

2025 STRATEGIC INTENT

(draft 05/05/2025)

The Strategic Intent of the NEPA Synod is to be a living document that serves as a guide for the bishop's staff and synod leadership¹. This document seeks to create clarity regarding the envisioned culture and mission of the synod as well as providing a structure that maximizes gifts and resources toward achieving the vision.

The strategic intent will be reviewed, updated, and built upon as goals and objectives are set and met. It will seek to identify the responsible positions and person(s) for each item as well as provide target dates and timelines when appropriate. As we live into the strategic intent we will add both quantitative and qualitative metrics to measure progress.

What is synod?

As members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we understand synod to be a relational network of member congregations, lay and rostered leaders and members, ministry communities and agencies providing shared collaboration, creativity, and support that fuels Christ's mission of life for the world. Synod ministries do not only happen through bishop's staff and synod leadership but through every member, congregation, ministry community and agency within the NEPA Synod. We strive to create a synod-wide culture that draws congregations, ministry communities, and agencies into greater alignment so as to maximize gifts, resources, and opportunities across the synod territory.

The bishop's staff and synod leadership exist to serve God's mission primarily through congregations. The metaphor we use is C.A.R. – which means that the bishop's staff and synod leadership serve and assist congregations and their members and communities to **c**onnect, to **a**dministrate, and to **r**esource. We are like a pace car or service vehicle, running alongside congregations as they travel the lanes of this road: the way of Jesus Christ.

Synod Purpose Statement for This Strategic Intent

Connecting congregations for life-giving mission and ministry: so they can love like Jesus, heal like Jesus, and engage like Jesus – growing young, gaining strength, and going beyond death to life.

¹ "Synod leadership" includes the Synod Assembly, Synod Council, Mission District Councils and Deans, along with Synod Ministry Teams listed in our governing documents, and special committees and task forces created and/or approved by the bishop, the bishop's staff, or synod leadership itself. "Bishop's staff" includes the bishop and those appointed by the bishop who serve at the request and approval of the bishop and by the consent of the Synod Council.

What is synod culture?

“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

(Romans 12:2)

“We make the road by walking” – Brian McLaren (also the title of the book he authored)²

Culture (a communal way of life that forms and shapes individual lives) works best when it is grounded in shared values and shared vocabulary. Everything we do as church together within the NEPA Synod should incorporate all three of these values. The culture of the NEPA Synod will generate congregations and leaders who:

LOVE like Jesus

God first loves us, before we ever love God (1 John 4:19). God's love extends unconditionally to all creation, enabling us to love God and others. Jesus, embodying this love, calls us to love God and our neighbors as the greatest commandments (Mark 12:28-31). This understanding empowers us to connect and engage compassionately with others. *This includes biblical values of: dignity; compassion; and justice.*

HEAL like Jesus

We all need healing, with God as our great healer. Jesus showed that being human involves being wounded, but through God's love, we can live without letting our wounds harm others. By recognizing our brokenness and seeking healing, we can support others with grace, forgiveness, and compassion. Healing is crucial in ministry, and we can trust God's promise to be with us and tend to us. *This includes biblical values of: forgiveness; grace; mercy; reconciliation; and faithful stewardship of God's creation and gifts.*

ENGAGE like Jesus

Engagement, which involves the conscious decision to dwell in the attention and efforts of another, helps us build deeper relationships within our churches and community. It allows us to understand and respond to those who are hurting, participate in God's work, and respond to the Spirit's call. To engage effectively, we must remain rooted in God's love, tend to our wounds, listen more than speak, and use contemplative practices to notice God's movement and the Spirit's guidance. *This includes biblical values of: inclusion; diversity; courage and openness to change.*

² Bryan D. McLaren, *We Make the Road By Walking*, Jericho Books, 2014.

DRAFT – May 5, 2025

Our cultural values of LOVE, HEAL, ENGAGE are intended to help us and keep us following Jesus, “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), to keep us welcoming, thriving, and connecting with God, our neighbors, and all creation: friends and enemies alike, families and strangers alike, saints and sinners alike. Together we travel in the three LANES:

Growing Young

Becoming a Jesus-centered community that equips diverse, intergenerational leaders, so that faithful people – with emphasis on youth, young adults, and young families – can be equipped as Christ’s disciples to engage the world. *Becoming a more welcoming church to all people, and especially new, young, and diverse people.*

Gaining Strength

Helping and encouraging every leader and every congregation to find partners that can share resources and combine strengths, leading to life-giving ministry and mission. *Becoming a more connected, sustaining church.*

Going Beyond Death to Life

Participating in transformational ministry inside or outside the church walls, bearing witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ by encouraging congregations to embrace their purpose and place in God’s mission. *Becoming a thriving church, rooted in tradition and radically relevant.*

For additional clarity on the Three Lanes, see Addendum B.

Note our connections as the ELCA: We give thanks to God for the presence of the Holy Spirit who is aligning us with the vision and purpose similarly discerned by our Churchwide office and expression. *The words in italics above are taken from the [“Vision and Purpose” statements](#) currently in place with us as the ELCA.* While these are newer to the ELCA and so not originally used in developing our NEPA Lanes and Values, that align well and remind us that God is up to something new with all of us!

Present Realities and Opportunities This Strategic Intent Addresses

1. **We now have a Spirit-led roadmap for our teams and leaders.** Our three Values and three Lanes are proving to be a helpful framework for us as a synod to reexamine and redefine our ministries, teams, task forces, committees and other governance structures. For example, the effectiveness of mission district structure and the amount of leadership and support needed to maintain it, needs to be considered. It is hoped this document will be a useful guide for the Redesign Team – the group tasked by our Synod Council to research, reflect, and propose a new and better structure for our synod governance and life together across our congregations.
2. **LLM and 6261: Strong congregational response – but they want more support.** Licensed Lay Ministry and 6261 Ministry Communities are two initiatives that our synod is deeply embracing as a plan of action and a source of life and hope. Over 50 persons are currently in or moving into the training process for LLM. The first 6261 “bundle” has officially begun in Reading as of February 1, 2025; at least three more are moving towards launching in the next year; and at least 11 areas are discerning – that’s 15 bundles, involving more than 100 congregations (out of 237). All these congregations and their leaders are requesting appropriate guidance and support from synod leadership and the bishop’s staff – especially from our Director for Evangelical Mission, Kat Tigerman, whose workload for 6261 alone is rapidly growing to full-time. The success of both these initiatives particularly reveal our need for re-aligned staffing. We don’t currently have enough staff to support our congregations in these areas, especially in this critical early stage of the next 3-5 years.
3. **Bishop’s staff wants to work smarter, not harder.** In the middle of the last decade, the bishop’s staff was cut significantly in the hope of achieving long-term sustainability in a time of diminishing mission support. In the decade since, the bishops and their staff have struggled to keep up with the workload. Good adjustments have been made, and hard-working and committed people serve well in their positions. But with this strategic intent, we now have the opportunity to work smarter than ever, with more efficiency, clarity of purpose and direction. We can better define and sharpen our goals and thus our roles. And we can ask for help from those with expertise, experience, and good ideas, all around in our congregations and communities.
4. **We want to engage and empower more lay leaders and non-staff.** Related to the previous point: we have the opportunity to rethink, re-align and sharpen some of the previous notions of bishop’s staff support and roles that don’t match our current realities and opportunities. In the past, the bishop had a larger staff with more full-time roles and responsibilities. Today, many may not realize that the majority of the bishop’s staff are less than full time – and most of those are working full-time-plus in their own congregations. The goals for staffing going forward need to be focused on

