

Southeastern Iowa Synod Governance Restructuring A Proposal for Revision

The mission goals of this synod now and in the future, are grounded in the call to provide a shared witness to God's saving action in and through Jesus Christ. While this proposal is chiefly about improving the governance of the Southeastern Iowa Synod, the ability to address the current emphasis on *Leadership* and *Vital Congregations* will be enhanced, thereby bolstering our gospel witness.

In summary, the proposal creates:

- a nomination process that intentionally considers a variety of gifts to achieve balance on the Synod Council, enriching deliberation and decision making.
- the move to 4-year terms on the Synod Council that are not renewable will lead to more people serving in positions of leadership, expanding engagement throughout the synod.
- the combination of conference chaplains, with their attention to peer relationships, and synod deans who collaborate in ways that push one another and the bishop to explore and try new things, contributes to the vitality of this synod. Leaders are supported and creative attention is given to enhancing the vitality of congregations, ministry partners, and the synod.
- possibilities yet to be envisioned are more likely to be raised with more people fully engaged. The freedom to do more than is prescribed and the freedom from structures or practices that are no longer effective sets the stage for more adaptive ministry.

Background

The Synod Council convened a task force in September 2016 to consider and prepare a proposal to restructure the synod, giving particular attention to improving governance. A draft proposal was reviewed by the Synod Council in December 2016. In February 2017, the council voted to forward the *Southeastern Iowa Synod-Structural Revision* to the 2017 Southeastern Iowa Synod Assembly for introduction, with an invitation to consider and offer feedback prior to acting on a proposal at the 2018 Southeastern Iowa Synod Assembly.

A year of conversation and shared discernment included listening posts in the fall of 2017, conversations in deans' meetings, conference gatherings, and other colleague groups, together with web-based responses to resources. This approach provided a variety of opportunities for people to "weigh in."

The timing of this proposal anticipates a shift in leadership in 2020 with the election of a new bishop. Our shared goal is to do our best to assure that this synod is in the best possible position for future-oriented ministry. More importantly - the proposed shifts seek to be responsive to current realities, including some of the significant challenges we face together today.

The following components of governance are the focus of this proposal.

Synod Council

The proposal facilitates the election of a Synod Council that will more accurately reflect the population distribution of the synod. Elections to fill council vacancies will occur at the synod assembly every other year (the even-numbered years, beginning in 2018).

The primary make-up the council will be tied to area subdivisions within the synod. This shift provides for a council that more closely corresponds to the distribution of congregational membership throughout the synod. The Synod Council will always include at least one lay member from each of the area subdivisions and a pastor from each of at least three area subdivisions.

Council membership will total eighteen (18) and shall include:

Bishop	Lay – Area Subdivision 1
Vice President	Lay – Area Subdivision 2
Secretary	Lay – Area Subdivision 3
Treasurer	Lay – Area Subdivision 4
Clergy – Area Subdivision 1 OR 2	Lay – Area Subdivision 5
Clergy – Area Subdivision 3 OR 4	Lay – Area Subdivision 6
Clergy – Area Subdivision 5 OR 6	Lay – Youth Male At-Large
Clergy – At-Large	Lay – Youth Female At-Large
	Lay – At-Large
	Lay – At-Large

The terms of office for council members (with the exception of the bishop) shall begin on the first day of the month following the month in which the synod assembly occurs.

- The bishop serves a six-year term and is eligible for re-election.
- The vice president and the secretary serve four-year terms and are eligible to serve up to two full consecutive terms.
- The treasurer, elected by the Synod Council rather than by the synod assembly, serves a four-year term and is eligible for re-election.
- Youth council members serve a two-year term and are not eligible for re-election.
- All other members serve a four-year term and are not eligible for re-election.

The Nominating Process

The Southeastern Iowa Synod Nominating Committee is elected by the synod assembly, consisting of one member from each of the area subdivisions. The Synod Nominating Committee is responsible for providing a full slate of candidates for Synod Council and other leadership positions to the synod assembly. Nominations from the floor of the assembly are also in order.

