



## 2026 Synod Assembly Nominee Ballot Book

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**Tanny Akerson** - Immanuel Lutheran Church, Bellevue, Metro East Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of how God is calling you into mission and service in the Nebraska Synod through the work of the position(s) selected above.**

While these are difficult days in our world, I believe they are also exciting days to be the church. In the ELCA, we carry a powerful message of unfathomable love, grace, and mercy. Walking together—sharing compassion, faith, and courage—we can make a meaningful difference in our neighborhoods, communities, and world. I trust that God still loves this world deeply and is at work in it, through us, bringing hope and healing to all. In my life as a secondary English teacher, worship director, faith formation leader, synod council member, mom, and in many other roles, my passion has been helping others recognize their infinite worth and beloved belonging. While serving on synod council, I have felt called to be a voice of encouragement—keeping our eyes and hearts open to the needs around us and responding with imagination and trust in the God who claims, loves, and redeems us. As vice president, I would continue in that spirit, listening, learning, and supporting the ministries, congregations, and people of the Nebraska Synod with humility, faithfulness, hope, and joy.

**Karen Benson** – Immanuel Lutheran Church, Bellevue, Metro East Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of how God is calling you into mission and service in the Nebraska Synod through the work of the position(s) selected above.**

God has always placed opportunities in front of me when I am ready for them. Some have been quite surprising but upon reflection, I appreciate how I was prepared, sometimes unknowingly, for the job or adventure in which I found myself. Some skills that support me are the ability to listen to multiple sides and opinions, practice patience, a sense of humor, and kindness when working with others. Prayer, continuing faith formation, and fellowship with friends also play a part in knowing who I am and how I am, as a child of God. At this time, I am able to say “yes” to this possibility knowing that I am competent to serve as needed.

**Nellie Beyan-Olabige** – St. Timothy’s Lutheran Church, Omaha, Metro East Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of how God is calling you into mission and service in the Nebraska Synod through the work of the position(s) selected above.**

I grew up as a member St Peter's Lutheran Church (ELCA) in Monrovia, Liberia. I worked as the secretary to the Youth Director of the Lutheran Church in Liberia before I came to the U.S. in 2000. I am very passionate about evangelism and leading people to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Nellie Beyan-Olabige** (cont.)

I am ready to work with the NE synod to reignite our faith and find ways to bring back members who have left and bring in new members as well. I am a very active and vibrant person who strives to live life joyfully and I bring that spirit of joy everywhere I go. I love to put smiles on the faces of people and I always say, the world appears like a bad place, but I want to be part of the "good people" who are changing lives and making the world a better place for everyone.

**Carla Brauer** – Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Panhandle Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of God's call as it relates to the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod. What gifts and areas of expertise do you bring to the position?**

have always been very proud to be a member of the ELCA, and particularly in the last several months. Our synod lives out its mission of witnessing to and living out God's gracious WELCOME to all people. Being a part of a committee of believers and encouragers to welcome those who are discerning their gifts in this area would be a privilege and an honor. My spiritual gifts include Healing, Exhortation, Miracles, Wisdom and Teaching (as my top 5). I spent 42 years in the field of education, the last 19 of which I was privileged to serve as a School Counselor. I am recognized as a caring, warm, genuine, positive and very approachable person. I was often sought out by colleagues for mentorship and guidance and have formally mentored several new School Counselors and Teachers. I sincerely appreciate your consideration as a prospective lay member of the candidacy committee

**Komach Deng Dey** – Nile Lutheran Church, Omaha, Metro East Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of God's call as it relates to the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod. What gifts and areas of expertise do you bring to the position?**

Carrying the words of God to Christians community in Nebraska or world-wide.

**Terry Eriksen** – Salem Lutheran Church, Dakota City, Northeast Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of God's call as it relates to the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod. What gifts and areas of expertise do you bring to the position?**

I have a desire to see the Church grow as all members of Christ do. While traditions are import those traditions all started as a new idea. I am a father 5 children and 15 grandchildren and I hear them all tell me why they feel left out of the Lutheran Church. There is no easy answer, each congregation is different and some resist change and some embrace it. I do not have the answers but am willing to pray, listen and discuss possible solution that God puts before us. I love the Lutheran theology I just think we could present it in a way more understandable to today's young and young adults.

