

The Election of a Bishop in the Pacific Northwest: Regional Challenges and Ecclesial Leadership

Main points about the Office of Bishop

from Dr. Samuel Torvend's lecture at the 2006 Oregon Synod Assembly

1. The bishop is a servant leader, using power to support and challenge – with love and persuasion, never fear and coercion.
2. The bishop is charged with the “oversight” (*episkopé*) of pastors and congregations. This oversight is elaborated in the following points.
3. Oversight, first of all, means an oversight of and a service to the church’s biblical, sacramental, theological, and ethical memory. That is, the bishop is called to decide, on behalf of the church, if the gospel is being rightly proclaimed, the sacraments rightly celebrated, and the teaching of the church faithful to the apostolic witness of Scripture and in harmony with the Confessions.
4. The bishop is called to serve the sometimes fragile unity of the congregation, the synod, and the church’s ecumenical relations. Thus, the bishop must be able to deal with conflict effectively; speak the truth in love to congregations and pastors; be a witness to a ministry of reconciliation, and thus to the unity of the church.
5. The bishop needs to possess deep knowledge of the unique dynamics that shape this distinctive regional culture in the Pacific Northwest – dynamics that clearly and seriously influence the life of the church in Oregon.
6. The bishop is charged with oversight regarding the charism of preaching among pastors, diaconal ministers, educators and spiritual directors, musicians, architects, and artists. This does not mean that the bishop is to be the judge of others’ preaching. Rather, it means that the bishop should be a clear witness to the Lutheran insight that the words we speak can create realities into which we can live with courage and hope.
7. Likewise, the bishop also needs to be a witness to and example of preaching that translates the biblical and theological language of Lutherans into language that loses none of the richness of that legacy but nonetheless can be heard by those in this region who do not know the language of Lutheran Christianity.
8. The bishop’s administrative responsibilities are not insignificant. But the bishop also has the freedom to appoint a wise and competent administrative staff. Thus, the bishop can be freed to attend to this synod’s biblical, sacramental, theological, and ethical distinctiveness, in order to encourage a lively thinking about living daily as Lutheran in a deeply spiritual but religiously skeptical culture.

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