



## **Bishop Nominee**

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### **Michael P. Carlson**

#### PERSONAL INFORMATION

##### Ordination

April 22, 2012

##### Current Call

Lead Pastor - First Lutheran Church, Sauk Centre, MN

##### Education:

B.A. – Concordia College

M.Div. - Luther Seminary



##### Three Most Significant Leadership Positions:

- 1) Willmar Public Schools Board of Education and served as Chair twice.
- 2) Administrative Pastor for the ACT Parish (6-point) at its formation and for 5 years.
- 3) Lead Pastor, First Lutheran, Sauk Centre.

##### Which three areas are you likely to focus on as you begin your role as bishop?

1) High priority on the health of rostered leaders. I would seek to connect with all and set up a yearly way to maintain connections. 2) Address the need to expand on ministry outside the walls of buildings. Learn from 2020 and use technology to help reach more people. 3) Include other voices to help address the loss of young members, so that the generation can see a relevant church for them in the ELCA.

##### As a bishop, you will use maybe 30% of what you learned while serving as a pastor in a congregation. How will you discover the other 70% you need to know?

Being open to the wisdom of those who have been there before. I am thankful to have known several current and former Bishops, and I believe there is great benefit in connecting with and learning from them. I also believe that there is much to learn

from sources outside the church. A bishop also has to manage a large organization, so gaining insight from those in non-profit and corporate settings will be a useful asset.

Given the fact that an incoming bishop faces multiple constituencies, all pulling for his or her time and energy, how will you choose and prioritize your work knowing that no matter what you choose, you will disappoint some or even many?

Like I mentioned earlier my number one focus will be on the health of our Rostered Leaders. 2020 has left many in pain. Now more than ever the role of Pastor to the Pastors needs to be a priority. So to allow me to do that I would surround myself and empower the Synod Ministry team to help assure that together we can meet the many needs and challenges. A strong and capable Synod Staff is what I will put forward so that it's not just a single leader but a team. A mobile and accessible Synod.

Since all bishops are expected to enter this role with a vision or plan that will cure the decline in worship attendance and financial support, how will you handle this expectation?

We need to learn from what has happened in 2020. We were all, small and large, rural and large city churches, forced to do church in new ways. We can't simply go back to what was, we need to learn from and embrace what works as we become the church for 2021 and beyond. I see this as a great opportunity to help address these two key issues, as we find ways of the Church meeting the people where they are as opposed to waiting for the people to meet the Church where it sits.

As God's people we have faced many challenges during Covid-19 that have pushed our understanding of what it means to be church. How would you continue to teach and encourage the Body of Christ in this new reality?

We are all on the same page as congregations. This past year has taught us that no matter the size we all had to do things different. I look at this as an exciting opportunity to make our churches relevant no matter the size. We need to grow the church not with big buildings but with a nimble and flexible approach to reaching people. I would make it a priority to raise funds to help those churches needing assistance in investing in technology that will help them meet these new opportunities.



## **Bishop Nominee**

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**Angela K. Denker**

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

#### Ordination

August 18, 2013

#### Current Call

Pastor – Grace Lutheran, Brownton, MN.

#### Education:

M.Div. Luther Seminary

B. Magazine Journalism, University of Missouri Columbia



#### Three Most Significant Leadership Positions:

Pastor – Grace Lutheran Church, Brownton, MN

Pastor of Community Life and Discipleship – Yorba Linda, CA

Pastor – St. Philip Lutheran Church – Glenview, IL

#### Which three areas are you likely to focus on as you begin your role as bishop?

- Public Communication that establishes our Church's relevancy in the Synod and beyond
- Pastoral Care of Synod Clergy, Lay Leaders, and Congregations after a tough pandemic year
- Partnering with Local Organizations already doing gospel work in the Synod

As a bishop, you will use maybe 30% of what you learned while serving as a pastor in a congregation. How will you discover the other 70% you need to know?

I will benefit greatly from my official and unofficial roles outside the church. I will draw upon my reporting and interviewing skills to practice empathetic and productive listening and conversation. I will use my writing and communication skills to communicate in an effective and timely manner on behalf of our synod. I will use the patience and multitasking skills I learned as a pandemic parent of young children to balance my responsibilities.

Given the fact that an incoming bishop faces multiple constituencies, all pulling for his or her time and energy, how will you choose and prioritize your work knowing that no matter what you choose, you will disappoint some or even many?

Here again I will draw upon my experiences as a pandemic parent of young children, where I have learned in the past year how to juggle multiple responsibilities - all in the same home!