**Walter Eskildsen** – Our Saviors Lutheran Church, McCook, Tumbleweed Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of God's call as it relates to the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod. What gifts and areas of expertise do you bring to the position?**

**Walter Eskildsen** (cont.)

Walter is willing to have his name on the ballot but does not want to nominate himself so Sharon Bohling, president of his congregation is submitting this information. Walter is the son of missionaries to Japan where he was born in 1964. He is the long-term secretary for the church council in McCook and is serving as chair of the worship committee. He is a lay leader who often leads worship or provides the sermon even when someone else may be leading the service. For many years he has been our voting delegate to Synod Assembly. He is a quiet but thoughtful leader and would be an asset to the Synod Council representing the Tumbleweed Cluster.

**Judson Gregory** – Immanuel Lutheran Church, Bellevue, Metro East Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of God's call as it relates to the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod. What gifts and areas of expertise do you bring to the position?**

Our world is in a major time of darkness, and this church is here to help people find the light. I want to be a more direct part of this mission to help people, especially those who are oppressed. This leadership position really spoke to me recently due to all the uncertainty and distrust occurring within this country and world as a whole. I hope that I can help spread the idea that we all have God's everlasting love and forgiveness. I could strongly help this Synod, especially on the youth side, to achieve this goal. I feel like I am empathetic, kind, and always willing to lend a listening ear or helpful hand to those in need. I have always wanted to have a stronger role within this church family, as I have grown up surrounded with my family being very active in the Nebraska Synod. This is my chance to help grow God's mission and spread his love, while growing my own faith as well.

**Scott Henneman** - Kountze Memorial Lutheran Church, Omaha, Metro East Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of God's call as it relates to the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod. What gifts and areas of expertise do you bring to the position?**

I am thankful to be an ELCA Lutheran. At this time in our world, being inclusive to all of God's people is important to me. I seek to be a member of a church that includes instead of excludes. I have served three separate ELCA church councils in Pierre, SD, Blair and Omaha. Participation in church choirs has always been an integral part of my spiritual journey. I view music as central to our church's identity. The belief that "singing is praying twice" resonates strongly with me. Although I belong to Kountze Memorial Lutheran Church in Omaha, I deeply understand the challenges rural congregations face. As the primary caretaker of our family farm near Sioux City, I remain connected to the small, rural Swedish Lutheran church where I was married over forty-six years ago. This church, part of a two-church parish sharing a pastor, exemplifies the adaptability required of rural congregations. My wife, Ruth, and I continue to attend this rural church during our time at the farm. Our Nebraska Synod has been blessed by strong leadership. My background as a church member, council member, business professional, father, and grandfather has provided me with life experiences which I humbly offer as service to the Synod Council. I am grateful and honored to be considered for this opportunity to serve. Thank you!

Joyce Kolbo – Callaway Lutheran Church, Callaway, Pony Express Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of God's call as it relates to the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod. What gifts and areas of expertise do you bring to the position?**

God has called me to care and help people, whether it be through my work at a food pantry, an office manager at a church, treasurer of the local Christian Charity Fund or simply a neighbor. I am currently the minister at Callaway Lutheran Church and a co-chairman of the PMA Steering Committee. I served as chairman of a WWII Hero Flight and many other organizational events. While I worked for Pastor Jon Mapa, he kept encouraging me to become a PMA. I dismissed his suggestions but deep down knew that I would love to do something like that. He always told me I had a way with people and I was needed. I heard God calling; just didn't answer it right away. I retired from the church office and hated "retirement" and sitting at home. I needed to be doing something, and it had to be something for people. I continued my PMA studies and was certified in June and then started at Callaway Lutheran in September. I know that being a minister is an honor and also a great responsibility. I have been in a congregation with a lot of chaos and with Callaway, I love seeing a congregation who truly is a church family. If there was ever a large disagreement in the church, I would appreciate a mediator. I would appreciate the chance to help other congregations come to a peaceful agreement through any conflict. If there is a sense of calmness and negotiation brought to a problem, it is much easier to resolve. I believe I can be of assistance in that area. Thank you for considering me.

