand Canyon Synod (2009-2017)
- Served as Chair of Region 2's Multi-Synodical Candidacy Committee
- Served as a Voting Member at the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly
- Served as an internship supervisor for a TEEM candidate for ministry (Theological Education for Emerging Ministry) with an emphasis in Spanish-language ministry. TEEM is a path to ordained ministry in the ELCA without a Master of Divinity.

9. List up to five (5) current or past community-related activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.

- Fostered a partnership between Atonement and a congregation of the Reformed Christian Church of God that is made up of Nigerians and Nigerian-Americans. Our two congregations will be working together on anti-racism ministry.
- Providing on-going support to the recovery community (AA, NA, Al-Anon, SA, GA) through the administration of Atonement's Community Center.
- Participated in congregation-based community organizing through the Valley Interfaith Project in Phoenix, Arizona.
- Served as treasurer of Arizonans for the Protection of Exploited Children and Adults (APECA).

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

For most of my 17 years of ministry, I have served as a redeveloper. In that work I received a toolkit for congregational revitalization. When this toolkit is put to work in a struggling congregation, that congregation grows to look more like Jesus and more like the community around them. And sometimes, if God gives it, they also grow in attendance and offerings. It is possible! Discipleship with Jesus is the key!

Thanks to my amazing wife I am conversational in Spanish. I have experience as a large-scale fundraiser, with access to a local network of donors. I have a broad experience of the ELCA and am aware of ministry experiments that are underway around the country. I have led congregations of various sizes. I have experience as the administrative leader of a large staff, including other deacons and pastors. I have a track record of lowering overhead without short-changing ministry. I have experience effectively using social media for evangelism, pastoral care, and other ministry. I am a committed feminist, anti-racist, and ally to the LGBTQIA+ community. And most importantly, I believe that our Lord Jesus is on the move to transform this beautiful, broken world with love!

11. 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)

This is a big synod! We have twice the number of congregations as many synods—but not twice the budget. This imbalance will make it increasingly difficult for us to afford the staff hours necessary for the traditional configuration of synod ministry. And this will be happening at a time when our congregations will need the ministry of the synod more than ever! The size of the synod also makes it difficult for leaders with gifts for synod ministry to share those gifts.

I propose that we spend the next six years carefully, but intentionally decentralizing the ministries of the synod, similar to the 1979 London Area Scheme. This could impact candidacy, mobility, and the revitalization/consolidation of congregations. There are things the bishop, whose authority is limited, must do in our polity. Whenever the next bishop is able, however, she/he/they should push authority, training, and accountability for the ministry of synod down and out to local leadership. This could help us to live well within our means and to faithfully fulfill the ministry of synod. After six years, the synod can choose to maintain its decentralization or to re-centralize when we elect our next bishop.

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

God wired me to be an optimistic, enthusiastic person. And in every ministry I've served, God has used that energy to gather teams of talented people. When God sends people like that your way, it's important to resist the temptation to micro-manage them. And so, though I have opinions about lots of things, I usually try to stick to ministry management by objective. Cast the vision. Set the goal. Set them free. See if they need help. Serve as an agent of accountability. Celebrate their victories.

But, it doesn't do any good for the Church to be busy if it doesn't have a sense of direction! One of my favorite leadership tasks is working with councils to prayerfully discern a concrete vision for their congregations. I have used John Carver's Policy Governance Model in this work. When leading a large ministry, it is impossible to personally tend to every member and task of the organization. Leaders of large organizations have to scale up their ministry by creating shared missional language and clear policies. They must also raise up leaders to succeed them or the ministry will suffer. Transparent communication is a must in this work, and all this must be rooted in discipleship.