

2019 Synod Assembly

BISHOP Candidate Information Form

Candidate Name:

The Rev. Jeanette D. Leisk

Current Position:

Pastor

Congregation Membership:

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

Previous Positions:

- Pastor, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA (2014-present)
- Associate Pastor, St. James Lutheran Church, Gettysburg, PA (2008-2014)
- Intern, Lutheran Public Policy Office of Washington State and St. John United Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA (2005-2006)
- Physician and Instructor of Medicine, University of Massachusetts Medical Center, Westborough, MA (1997-2003)
- Resident Physician in Internal Medicine and Pediatrics, Baystate Medical Center, Tufts University, Springfield, MA (1993-1997)



Date and Year of Ordination:

June 13, 2008

Education and Earned Degree

- Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, MDiv, 2007
- Tufts University, BS, MS, MD 1987, 1989, 1993

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

- Chairperson, Stewardship and Mission Support Table, MetroDC Synod
- Lily Foundation's Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising and Luther College's MiniMBA for Church Leaders
- Mosaix, a MetroDC Synod effort to increase diversity in congregations
- Board Member, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry of PA
- Healthy Leaders Consultant for Portico (ELCA benefit management organization)



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

- Mentor, Friends of Guest House, residential program for women who have been incarcerated
- Member, People of Faith for Equality Virginia, clergy group addressing LGBTQ+ civil rights in VA
- Co-leader, Muslim-Christian theological conversation group
- Member, Mayor's Clergy Council in Alexandria
- Executive Committee, Hunger Free Alexandria

What gifts would you bring to the office of bishop of this synod?

I consider a love of God and all of God's people my greatest gifts for this office.

I have other demonstrated leadership skills. I have executive experience which began with the start up of a medical practice which entailed hiring and evaluating staff, reviewing budgets, marketing, and crisis management.

I sensed a consistent call to ordained ministry and after a few years of discernment (which included exploration of medical missions and other forms of ministry) I responded to this call. In this change of vocation, I see gifts of prayer and discernment and a certain boldness to take a different path as the Spirit leads.

When it came time for seminary internship, I applied for a Horizon internship which allowed me to serve in a congregation as well as in the Washington State Lutheran Public Policy Office. I sought out this internship because I knew as a pastor I would be a public theologian and called to speak out alongside those who are facing injustice. Through my internship experience I organized pastors, deacons, and lay leaders of various denominations and faiths to speak to legislators about social issues impacted by legislation which concern people of faith.

As a leader, I am a curious and enthusiastic learner. I share resources and best practices with others. I am a certified Level II coach, with specialized training in team coaching and discipleship provided by our synod. I serve as chair of the synod's Stewardship and Mission Support table. I value the wisdom of others and take part in monthly coaching and spiritual direction and weekly pericope (text) study with colleagues.

I believe it is a leader's role to set a clear and compelling vision for the community they lead. I am delighted that the church I serve has a vision to follow the example of Jesus and build "a bigger table" - extend into the community and widen its circle of relationships. To this end, during my 5 years here we have:



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- adopted a welcome statement including those of all gender identities and expressions into the full life of the church, thereby becoming a Reconciling in Christ congregation
- started an anti-racism team to educate ourselves about issues of privilege and its history especially in Alexandria
- created a Mosaix Implementation Team of 13 people including 3 high school students to guide our work in becoming a more diverse congregation
- expanded our social media outreach through Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook Live
- opened our doors for daily workforce development classes by Guest House, a residential program for formerly-incarcerated women
- established a monthly theological conversation group with an area mosque

What do you see as the principal challenge to this synod in the next six (6) years, and how would you address it?

I love serving in this synod and am energized by the range of gifts and opportunities for mission and advocacy we have here since we are situated in the nation's capital region.

We also have significant challenges. Respondents from the synod's transition team survey have identified congregational vitality and growth as a priority. It is a priority not because we are called to maintain buildings and institutions, but because the opportunity for people to hear the liberating and transforming news of the gospel is at stake.

Erin (not her real name) grew up in the midst of an abusive home. She is an addict and has been in and out of jail several times in the past few years. During this last stay, she started to attend weekly mass. And she was baptized. After her release she decided to enter a residential program a block from our church. She began to come to worship - attending not just one, but two services every week. (That caught my attention!) We met and began to talk about faith. We talked about grace and love and Jesus and community. We talked about caring for the earth, concern for immigrants and refugees, and confronting prejudice and discrimination. To her astonishment, I said the best description I have about God is that God is love. She then asked me a question: "Why didn't I know this about God before?"

The principal challenge for our synod is that with declining participation in churches like ours, there are more people than ever who if they only knew would ask the question, "Why didn't I know this about God before?"

There are people like Erin who have experienced trauma throughout their lives. There are people like those I meet on the metro and on the soccer fields who are doing so much with so little time. There are those who are distraught by the current atmosphere of political polarization, condemnation, and hatred.

God is love. Why didn't I know this about God before? The ELCA Lutheran churches in the MetroDC synod are here to proclaim God's love.



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I believe we best address this challenge not as isolated leaders and congregations but in relationship with each other as a synod.

- I envision deep engagement between synod staff and congregations.
- I would encourage congregations to identify the unique way(s) in which they embody God's love in their communities and offer coaching resources so that each can effectively name, celebrate, measure their impact, and extend their gifts in their local settings.
- I would use synod communications channels and expertise to share best practices and stories of how local congregations influence their communities.
- I would use the public voice of the church to advocate for the people and principles we as ELCA Lutherans hold dear as followers of Jesus who revealed to us this God of love and condemn actions and policies contrary to those principles.
- I would seek out and raise up diverse voices in leadership.
- I would ask that colleagues and lay leaders make it a practice to meet together in small groups where there is sharing of joys and concerns, prayer, and mutual accountability.
- I would explore expanding the role and training of conference deans as stipended positions responsible for knowing well the local congregations and their needs and providing assistance in transitions, celebrations, conflicts, and candidacy.

The national capital region is hungry to know that God is love. The ELCA Lutheran churches are here to proclaim that love in word and deed.

Describe your leadership style.

I am vision- and action-oriented by nature. I work best in collaboration with those who have different perspectives and am energized by a room filled with creative people willing to share ideas. I prefer not to get bogged down by details – so I need to have people around me who are more detail-oriented.

I experience the Spirit most clearly as a mighty wind and flame – and perhaps less frequently as a still small voice.

I have a spiritual director and a coach. I have relationships outside of the church which both support and challenge me. I give over 10% of my income to my local congregation and committed \$5000 personally to the synod New Connections campaign. I financially support what I believe in - I believe in the work of my congregation and the synod.

I go to Zumba, attend a reading group, follow people on Twitter whose opinions I abhor, and meet with a group of atheists every month for humility's sake.

I love people. I'm not afraid to ask for a second opinion. I initiate the hard conversations. Humor is seriously important to me.