DRAFT – May 5, 2025

supporting congregations and ministries that are guided by the work of our common Lanes and Values; and are led and engaged by lay leaders working with rostered ministers – and not by bishop’s staff.

5. **We now have new approaches to engaging youth and families.** In meeting with congregations and leaders across our synod, one message has been clear and consistent: we want to engage more younger people and families, but we are struggling to reach them. And yet there are places and initiatives, congregations and individuals all across this synod who are finding new ways that work. Our 3 Lanes and 3 Values are also connecting with younger folks. With this new strategic intent, we can seize an opportunity to show our deep commitment and our willingness to invest in what matters most to younger people today. And this can be done, without ignoring the needs and passions of our majority older members; in fact, God is calling us to deploy all our wisdom and resources to Growing Younger at every age.
6. **People will commit as God bears the fruit.** Mission support giving to carry out the work of God through us as a synod has been going down consistently for years. While there are multiple reasons for this, one key factor may be that congregations need to understand not just what “the Synod” is doing, but how we are all working together towards common goals, vision, and values. If they see how the bishop’s staff is focusing its work; and they participate in that focusing, and in efforts they believe in and see bearing fruit – the people of our synod will not only be more committed to regular mission support; but may feel more than ever the call to contribute their time, talents, and treasures to specific aspects of that work, such as 6261 or LLM. This opportunity calls for a bishop’s staff who is more focused on tracking, listening, communicating, thanking, and inviting to give and participate.

Strategic Goals

Led by the gospel of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ and his command to love one another; together as congregations and leaders; as bishop's staff; and as synod leadership; with support from our ELCA churchwide organization, ecumenical and global companions, and ministry partners: we are working towards these broad goals for the next five to seven years. From these, we will develop sub-goals and metrics for tracking and communicating our progress.

1. Ensure and encourage that every congregation can be in partnership with other congregations of their choice, centered around mission and ministry in their communities for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ and grounded in our Lutheran tradition, commonly expressed in our three Values and Lanes.
2. Empower and encourage the roles of all believers in this NEPA Synod, especially lay persons and with particular focus on younger people, to live out their baptismal callings and to love and serve God together in this church and their communities.
3. Make it possible for every congregation in this synod to have a pastor, a deacon, and a licensed lay minister.
4. Strengthen and secure the opportunities for rostered ministers and licensed lay ministers to serve congregations in this synod – faithfully, healthfully, and safely.
5. Reduce the need for congregations to close.
6. Engage and encourage all people – especially those who have been marginalized, harmed, or under-represented – to live and serve and lead well in this synod.
7. Train, inform, onboard, communicate, track and evaluate better, to better achieve these goals.
8. Evaluate and revise our governing documents, structures, and policies to better achieve these goals.
9. Align the roles, responsibilities, goals and evaluation of the bishop and bishop's staff to better achieve these goals and create a more efficient and satisfactory working environment.
10. Engage and encourage individuals, congregations, and partners to deepen their support of these goals – through the sharing of their time, talents, and resources.

Initial List of Sub-Goals

These sub-goals are a starting place for initial planning purposes. Each key group in synod leadership and on bishop's staff will give input and develop finalized sub-goals.

- Support Redesign Team to have initial report by Synod Assembly 2025 and beyond.
- Develop a "Strategic Team" to work with synod leadership, bishop and staff to develop goals, deadlines and key metrics and continue to implement and update the Strategic Intent.
- Create a plan for more and new investment to support this work and to seek out multiple streams of financial support.
- Create a plan to train "Transition Coaches" to work with staff and Committee of Deans to assist congregations in transition (use UCC system as model).

DRAFT – May 5, 2025

- Create an electronic “dashboard” system for tracking synod numbers and metrics.
- Create succession plans for all positions.

6261 Ministry Communities and Gaining Strength Cohorts

- Put enough support in place to launch 4 bundles per year.
- Develop “Gaining Strength Cohorts” for 6261 MCs.
- Develop ELCA coaching support plan for 6261 MCs.
- Offer connection with a “Gaining Strength Cohort” for all rostered ministers by 2030.

Licensed Lay Ministry and Lay leadership

- Onboard 25 LLMs per year.
- Find and encourage people of all ages to consider LLM and rostered ministry.
- Fund the training of all LLMs so that there is no cost to any congregation.
- Encourage and make it viable for every congregation to have a LLM.
- Work towards ULS as our primary training partner for LLM and lay leadership.
- Work with ULS, synod council, new and current staff, volunteer leaders, and congregations to offer administrative and discipleship training for mission district deans, councils and their officers, for lay leaders and rostered ministers.

Deacons (Ministers of Word and Service)

- Take steps to make NEPS the best place for deacons in the ELCA.
- Communicate in and beyond synod our work through 6261, which needs deacons.
- Encourage deacon vocations, including through LLM.
- Keep compensation for deacons on par with pastors.

More sub-goals to be developed or sharpened through the roll-out and transitional phase of Strategic Intent.

Bishop's Staff Roles and Alignment

As we begin to form and enact our strategic intent, we need a bishop's staff structure that works in concert: with clear responsibilities, but also with overlap between roles for mutual collaboration and support. Responsibilities for key staff leaders will align in two ways: by *missional lane* and by *service area*. Some of the key staff leaders will also bear the description "Lead Servant For..." to show our commitment and intention to serve and support our congregations, their ministries, and their lay and rostered leaders who in turn understand themselves as servant leaders – disciples in the name and the way of Jesus Christ. Each lead servant will play a role in forming and updating the strategic intent and the goals of their lanes and areas through conversation with the bishop and synod leadership.