I will also draw upon my experience as a first-call pastor who replaced a pastor removed for misconduct. I will trust that if everyone is happy with what I say or do, I probably haven't said or done anything significant. I will draw upon the courageous example of Jesus and many who have gone before. (1 Cor 4:8-13)

Since all bishops are expected to enter this role with a vision or plan that will cure the decline in worship attendance and financial support, how will you handle this expectation?

I grew up in a church that was part of the church growth explosion in the Twin Cities suburbs in the 1980s and 90s. For a while, I too associated success with size, and I served as a pastor in two of the ELCA's largest congregations. However, I have seen the ways that large size can make it difficult to focus on mission. In the same ways, too-small size can also make it difficult to focus on mission. In all my calls, I have focused on financial stewardship as a Gospel issue, with positive result.

As God's people we have faced many challenges during Covid-19 that have pushed our understanding of what it means to be church. How would you continue to teach and encourage the Body of Christ in this new reality?

The positive side of Covid-19 (in the midst of incredible difficulty) is it forced us to de-center our buildings and our traditions from our ministry and mission. We saw new people become more involved due to increasingly accessible technology. We also had to make difficult decisions to prioritize the lives of our most vulnerable churchgoers. This proved clarifying. But it cannot be done without respected and trusted lay leaders. They are our synod's most important resource.



**Southwestern Minnesota Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
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## **Bishop Nominee**

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***Christa D. Forsythe***

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

#### Ordination

January 31, 2010

#### Current Call

Solo/Lead Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Atwater, MN – 2013 to present.



#### Education:

BA – Luther College

Tentmakers Youth Ministry Training (2000)

M.Div. with Congregational Mission & Leadership emphasis – Luther Seminary (2009)

#### Three Most Significant Leadership Positions:

Campus Ministry: Co-Founder FOCUS, Luther College, Ridgewater LCM

Youth Ministry; Our Redeemer/St. Paul 99-05; Synod LYO Board,

Pastoral Calls – Associate, First, Litchfield 07-13; Lead/Solo Pastor – Immanuel, Atwater.

#### Which three areas are you likely to focus on as you begin your role as bishop?

I am a 6'1" white woman who loves Jesus & swears a bit. 21 yrs working with youth taught me that: transparency, relationships, & authenticity are the only way forward. Focus areas: 1) Advocacy: form 2 teams for church conflict: church advocacy team & pastor/staff advocacy team: one can't do both. 2) Build trust: Deploy synod staff to connect relationally in context & reduce costs. 3) Cast vision: No conflict is the end of God's mission. Unashamedly preach that God's love for all really means ALL.

As a bishop, you will use maybe 30% of what you learned while serving as a pastor in a congregation. How will you discover the other 70% you need to know?

To discover the unknown 70%, I need to seek out wise mentors, pastors who disagree with me, churches with different visions, & parishioners with unique stories/ideas. I love being a pastor, serving in rural MN, working with young adults, diversifying ministry with all ages, & proclaiming God's life-changing story. I have tons to learn. I will work to empower others' gifts; play to my strengths; admit when I'm wrong; listen/learn from you; & most of all pray, trust, & cling to God's grace & help.

Given the fact that an incoming bishop faces multiple constituencies, all pulling for his or her time and energy, how will you choose and prioritize your work knowing that no matter what you choose, you will disappoint some or even many?

All my calls, including marriage/motherhood, have taught me: change & conflict are constant; I will disappoint; and I'm not Christ but must point to him. Key priorities: build on strengths, delegate/equip other lay/rostered leaders with different gifts than mine for the good of the Gospel; stay spiritually connected. Jesus & my family are my first loves. I'm no good to anyone if I neglect those. My calls have taught me often less is more. Diversify ministry outside the office of the bishop.

Since all bishops are expected to enter this role with a vision or plan that will cure the decline in worship attendance and financial support, how will you handle this expectation?

"Death takes many forms, even while alive.-Plankeye" Cure? No. A cure is often to remove tumors, so health lives. We must live into the truth that we worship the God of death & resurrection. What if we believe it & seek to die well? Our bucket list: All truly means ALL; inter-generational ministry/faith at home; multi-church partnerships; dismantle ethnic idolatry; actively confess/kill the -isms; boldly proclaim our grace roots to a hungry world (& let's feed them). Proclaim grace or die trying.

As God's people we have faced many challenges during Covid-19 that have pushed our understanding of what it means to be church. How would you continue to teach and encourage the Body of Christ in this new reality?