The Nominating Committee is required to nominate at least one person for each position for which the Synod Assembly will hold an election. Though not required, it is expected that in most cases, the nominating committee will nominate two qualified persons for each position on the synod council.

The Synod Nominating Committee will provide a slate of candidates to become Churchwide Assembly voting members to the Synod Assembly in the year prior to a Churchwide Assembly in accordance with the criteria provided by the ELCA governing documents and the Office of the Secretary. Again, nominations from the floor of the assembly are in order.

Synod Deans

Synod deans will serve on behalf of the entire synod rather than on behalf of a subset of congregations and rostered ministers within the synod. To increase the likelihood of reflecting an understanding of different settings or contexts throughout the synod, the six synod deans will be selected from among pastors and deacons serving in each of the six area subdivisions.

Each dean will be elected to a 3-year term by the Synod Council upon the recommendation of the bishop and are eligible to serve two consecutive terms. Initially, these terms may be staggered.

The deans, as a group and individually, are collaborative partners with the Office of the Bishop on behalf of the whole synod. Pastors and deacons who are respected by and well connected to their peers will be sought for the position of dean. These are leaders who have the ability to think and act strategically, and are willing to be advocates for goals and initiatives that will enhance our shared mission to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and to assist one another in this proclamation. In advising the bishop, the deans are intentionally positioned to enhance connections with the Office of the Bishop, leaders and communities of faith.

This model allows a bishop to utilize synod deans as an extension of the bishop's staff in times when essential needs of the synod cannot be met by current staffing. As an example, should such a need arise, a dean that has been recommended by the bishop and has participated in strategic planning with the Office of the Bishop may be called upon to facilitate a call process in a congregation. Such use of a dean requires consultation with the congregation served by that dean (or other employer, in the case of specialized ministry settings), and a stipend for these activities would be paid.

Area Subdivisions

Area subdivisions have no programmatic function. The six area subdivisions are simply geographic areas from which nominees for synod leadership positions are identified. Most of the area subdivisions consist of the combined territory of two conferences.

Conferences and Conference Chaplains

Eleven conferences will continue to be comprised of the communities of faith and ministry partners within their defined boundaries. The specified purpose of the conference has less to do with all of these partners and more to do with the pastors and deacons serving within the conference, or who are retired on the territory of the conference. These rostered ministers will select from among themselves a person to serve as conference chaplain for a period of three years. A conference chaplain may be reelected.

The role of the conference chaplain is to be an intentional colleague to pastors and deacons within the conference. To support their work and to enhance the sense of connection with the Office of the Bishop, conference chaplains will meet periodically (at least three times per year) with the bishop. Between meetings, chaplains are expected to be in touch with the bishop with news or concerns about colleagues that the chaplain thinks important to share. The Office of the Bishop will strive to keep the chaplain apprised of transitions occurring in the conference or with information that should be shared with the pastors and deacons of the conference.

While there are no additional expectations of the conference or of the conference chaplains, there is freedom for the pastors and deacons of a conference to engage in additional shared activities that enhance ministry and collegial relationships within the conference.

Implementation

The Synod Nominating Committee is prepared to introduce a full slate of candidates to meet the expectations of this proposal.

Upon the adoption of the proposed Synod Governance Restructuring, persons who have been serving as the dean of the conference prior to the adoption shall convene a gathering of conference pastors and deacons no later than October 1, 2018, for the purpose of electing from among themselves a person to serve a 3-year term as conference chaplain. The initial 3-year term shall conclude on September 30, 2021.

In those conferences where monies are held in common (a conference “treasury”), the meeting at which the conference chaplain is elected shall also include an action by the rostered ministers gathered regarding the disbursement or retention of such funds. This meeting will be held no later than October 1, 2018.

The bishop will recommend to the Synod Council six potential synod deans, (pastors or deacons), one from each of the area subdivisions. The Synod Council will act on the recommendations at their September 2018 Synod Council meeting. Should any recommendations fail to be ratified, the bishop shall bring new recommendations for consideration to the next meeting of the Synod Council. Recommendations will include a rationale for consideration.