Alignment by Lanes

Staff structure will first be guided by our vision for missional development across the synod territory in terms of the three lanes: **Growing Young, Gaining Strength, and Going Beyond Death to Life**. Each lane will have at least one lead servant assigned to focus on that lane, while communicating and collaborating with their colleagues, as well as the rest of synod leadership.

Alignment by Service Areas

Along with the three lanes – the roles and responsibilities of each lead servant will also be shaped by the following categories or constituents needing service and support:

Leader Support: This service area includes support for rostered ministers (pastors and deacons), active and retired; licensed lay ministers (LLMs); candidates discerning calls to lay or rostered ministry; and leaders serving roles as officers and council members in congregations.

Congregation Support: This service area includes support for our existing congregations. It will have obvious connection with the Leader Support area.

Growing Young and Emerging Ministries: This service area includes support for ministries to youth, young adults and families; and both the existing and new special ministry communities designated as "Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities" (SAWCs) and "Synod Authorized Outreach Communities" (SAOMs).

Gaining Strength and 6261: This service area includes support for our rostered minister development groups known as "Gaining Strength Cohorts"; and our 6261 Ministry Communities.

What do we mean by “Lead Servant for...”?

As we seek to build a culture clearly centered in Christ, our vocabulary matters. The words we use communicate that our understanding of our roles and where we place our commitments and our trust. Also, our vocabulary helps to align our team structure so that we have clarity of roles and expectations for our leaders and those they serve.

The term “servant” aligns with Jesus’ command to wash the feet of others (John 13:12-20). While we want our key staff leaders to be strong in leadership, we want each to lead with a servant’s heart (Matthew 20:24-28).

The bishop’s role must also be a servant-leader who discerns and conveys vision and overall direction, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer, deliberation and collaboration. This role works best in a synod of this size³ when the bishop spends more of their time as the “conductor of the orchestra” ensuring that all the parts are working in concert while constantly looking ahead and recalibrating for the future. The Lead Servants, therefore, become the frontline and the go-to leaders in the execution of each area of ministry support.

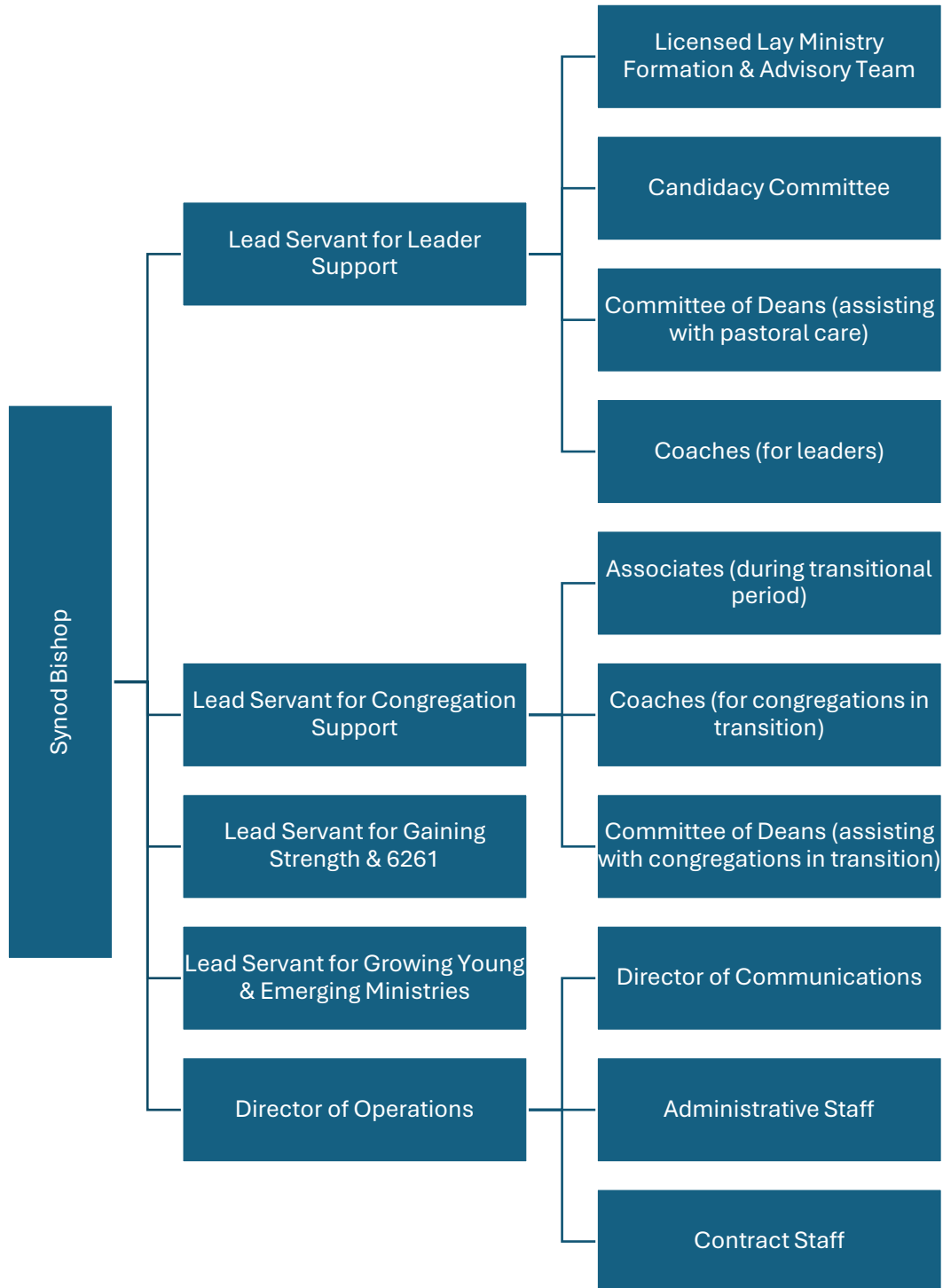
Also, as we seek to attract highly skilled candidates for these roles, the title of Lead Servant demonstrates that each will play a critical part in visioning and creating the strategic direction for their areas of ministry. And, they will understand they serve a higher authority: our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and his church, his Body, who is alive and active in the world through congregations of baptized members – all of whom share leadership and serve God by loving and serving their neighbor, as they spread the good news of Jesus.

Using titles such as this will differentiate our synod structure from others. It will communicate to people that we have a team of leaders who are equipped and unleashed to dream, fuel, and execute all of the key areas of Christian discipleship in our synod life together.