Maybe church in our homes should have been the goal all along. As parents are the #1 pastors for their kids: how has this equipped us to make that more of a reality? We've learned your church can come into your home. Your synod, too. New realities: greater value for our elders/their stories; youth ARE the church; technology as medium for the Gospel; relationships are non-negotiable for faith life/mental health; ministry collaboration & build on why folks stayed when they had ever reason not to.



## **Bishop Nominee**

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### ***Bryant C. Kaden***

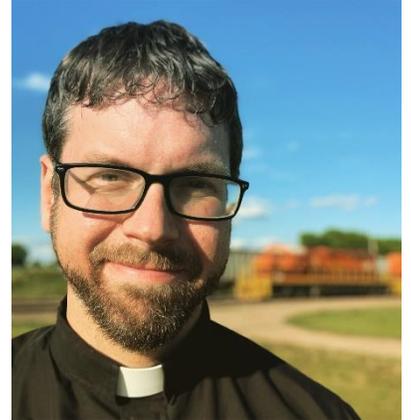
#### PERSONAL INFORMATION

##### Ordination

June 20, 2008

##### Current Call

Lead Pastor, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Redwood Falls, MN.



##### Education:

B.A. Religion/Philosophy -Midland Lutheran College (2004)

M.Div. – Wartburg Theological Seminary (2008).

##### Three Most Significant Leadership Positions:

- 1) Lead Pastor, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Redwood Falls, MN
- 2) Pastor, Trinity & West Lake Johanna Lutheran Parish, Brooten, MN (2008-2015)
- 3) Chair, SWMN ELCA World Hunger Cmte (2011-2014).

##### Which three areas are you likely to focus on as you begin your role as bishop?

Forming our Synod staff to meet the challenges and opportunities we face within and coming out of the pandemic. We need a team of diverse voices, centered on Christ, for the sake of the world. Calling, equipping, and supporting effective lay and rostered leaders. We need to invite people to an ever deeper and wider life of following Jesus. Responding to misconduct is an unfortunate reality. We need an emphasis on prevention through professional support and accountability.

##### As a bishop, you will use maybe 30% of what you learned while serving as a pastor in a congregation. How will you discover the other 70% you need to know?

I have a natural curiosity about theology, the church, and the world. I'll continue my commitment to lifelong learning through reading and scholarship. However, there is

no better teacher than experience. I'm sure I would learn a lot the same way most of us do: by making mistakes, but I would try to avoid as many as possible by learning from the experiences of others. Reaching out to those who have served as bishops, as well as colleagues within the current Conference of Bishops, would be key.

Given the fact that an incoming bishop faces multiple constituencies, all pulling for his or her time and energy, how will you choose and prioritize your work knowing that no matter what you choose, you will disappoint some or even many?

I like a joke on a sign I saw in a local restaurant: "If the service you are receiving does not meet your expectations, please lower your expectations." In all seriousness, managing expectations is helpful, but prayer and discernment are critical. There is often a difference between urgent tasks and important ones. I need God's help to discern between them. I start my day with a to-do list, but ministry is frequently found in the interruptions. Delegation is also essential. It's all God's work.

Since all bishops are expected to enter this role with a vision or plan that will cure the decline in worship attendance and financial support, how will you handle this expectation?

There may be many reasons for decline besides a lack of competent or faithful clergy and lay leadership, such as demographic and societal changes. There are also many ways to measure our mission and ministry apart from numerical statistics. The only solution, however, is competent and faithful leadership. Healthy leaders form healthy communities, which promote growth, numerical or otherwise. God intends for that to be us. Christ is the vision. We are the plan, empowered by the Spirit, together.

As God's people we have faced many challenges during Covid-19 that have pushed our understanding of what it means to be church. How would you continue to teach and encourage the Body of Christ in this new reality?

I have both more questions and more confidence in the life and future of the church than I did a year ago. Answers may lie both within our tradition and in listening to new voices and experiences. Our confidence comes by centering our life on Christ, as Nikolai Grundtvig wrote in the hymn "Built on a Rock." "Christ builds a house of living stones: we are his own habitation." Led by the Spirit, this faith is what has and will always build and renew the church, no matter the challenges we face.



## **Bishop Nominee**

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***Naomi L. Mahler***

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

#### Ordination

August 8, 1998

#### Current Call

Associate Pastor, Calvary Lutheran Church, Willmar, MN.



#### Education:

B.A. - Luther College

M.Div. – Luther Seminary

#### Three Most Significant Leadership Positions:

- 1) Pastor – Paz y Esperanza Lutheran Church, Willmar, MN.
- 2) Interim CEO – Green Lake Lutheran Ministries, Spicer, MN.
- 3) Associate Pastor – Calvary Lutheran Church, Willmar, MN.