Rick Kolkman – Immanuel Lutheran Church, Omaha, Metro East Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of God's call as it relates to the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod. What gifts and areas of expertise do you bring to the position?**

I have been praying for an opportunity to serve the Church and to utilize the skills I have gained in administration, finance, planning and fundraising. My experience in managing a \$460 million dollar bank with 116 employees in 5 western Nebraska location was my main focus. However, I was also privileged to serve as Chairman of the Nebraska Diplomats, Chairman of the Nebraska State College Board of Trustees, Chairman of the University of Nebraska Medical Center Council of Advisors, Chairman of the Chadron State College Foundation. I started the largest fundraising effort for the CSC Foundation which resulted in \$116 million being raised. I served as chairman for the Great Plains Regional Medical Center fundraising drive for expanded services. I have served on church councils for a total of 20 years. I believe in God as my personal savior and the Apostles' Creed. I am a lifelong Lutheran and graduate from Augustana University. It would be a privilege to assist the Nebraska Synod in providing churches the tools and assistance they need in bringing the word of God to parishioners and provide services necessary for personal wellbeing.

Jacob Krueger – Zion Lutheran Church, Lincoln, Lincoln Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of God's call as it relates to the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod. What gifts and areas of expertise do you bring to the position?**

Throughout the ministry, I have felt called to equip and raise leaders in the church. Throughout my short time at Zion Lutheran, by the power of the Holy Spirit, I have empowered young and younger people to find their voices and take leadership roles in our congregation through worship and our congregational council.

**Jacob Krueger** (cont.)

The questions I ask help people think more deeply theologically and biblically. The discernment I use in my own life helps facilitate faithful discussion and decisions. My sense of God's call through the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod is centered and grounded on the trustworthiness of the gospel, enacted and participated through the liturgical traditions, ordo, and rites. Through worship, in a local congregation, I help the Nebraska Synod administer the precious gifts of God in word and sacrament to many people in my local area.

**Mickey Larkins** – Zion Lutheran, Pickrell, Homestead Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of God's call as it relates to the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod. What gifts and areas of expertise do you bring to the position?**

I was asked by a fellow church member if I would be interested in the position. They thought that I would make a good candidate. I have attended several spring gatherings and enjoyed seeing how everything works together. I felt moved by God to apply.

**David Magnuson** – Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Omaha, Metro West Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of God's call as it relates to the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod. What gifts and areas of expertise do you bring to the position?**

My name is David Magnuson my pronouns are he/him. I am honored to be nominated for the Synod Council At Large Member position. I am cisgender gay man. My husband and I are members of Holy Cross in Omaha. I think God has called me to live authentically and be seen. I have done this by being an active member at my congregation. I have served on church council, our RIC (Reconciling in Christ) task force. I have coordinated Holy Cross's participation in the PRIDE Parade and co-lead our food pantry. More recently I believe God called me to reach beyond our walls. I am currently a member of Queerly Beloved Team, serve on the synod's Justice Leadership team and am the incoming chair of the Synod's Candidacy Committee. Serving on Synod Council will be another opportunity to be seen, share my gifts and further respond to God's call.

**Elysia McGill** - St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Falls City, Rolling Hills Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of God's call as it relates to the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod. What gifts and areas of expertise do you bring to the position?**

I love the work that we do together as the Nebraska Synod. From all parts of Nebraska, we work together to help all of our neighbors. God is calling me to listen and help in any way that I can. I look forward to continuing the work that God is calling all of us to.

**Carol Rieken** – St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Johnson, Rolling Hills Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of God's call as it relates to the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod. What gifts and areas of expertise do you bring to the position?**

Carol Rieken (cont.)

My gifts are empathy and listening to others. I try to fulfill God's calling by helping at our church when needed and offering comfort and encouragement to others.

Linda Walz – Immanuel Communities, Omaha, Metro East Cluster

**Briefly describe your sense of God's call as it relates to the work and mission of the Nebraska Synod. What gifts and areas of expertise do you bring to the position?**

I have enjoyed the opportunities I've had, through the years, to serve the larger church through the Nebraska Synod. I think I would bring perspective, sensitivity, humor, and grace to the Discipline Committee. I know that conflicts cause pain for all involved, and my hope would be to listen, genuinely hear what is being communicated, and offer options with humility and compassion.