In summary, the title Lead Servant aligns deeply with our values to Love Like Jesus, Heal Like Jesus, and Engage Like Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate Lead Servant. We seek to emulate Jesus in all that we are and do.

³ We as the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod have the largest number of congregations in the ELCA (237).

Bishop's Staff After Full Implementation (for current structure see Addendum E)



Operational Structure and Responsibility

- **Synod Bishop (Full-time)**
 - The responsibilities that follow should be in concert with the duties described in the NEPA Synod Constitution and Bylaws.
 - Responsible for working alongside the synod council to craft the vision and strategic intent of the synod – the servant leader in the role of *cultural architect*.
 - Oversee the bishop's staff to ensure alignment and collaboration between roles as defined by the strategic intent.
 - Five direct reports: the Director of Operations, Lead Servant for Leader Support, Lead Servant for Congregation Support, Lead Servant for Growing Young and Emerging Ministries, and Lead Servant for Gaining Strength/6261.
 - Work with ELCA, Regional Synods, and ecumenical partners to foster diversity, accessibility, inclusion and equity in the synod, according to God's will, our scriptures, creeds, and Lutheran Confessions; and according to the standards and guidelines set by our synod and by our ELCA social messages, policies and governing documents.
 - As the chief communicator for the synod, regularly and consistently articulate the vision and direction of the synod with the bishop's staff, synod council, congregations and congregational leaders; with clear goals and appropriate metrics to evaluate and sharpen our strategies.
 - Serve to connect congregations and leaders missionally across the synod territory based on shared passions and gifts.
 - Serve as the primary connector and communicator with full-communion partners within the synod territory.
 - Serve as the primary conduit with ELCA Churchwide Office and other ELCA synods, while also encouraging appropriate helpful connection directly between synod leadership and staff, and ELCA and ecumenical partners.
 - Manage the relationship with our four Global Companions: South-Central Diocese in Tanzania; Argentina-Uruguay; Saxony Germany; and Slovenia.
 - Encourage visionary succession planning.
 - Working with Director of Operations, create and maintain data "dashboards" on key metrics for their work.
 - Serve as synod's chief boundary officer and enforcer of Guidelines for Discipline for Rostered Leaders and LLMs.

DRAFT – May 5, 2025

- **Lead Servant for Leader Support** (Full-time – reports to bishop)
 - Primarily focus on strategies in the lanes: **Going Beyond Death to Life** and **Gaining Strength**.
 - With the Bishop, build warm relationships with lay and rostered leaders in the synod; be known as the **“go-to” leader for leaders** on the bishop’s staff.
 - **Candidacy:** Focus on strengthening the language and culture of vocation within NEPA and the ELCA. Working with partners—such as Bear Creek Camp, Licensed Lay Ministry Coordinator, Churchwide, area seminaries, and other denominations—develop a web of resources. Provide staff support for the Candidacy Committee. Remain up-to-date on candidacy policies and procedures. Facilitate conversations with seminaries on candidates’ progress and formation. Foster connections with seminaries and Lead Servant team to strategize best placement and support of interns.
 - **Licensed Lay Ministry:** Supervise the Licensed Lay Ministry Coordinator and the process for training, credentialing and supervising LLMs.
 - **First Call Formation:** Develop and Oversee First Call Theological Education for NEPA rostered ministers, in accordance with ELCA directives.
 - **Call Process and Mobility:** working with the Bishop and Lead Servant team, develop relationships with rostered ministers who indicate a willingness to change calls and encourage them to consider calls in Northeastern PA. Receive, activate and make initial contact with rostered ministers entering the system with RMPs (with Bishop and Lead Servant for Congregation Support). Develop and maintain a network with Full Communion Partners to place non-ELCA rostered ministers in calls when such opportunities arise. Update NEPA’s call process documents.
 - **Leadership Development:** With Lead Servant team, Committee of Deans, and Synod Council, create strategy and goals for leaders’ health and development. With Bishop, recruit and provide guidance to the Leadership Development Team; with Team, develop yearly compensation guidelines; and promote healthy personal and professional practices through continuing education for rostered ministers, LLMs, and lay leaders. Do this in cooperation with ELCA Offices, other synods, ecumenical partners and secular partners – including governmental agencies, and academic sources. Work closely with United Lutheran Seminary, Moravian Seminary, and Muhlenberg College in their educational offerings for rostered and lay leaders and members, especially those supporting our 3 Lanes and Values, LLM and 6261.
 - **Annual RM Reports:** Receive and review the annual rostered minister reports as a means for being aware of the health and vitality of the leaders; consult with Bishop, Lead Servants and administrative support for follow-up.
 - **ELCA Coaching:** With Lead Servant team and Committee of Deans, encourage ELCA Coaching relationships to support synod Leaders.

DRAFT – May 5, 2025

- **Retired Roster Engagement:** Assist rostered ministers and congregations in retirement and benefits issues; interact with and encourage involvement from our retired roster.
- **Committee of Deans:** Work with Bishop and Lead Servant for Congregation Support to supervise Committee of Deans, especially in areas of pastoral care.
- Working with Director of Operations, create and maintain **data dashboards** on key metrics for their work.
- Spearhead **grant applications** to support work in these lanes and responsibilities, with aid of bishop's staff and Director of Operations.
- Be available to supply-preach and **represent the bishop's office** for important meetings and activities.

DRAFT – May 5, 2025

- **Lead Servant for Congregation Support** (Full-time – reports to bishop)
 - Primarily focus on strategies in the lanes: **Going Beyond Death to Life** and **Gaining Strength**.
 - With the Bishop, build warm relationships with congregations in the synod; be known as the **“go-to” leader for congregation support** on the bishop’s staff.
 - **Transition:** Provide support and supervision to congregations seeking a new rostered leader or LLM; maintain a clear, effective and timely transitional process; manage follow-up contact with rostered ministers entering the system (with Bishop and Lead Servant for Leader Support); work with administrative staff to maintain files and the data dashboard for congregations in transition, with support from the Director of Operations; with Bishop and the Lead Servant for Leader Support, supervise Committee of Deans to support congregations in transition; and with Bishop and the Lead Servant for Leader Support, develop and deploy a team of “transition coaches” to assist congregations in transition.
 - **Interim Ministry for Congregations:** Seek out, maintain list, and deploy interim ministers and designated pastors, consulting with Lead Servant for Leader Support and bishop.
 - **Legacy and Purpose, and Holy Closure:** Accompany congregations to implement strategies for closing well and leaving a lasting legacy.
 - **Congregation Connections:** Support the shaping and strengthening of current and new connections, and facilitate the renovation of our mission district structure; working with Lead Servants for Leader Support and for Gaining Strength/6261, recruit and place rostered ministers and LLMs for 6261.
 - Working with Director of Operations, create and maintain **data dashboards** on key metrics for their work.
 - Spearhead **grant applications** to support work in these lanes and responsibilities, with aid of bishop’s staff and Director of Operations.
 - Be available to supply-preach and **represent the bishop’s office** for important meetings and activities.