#### Which three areas are you likely to focus on as you begin your role as bishop?

A bishop does not do the job alone, so it would be important to me to build my relationships with various partners in ministry. 1) I'd want to get to know the current synod staff and synod council better. They can teach me about their relationships, roles and functions within the synod. 2) I'd like to get to know the synod's rostered leaders and congregations better to teach me about their contexts. 3) I would also need to get to know my colleagues on the Conference of Bishops and their work.

#### As a bishop, you will use maybe 30% of what you learned while serving as a pastor in a congregation. How will you discover the other 70% you need to know?

A learning curve exists in any new job. There is certain required information or knowledge one needs to learn in a new job, but I also think that a leader's outlook or

way of being is even more important. One needs to have an attitude of curiosity, openness and vulnerability. Curiosity helps one seek out what one needs to know. Openness allows one to learn from a variety of "teachers". Vulnerability helps one be brave enough to try out new learnings.

Given the fact that an incoming bishop faces multiple constituencies, all pulling for his or her time and energy, how will you choose and prioritize your work knowing that no matter what you choose, you will disappoint some or even many?

Parish pastors face this too. For me it is important to remain grounded in my faith. I start most days with devotions. These words can then echo back to me throughout the day giving me encouragement or challenge as needed. When faced with a big decision or conflict I find that time spent in prayer is helpful for discernment. It is necessary to know that in the normal course of leadership some people will be disappointed. A good leader accepts this and understands it is a part of the job.

Since all bishops are expected to enter this role with a vision or plan that will cure the decline in worship attendance and financial support, how will you handle this expectation?

No bishop can singlehandedly cure the decline in worship attendance and financial support. A silver bullet solution does not exist. There are many factors contributing to this decline and not all are in our control. Instead, we should focus on the "Why" of our existence as a church, which at least in part, is to share the love of God with our communities and the world. If we really focus on making a difference for people with God's love, I believe the rest will take care of itself.

As God's people we have faced many challenges during Covid-19 that have pushed our understanding of what it means to be church. How would you continue to teach and encourage the Body of Christ in this new reality?

It has been a hard year, so we need to acknowledge the grief and hurt we carry with us, but there have been gifts in this time too. One of the biggest gifts for the church I think is a spirit of innovation. We need to adopt this outlook going forward. Amid the challenges, great opportunities exist to expand our ministries beyond the walls of the church. But this will only be possible if we can also learn to be more supportive, collaborative and caring for each other.



## **Bishop Nominee**

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**Todd A. Nelsen**

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

#### Ordination

March 26, 1995

#### Current Call

Lead Pastor - Faith Lutheran, Spicer, MN



#### Education:

M.Div. Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, 1994

BA Political Science/Communications, Concordia College, Moorhead, MN, 1987

#### Three Most Significant Leadership Positions:

- 1) Lead Pastor – Faith Lutheran Church, Spicer, MN (2015 – present)
- 2) Senior Pastor – Abiding Presence, San Antonio, TX (2010 – 2011)
- 3) Senior Pastor – Our Savior's, New Ulm, MN (1998 – 2010)

#### Which three areas are you likely to focus on as you begin your role as bishop?

My number one priority would be to develop relationships with the rostered leaders and congregations of our synod. In cultivating these relationships, I would like to invite the people of our synod to imagine what the synod might look like as we move deeper into the twenty-first century. How might the ways in which our synod engages in ministry be both faithful to the gospel and relevant? I would also like to build networks between rostered leaders and congregations across the synod.

As a bishop, you will use maybe 30% of what you learned while serving as a pastor in a congregation. How will you discover the other 70% you need to know?

I would seek the mentorship of those currently serving in the role of a synodical bishop and those who have recently served in this role. In addition, there are resources within our synod and region who have experience in the church-wide office that would be beneficial resources to tap. I would also lean on the theological gifts shared by professors of Luther Seminary and our six regional ELCA colleges and universities.

Given the fact that an incoming bishop faces multiple constituencies, all pulling for his or her time and energy, how will you choose and prioritize your work knowing that no matter what you choose, you will disappoint some or even many?

It's important for the bishop to maintain a healthy sense of self-care and balance while serving in this role. Not only does the bishop need to prioritize the workflow of the synod office but also in his/her vocation within the family. Having a strong sense of self will allow the person in the role of the bishop to handle the reality of the fact that some will always be disappointed with the direction provided by the bishop and synod. Building strong relationships early will be beneficial.