DRAFT – May 5, 2025

- **Lead Servant for Gaining Strength and 6261** (Full-time – reports to bishop)
 - Formerly titled as the **Director For Evangelical Mission** (DEM); position will continue to be funded from ELCA.
 - **Gaining Strength Cohorts:** Relates primarily to the **Gaining Strength** Lane: to equip rostered and lay leaders to gain strength in their ministries through intentional spiritual practices, practical organizational intelligence, service into the community, and partnership with others; includes supervision and interaction with “Gaining Strength Cohorts” – groups of Pastors and Deacons who meet over 18 months for strength-building, growth, and collaboration.
 - **6261 Ministry Community Development and Support:** Connect and guide congregations and 6261 bundles across the synod territory based on shared areas and/or passions for outreach. Develop the formation of a 6261 Steering Team which can help in the oversight of 6261.
 - **ELCA Coaching:** Strengthen the culture of coaching in the NEPA Synod, especially for 6261 Bundles and Gaining Strength Cohort participants.
 - Work with creation of innovative ministries in “**mixed ecology**” vision within 6261 bundles; sharing and coordinating this strategy with the Lead Servant for Growing Young/Emerging Ministries. Promote and support new and current ministries growing out of 6261 bundles, including Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities (SAWC), and our Synod Authorized Outreach Ministry (SAOM).
 - **LLMs in 6261:** Provide consultation for the Licensed Lay Ministry initiative, in relation to 6261 bundles.
 - Working with Director of Operations, create and maintain **data dashboards** on key metrics for their work.
 - Spearhead **grant applications** to support work in this lane and responsibilities, with aid of Director of Operations.
 - Be available to supply-preach and **represent the bishop’s office** for important meetings and activities.

DRAFT – May 5, 2025

- **Lead Servant for Growing Young & Emerging Ministries** (Full-time – reports to bishop)
 - Two Focal Lanes: **Going Beyond Death to Life** and **Growing Young**.
 - **New & Emerging Ministries:** Be the “go-to” leader for any initiatives for new ministries or communities in our synod, especially those focused on ministry with, for, and to new, young, and diverse people. Work with creation of innovative ministries in ELCA “mixed ecology” vision; coordinating this strategy with Lead Servant for Gaining Strength/6261, other synods and Churchwide.
 - **Growing Young:** Invest in and connect congregations, leaders and staff toward their goals of generating a multigenerational Growing Young spirit within their communities, guided by the 6 “Essential Strategies” of Growing Young (see Addendum A). Assist and advise congregations in assessing and fueling congregational development that relates to children, youth, and young families within congregations and their surrounding ministry contexts. Invest in congregational leaders as they equip parents and grandparents to live the Christ culture in a way that shapes and forms their children and youth as disciples of Christ.
 - **SAWCs & SAOMs:** Facilitate creation, implementation, supervision and multiplication of new and current “Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities” (SAWCs) and “Synod Authorized Outreach Ministries” (SAOMs).
 - **Stewardship & Generosity:** Work Lead Servant for Congregation Support, the Director of Communications, “God’s Work Our Hands” storytellers, and 5G Team (stewardship and generating generosity) to showcase impact stories of Mission Support giving. Be present for 5G meetings. Accompany the Lead Servant team, Administrative staff, and 5G Team to grant-write and develop multiple revenue streams for mission support. Give guidance and expertise in locating material support for Synod initiatives. Provide staff support, as requested, to ministry groups called to Love, Heal, and Engage—including the LGBT+, Hunger, Racial Justice, and Green teams.
 - Working with Director of Operations, create and maintain **data dashboards** on key metrics for their work.

- **Director of Operations** (3/4 time, moving towards full-time – reports to bishop)
 - The Director of Operations works closely with the bishop to conduct the operations of the synod, keeping focus on the 3 Lanes and 3 Values.
 - Supervise the Director of Communications and all administrative staff. In consultation with the bishop, executes hiring, firing, and disciplinary functions on the bishop's staff.
 - With support from administrative staff, responsible for human resources, onboarding new staff, evaluation processes, calendar, facility needs, staff meetings, and inner-staff communication. This will include the creation of an electronic planning platform and “dashboard” system for keeping track of key goals and metrics.
 - Solicit budget needs from synod leadership and then collaborates with the Bishop, the Synod Treasurer and Executive Committee, Finance Committee and the Synod Council in creating and enacting the annual synod budget.
 - Assists Synod Treasurer as she/he supervises Witness and Service and Church Loan Fund processes.
 - Communicates with congregations and leaders regarding mission support, working with administrative staff and Lead Servants for Leader Support and for Congregation Support.
 - With bishop's staff and Treasurer, seeks additional revenue streams through:
 - ELCA funding
 - Congregational trust funds or foundations
 - Granting agencies such as the Lilly Foundation
 - Relate to the annual Synod Assembly Team and the annual Bishop's Conference Team to assure their goals are met and they maintain budgetary limits.
 - Utilize administrative staff to support the planning for synod retreats and events.

DRAFT – May 5, 2025

- **Director of Communications** (Full-time – reports to Director of Operations)
 - With the bishop, be the “go-to” leader for “green-lighting” or approving communications materials that represent the whole synod.
 - The Director of Communications generates and maintains the brand look and message for the NEPA Synod.
 - Creates and maintains the content on the synod website and social media.
 - Creates newsletters, videos, and publications that tell missional stories from within the NEPA Synod.
 - Oversees all material being distributed from the NEPA Synod leaders and bishop’s staff to ensure brand consistency.
 - Distributes information and material from ELCA Churchwide.
 - Working with Director of Operations, create and maintain data “dashboards” on key metrics for their work.

- **Administrative Coordinators and Contract Support** (report to Director of Operations)
 - The administrative roles and responsibilities are to be defined by the Bishop in consultation with bishop’s staff and synod leadership.
 - LLM Coordinator role will continue through the period of building program structure.
 - Two current roles will be maintained:
 - Leadership Support Coordinator
 - Mission Support Coordinator
 - A new role will be added to support LLM and 6261. This position was approved by Synod Council 12/07/2024 to begin in FY 2025:
 - Ministry Support Administrator
 - Additional contractor and volunteer support:
 - Pastor Doug Hill (Gaining Strength Cohort)
 - Pastor Dave DeRemer (coach for 6261)
 - “ELCA Coaches” for lay and rostered leaders
 - “Transition Coaches” which can work with Deans and staff to support congregations in transition; hourly stipends to be considered.

NOTE: This Strategic Intent adds only one new full-time position.

Responsibilities and Positions to Change

Please note that none of the three major changes that follow are a reflection on the quality or significance of the work of the staff who faithfully carry it out. But in living out our Values and Lanes, we are called to make choices that best align our time and resources. To love and engage like Jesus can mean we need to share the work and give it away to others (John 14:12). Growing Young and Gaining Strength can mean, practicing “keychain leadership” and sharing strengths and assets with others, including time and wisdom. These three examples, though very significant, will not be the only ways we will need to cease doing some things and share responsibilities with others.

Admin Staff Support for Finding Sunday Supply Pastors

The work to assist congregations in transition to find a supply pastor is currently taking as much as 20 hours per week of administrative support. There are very few synods providing this level of support today. The hope is, this administrative task can be reduced to less than 10 hours per week, as congregations are encouraged to work with the four Lead Servants to find assigned transitional preachers and presiders, and consider finding LLMs, joining 6261 bundles, or moving to faithful closure with legacy and purpose.

Staff Involvement and Liaison with Ministry Teams and Partners

Care needs to be taken to give back as many roles and responsibilities as possible to others outside the bishop’s staff; so that the bishop’s staff can focus on their role of C.A.R. support based on the three Values and Three Lanes. In particular, bishop’s staff should seek to step away from:

- Any synod roles that could be done by rostered ministers or lay persons not on staff;
- The traditional role of “staff representative” on Ministry Teams;
- Serving on Boards of partner organizations (except as is constitutionally required of the bishop);
- Other leadership positions that in the past were held by bishop’s staff, such as guiding Witness and Service team or heading up grant or loan processes.

Associates of the Bishop for Each Mission District

For over 20 years, we have greatly benefited from a staff structure that included multiple Associates of the Bishop who serve in Mission Districts, especially in accompanying congregations in transition (See Addendum C for current position description). Early on, these were full-time positions with one per Mission District. In the past four years, we have reduced that number to seven – doing this work part time, along with their full time work as pastors in congregations. However, several challenges have made this structure less effective, including:

- Less consistency of process and messaging across mission districts – seven different methods have developed, sometimes leading to confusion for staff, rostered minister candidates, and congregations in transition.
- Some mission districts have a lot of work for Associates to do, others less so.

DRAFT – May 5, 2025

- The full-time pastors in this role cannot be in other congregations on Sundays; yet Sunday mornings are the prime time to best interact with the whole congregation.
- They are also very busy with their own congregations; and some are bearing additional responsibilities beyond their congregations.
- It is increasingly difficult for them to find the time to meet regularly as a group.
- People across the synod think they are still full-time – and expect full-time service.

Most of these challenges could be more efficiently addressed if this work were shared differently – moving towards a staff with fewer people who have more time to commit to these tasks. Following the full implementation of the plan laid out in this strategic intent, the support work currently carried out through the roles of the seven Associates, the one Executive Associate for Leadership, the bishop and admin support staff, would move to:

- **Two full-time Lead Servants** – one supporting the leaders, and one supporting congregations.
- **The current “Gaining Strength Cohorts” groupings** – which builds-in support and pastoral care for pastors and deacons – now and more so as time goes on.
- **The current Committee of Deans structure** – with some additional training but without need to expand their current workload.
- And, to be developed: **“transition coaches”** who can work with congregations in transition.
- **The current rostered minister mentors** providing support and care for LLMs
- Working as well with the **bishop and current admin support staff**.

We want to make it very clear that the seven rostered ministers currently in this role, and the others who preceded them, have done and are doing an outstanding job. They have worked with hundreds of congregations and rostered ministers to find fulfilling and well-placed calls, while maintaining full-time leadership roles in their own congregations. They have put in countless hours, driven thousands of miles, made many phone calls and visits, poured over documents, faithfully created and followed processes and prayerfully devised creative new solutions that have led to Spirit-led outcomes across this synod and the whole church. They have served and led through colossal changes and a global pandemic, with many leaders and congregations deeply grateful for their work.

Let us give thanks to God for the dedicated work of our current Associates of the Bishop:

Pastor Samantha Drennan, serving the **Northern Lehigh Valley Mission District**

Pastor Charles Grube, serving the **Scranton and Wilkes-Barre Mission District**

Pastor Jean Huber, serving the **Lehigh Mission District** and the **Bethlehem Easton Mission District**

Pastor Zach Labagh, serving the **Schuylkill Mission District**

Pastor Drew Neidig, serving the **East Berks Mission District** and the **West Berks Mission District**

Pastor Niels Nielsen, serving the **Pocono Mission District**

Pastor Carl Shankweiler, serving the **Hazleton/Lehighon Mission District**

This transitional period will take time – months most likely. There will need to be sufficient overlap between the current and future structure to minimize the disruption for congregations, staff, and all involved, including the Associates themselves. The bishop will also look forward to working with each current Associate to discern ways to pursue ministries, ideas, and initiatives that they feel called to and passionate about – including 6261, LLM mentorship, and other missional plans and areas of expertise. This is also an opportunity to lift up appropriate authority to and partnership with our nine Mission District Deans. These Rostered Ministers have been elected by their Mission Districts and already serve as valued leaders in terms of pastoral care and mission district governance, according to our Synod Constitution and existing Position Description for the role of Dean (see Addendum D).

Next Steps for this Strategic Intent

- Approval and input from Synod Council
- Work alongside the Synod Redesign Special Committee
- Further implementation plans with Synod Treasurer, Staff, and Finance Committee
- Work with current staff for smooth transition and good deployment of their talents, interests and experience
- Posting and hiring process for positions
- Announcement at Synod Assembly
- Development of a “Strategic Team” to work with synod leadership, bishop and staff to develop goals, deadlines and key metrics and continue to implement and update the Strategic Intent

ADDENDUM A

The 6 Essential Strategies of Churches Growing Young⁴

Unlock keychain leadership:

Instead of centralizing authority, empower others—especially young people.

Be the best neighbors:

Instead of condemning the world outside your walls, enable young people to neighbor well locally and globally.