Since all bishops are expected to enter this role with a vision or plan that will cure the decline in worship attendance and financial support, how will you handle this expectation?

Our synod should serve as a conduit to bring people and resources together to address these pressing matters in our church. Nurturing collaborative efforts between rostered leaders and congregations to strengthen worship attendance and financial support can be accomplished by tapping into the creativity of the many gifted people in our synod and the surrounding region. Today congregations and leaders need to develop innovative approaches to worship and stewardship to remain relevant.

As God's people we have faced many challenges during Covid-19 that have pushed our understanding of what it means to be church. How would you continue to teach and encourage the Body of Christ in this new reality?

In many congregations, the pandemic has brought to light the varied gifts and talents of the body of Christ. Our synod will benefit greatly by learning from one another how to better be the church together. Hopefully, we have learned to be more gentle and gracious with one another in difficult times. We have also learned resiliency and the ever-present invitation of the Holy Spirit to provide relevant and faithful connections to God and one another. This is an exciting time to be the church!



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**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

## **Bishop Nominee**

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***Dee H. Pederson***

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

#### Ordination

July 12, 1981

#### Current Call

Director for Evangelical Mission, Southwestern Minnesota Synod,  
ELCA



#### Education:

B.A., B.S., - Luther College, Decorah, Iowa

M.Div., D.Min. – Luther Seminary, St Paul, MN

#### Three Most Significant Leadership Positions:

- 1) Lead Pastor Bethlehem Lutheran, St. Cloud
- 2) Synod Long-Range Planning Committee
- 3) ELCA Church Council, Chair-Churchwide Task Force "Living into the Future Together: Renewing the Ecology of the ELCA"

#### Which three areas are you likely to focus on as you begin your role as bishop?

Listening to God & our people to discern what God is calling us to be and do as we plan for the future in this changing time. -Vital congregations that connect with new people by 'activating each of us so more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice, and love.' - Future sustainability: identifying & preparing new leaders, passing leadership & power to younger leaders, and exploring congregational collaborations that strengthen God's mission in our large synod in new ways.

As a bishop, you will use maybe 30% of what you learned while serving as a pastor in a congregation. How will you discover the other 70% you need to know?

Synod staff & governance leaders have expertise & wisdom that is essential for administrative & constitutional responsibilities. The ELCA provides training in mandatory accountabilities for the Office of Bishop. Partner organizations provide orientations. Experience teaches adaptation & new knowledge. A bishop must hold-on to a pastor's heart and learn by listening to the rostered ministers and the people of our 233 congregations; they become a new bishop's new parish & are the best teachers. God will provide the next bishop with mentors and training needed to assume a role much different than congregational ministry. At the same time, a bishop must intentionally hold on to the heart of a pastor that was shaped in congregational ministry. *Most importantly, a bishop learns by listening to the rostered ministers and people of our 233 congregations; they become a bishop's new parish and are the best teachers.*

Given the fact that an incoming bishop faces multiple constituencies, all pulling for his or her time and energy, how will you choose and prioritize your work knowing that no matter what you choose, you will disappoint some or even many?

The Office of Bishop is a call to oversight for the synod's ministry. The bishop serves as pastor to rostered ministers & congregations - shows up, cherishes relationships, preaches & teaches, affirms assets, and works to build healthy & vital partnerships. Grounded in God's mission, a bishop communicates a big picture of how we are connected to others in that mission. A bishop discerns what to address, what is best delegated, trusts staff to do their jobs, and recognizes we are better together.

Since all bishops are expected to enter this role with a vision or plan that will cure the decline in worship attendance and financial support, how will you handle this expectation?

The pandemic more clearly revealed this cultural shift, yet also revealed that people are hungering for deeper connections and warm & empathetic community. Evangelical, good news Lutherans have a message too good to keep to ourselves! We are being called 'for such a time as this' to discern how to be neighbors who love and shape our communities. And we have seen that people are generous in response to God's gifts as congregations convey wisdom & accountability as stewards of that generosity.

As God's people we have faced many challenges during Covid-19 that have pushed our understanding of what it means to be church. How would you continue to teach and encourage the Body of Christ in this new reality?

A pandemic could not close the church, we simply left the building, moved online, and discovered how precious we are to each other as the body of Christ. I'm so grateful for the wisdom & strength God gave our leaders to adapt by tackling technical challenges. Today, we grieve so many losses, communities are divided, and we struggle to work for racial justice. I trust that our Living God will continue to transform us to live in the way of Jesus, as the body of Christ, in this new reality today.