Prioritize young people (and families) everywhere:

Instead of giving lip service to how much young people matter, look for creative ways to tangibly support, resource, and involve them in all facets of your congregation.

Fuel a warm community:

Instead of focusing on cool worship or programs, aim for warm peer and intergenerational friendships.

Take Jesus' message seriously:

Instead of asserting formulaic gospel claims, welcome young people into a Jesus-centered way of life.

Empathize with today's young people:

Instead of judging or criticizing, step into the shoes of this generation.

⁴ Powell, Mulder, Griffin, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*, Baker Books, September 2016.

ADDENDUM B

More Clarity on Lanes and Roles

Growing Young

Growing Young is more than a strategy. It is a call to raise up the next generation and to connect the dots across all generations. By creating spaces of belonging, listening deeply to their voices of the emerging generations, and empowering cross-generational leadership, we ignite a flame of faith that illuminates and connects the present and future. In a world longing for authenticity, we are reminded that Spirit-led energy and wisdom are gifts to be cherished and cultivated from all places and with all ages. It's important that we understand that *Growing Young* focuses on drawing younger people into our congregations and ministries through generating a youthful spirit and energy within congregations. As congregations assess the efficacy of their ministries and practices, we hope to inspire joyful creativity and innovation that fuels Christ's mission of life for people of all generations.

Gaining Strength

Gaining Strength highlights the power of community. When congregations come together to share resources, stories, and support they discover a strength that transcends individual efforts. This lane celebrates the beauty of collaboration—of being the body of Christ, where every part contributes to the whole. Through shared ministry, we witness the miraculous multiplication of hope and impact.

Gaining Strength cohorts of rostered ministers will continue to be formed, equipped, and unleashed for collaboration, innovation, and support. Congregational leaders will also be added into *Gaining Strength* cohorts as the rostered ministers build deeper relationships and partnerships for Christ's mission of life.

6261 Bundles are an integral piece of the *Gaining Strength* Lane as congregations are connected for shared missional development. While *Gaining Strength* cohorts develop partnerships organically and as needed, 6261 Bundles will intentionally define and articulate their shared missional focus and identity. They will share resources for staffing and missional initiatives.

Going Beyond Death to Life

Going Beyond Death to Life speaks to the core of our faith—resurrection. It challenges us to see beyond loss and embrace transformation. Whether it's revitalizing declining ministries or finding new ways to serve, this lane reminds us that death is not the end. In Christ, there is always the promise of new life, new beginnings, and new possibilities. When a congregation reaches out to the synod office for support, the Lead Servant for Congregation Support can respond to assess the needs of the congregation. If the

DRAFT – May 5, 2025

congregation seeks redevelopment or revitalization, the LS for CS connects the congregation to one of the other Lead Servants, depending on their needs and goals. If a congregation seeks holy closure, the Lead Servant for Congregation Support accompanies the congregation in the process. The Lead Servant for Congregation Support engages the congregation in an open and candid conversation about ways that the congregation's assets can be re-invested and utilized for fueling local mission and our common values and mission we share as synod.

Rostered and LLM Support

We want all rostered and licensed lay leaders within the NEPA Synod to be healthy, whole, and fulfilled through their work of ministry. We want rostered and licensed lay leaders to have easy access to tools and resources that support their work. We strive for our leaders to have collaborative and supportive relationships with one another as they learn and innovate together.

We also strive to seek out and identify potential new rostered and lay leaders to serve in the NEPA Synod. We want to be known as a synod that welcomes leaders with an entrepreneurial spirit, a passion for Christ's mission of life for all, and a deep drive for collaboration and connection with colleagues. We seek to connect rostered and lay leaders with calls that align with their particular gifts, passions, and experiences. We seek to listen to the needs of our rostered and lay leaders so that we can continually provide opportunities for personal and professional development. We strive for our assemblies, conferences, and retreats to provide high quality content while offering opportunities for relationship building and collaboration. We believe connecting congregations and leaders around mission-focus will generate greater collaborative energy for all. This goal may move us away from our current Mission District structure to a form that better aligns congregations who have similar missions or ministry projects, or that are grouping in 6261-like bundles.

ADDENDUM C

Current Position Description – Associate of the Bishop

UPDATED: August 2024

OVERALL GOALS:

- *To share the Good News of Jesus Christ through the Lanes and Values of “Love. Heal. Engage.”*
- *Lanes Focus for this position: GAINING STRENGTH*
- *Work with the congregations and leaders of assigned Mission District(s), highlighting the mutual ministry between the Synod/ELCA and congregations.*

SUPERVISOR: Executive Associate of the Bishop for Leadership

HOURS: Quarter-Time (up to 12 hours/week). More hours for Associates with more than one Mission District

COMPENSATION: (to be determined, based on experience of person holding position)

COMPENSATION STATUS: Part-time, salaried, exempt.

BENEFITS AVAILABLE: (to be determined, based on needs of person holding position)

OFFICE LOCATION: able to work remotely with an essential need to be at Lutheran Center for meetings and strategizing.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Walk with congregations through the entirety of the transition/call process. This includes identifying and recruit appropriate pastoral care for congregations in leadership transitions; meeting with councils and call committees throughout the call process; providing appropriate documentation at the various stages of the process; identifying, along with other synod staff, possible candidates for congregations; acting as a bridge between candidates and congregations; and, being available for consultation, consolation, and conversation.
2. Work directly with congregations/rostered ministers on issues of conflict, involving the dean as necessary.
3. Touch base regularly with Mission District Dean(s). Encourage congregations in their Mission Support and submitting yearly parochial reports.
4. Relaying details about upcoming events and deadlines to mission district leaders and congregations.
5. Attend Mission District Council meetings, bringing transition updates as well as information from around the Synod. If unable to attend, provide a written report.
6. Develop relationships with congregations/rostered ministers outside of the transition process, especially those engaged in healthy, vital ministry.

DRAFT – May 5, 2025

7. Attend Rostered Minister gatherings as able.
8. Notice opportunities for collaboration/cross-pollination across Mission Districts for the sake of the Gospel.
9. Develop an awareness of the features of Union/Federated congregations. Collaborate with respective UCC counterpart to find appropriate candidates when Union/Federated congregations are in transition.
10. Be available to represent the Bishop's Office for important meetings and activities.
11. Provide regular report of their work and congregational interactions to Bishop and other staff. Attend staff meetings regularly (currently approximately 2x/month).

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS:

1. Master's degree in counseling, chaplaincy or theology
2. 3-5 years of experience
3. Strong, clear, demonstratable communication skills
4. Skills and experience with MS Office Suite, Zoom, budgeting, and church structure and constitutional policies and practices
5. Organized, proactive, timely, and enjoys working with people and sharing their stories
6. Clear capacity to thrive in a collaborative and high-energy work environment
7. Understanding of Christian faith and Lutheran traditions
8. Skills in follow-through and record management

ADDENDUM D

Current Position Description – Mission District Dean

UPDATED: October 2024

OVERALL GOALS:

- *To share the Good News of Jesus Christ through the Lanes and Values of “Love. Heal. Engage.”*
- *Synod Lane for this position: GAINING STRENGTH*

HOURS: Varied; not more than 12-16 hours/month

COMPENSATION: Volunteer

LENGTH OF SERVICE: 3-year term, elected at the Mission District Assembly. May serve 2 consecutive terms.

ELIGIBILITY: Deacon or Pastor, active or retired, whose congregational membership is within the mission district where they’re elected.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Conduct exit interviews for rostered ministers leaving their call.
2. As part of the Committee of Deans, serve as advisor to the Bishop. Attend Dean’s meetings (currently every other month).
3. Provide direct pastoral care for rostered ministers actively serving in mission district congregations, when requested.
4. Work with congregations/rostered ministers on issues of conflict, involving the Associate of the Bishop as needed.
5. Touch base regularly with Associate of the Bishop for the Mission District. Work together in: encouraging congregations to submit mission support intent forms and yearly parochial reports, encouraging rostered ministers to submit the Annual Report to the Bishop, and thanking congregations for mission support giving.
6. Attend Mission District Council meetings (executive and regular) and chair the annual Mission District Assembly.
7. Develop relationships with congregations/rostered ministers, especially those engaged in healthy, vital ministry.
8. Attend Rostered Minister gatherings as able, as well as ordinations and installations.
9. Notice opportunities for collaboration/cross-pollination across Mission Districts for the sake of the Gospel.
10. Be available to represent the Bishop’s Office for important meetings and activities.

NEPS CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS on Position of Mission District Dean:

BLS12.01.g. The dean will serve as an advisor to the bishop, and will assist in representing this synod and the Mission District at important events in congregations and communities.

- l) The dean shall preside at the meetings of the Mission District Assembly.
- 2) The dean will work in conjunction with the synod staff person assigned to the Mission District. The dean may be assigned further responsibilities by the bishop of this synod or by the Synod Council.
- 3) The dean will report annually to the Mission District Assembly.

PROPOSAL FOR NEW BYLAW TO SYNOD CONSTITUTION

BLS12.01.g. The primary responsibilities of the dean shall be as follows:

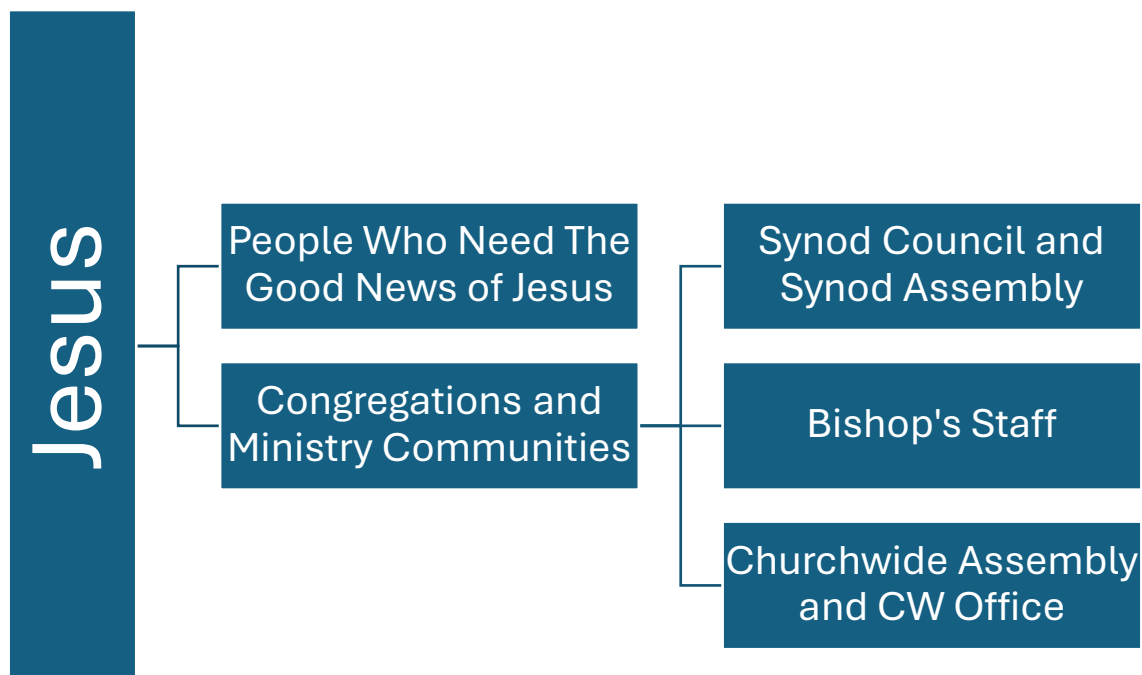
- 1) The dean shall serve as an advisor to the bishop and assist the bishop as requested in representing the synod and the Mission District at events in congregations and communities.
- 2) The dean shall preside at all meetings of the Mission District Assembly and report to each assembly.
- 3) When schedules permit, the dean shall conduct exit interviews for rostered ministers leaving their calls.
- 4) The dean shall work with congregations and rostered ministers regarding issues of conflict.
- 5) The dean shall encourage congregations and rostered ministers to submit forms and reports as requested by synod and churchwide officers and councils.
- 6) The dean shall attend Mission District Council meetings and report to each meeting of the council.
- 7) As time permits, the dean shall attend district-wide gatherings of rostered leaders.
- 8) The dean shall encourage cooperation among the congregations and agencies within the district and openly support cooperation by those congregations and agencies with the congregations and judicatories of the ELCA's full communion partners operating within the district.
- 9) In assistance to the bishop, provide direct pastoral care for rostered ministers actively serving in mission district congregations when requested, it being understood that the pastoral care of retired rostered leaders falls to the pastors of the congregations of which they are members.
- 10) The dean shall assist the bishop in other ways as requested.

ADDENDUM E

Organizational Charts

Our Synod's Mission and Ministry Support Structure

Here's how we are really structured: our head is the Lord Jesus Christ.



See the next page for the chart of our current organization structure.

Bishop's Staff – Current Structure

