

2018 Nomination Biographies

Synod Council

Vice President

Tom Gossack Redeemer Lutheran, Great Falls, MT (Synod VP)

Tom has been a member of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Great Falls since about 1970. He was elected to the church council in 2001 and became president of the congregation in 2002. Over the years, he has served on the Mutual Ministry, Property, Finance and Stewardship committees. In 2009, he was elected as the Russell Country Cluster Representative to the Montana Synod Council then reelected in 2012. He was appointed as Synod Vice President in January 2014 then elected at the June assembly and also sits on the Executive committee. He has completed his second term having served on the Mission Table for the past six years.

He is Vice-President of the Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp Corporation and has been a delegate from Redeemer to the annual meetings of Emmanuel Lutheran Communities. He also serves on the executive committee and is a member of the region one governing council which consists of the six synods in the Northwest U.S. He is currently branch manager of Tractor and Equipment in Great Falls, a member of the Montana Contractors Association and sits on the executive committee of the Montana Association of County Road Supervisors. He has also served one term on the Cascade County road advisory committee.

Secretary

Rev. Amanda Liggett, Zion Lutheran, Roundup and American, Lavina, MT

Pastor Amanda Liggett was ordained in 2008 and serves Zion Lutheran Church in Roundup and Lavina Methodist and American Lutheran Church in Lavina. She was raised in Buffalo, SD, earned a B.A. from Augustana College in Sioux Falls, and an M.Div. from Luther Seminary. Amanda was raised in Buffalo, SD. She currently serves as a member of the Christikon Board and the board of the Lutheran Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations Network. She represents the ELCA to the United Methodist Council of Bishops Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships. Locally, she helped to form the Musselshell County Recovery Team following the flood of 2011. Past service includes the Hetzel Foundation and the Synod Council. She lives in Roundup with her husband, Derek, and their 19-month-old son, Benjamin.

Five-Valleys Cluster Representative

Kris Gunsten Atonement Lutheran Church, Missoula, MT

Kris Gunsten is a life-long Lutheran - her father is a Lutheran pastor as was her husband. She has always been an active member participating in youth group, choir and Sunday School. She has been a Sunday School teacher, coordinator of VBS, committee chair, retreat leader. She plays guitar for services at Atonement Lutheran in Missoula. Kris has a strong commitment to the church and its place in this world. God's work, our hands is her motto!

Kris is a Midwesterner - born in MN living there and in SD until she went to St. Olaf College majoring in Family Studies. After college she met Chip Gunsten at a Lutheran Camp in NY. He became a pastor and they lived in Virginia for almost 30 years. She has 2 girls, both married and 2 grandchildren. Kris went back to college to obtain her nursing degree working mostly with families needing help with parenting skills and at the Health Dept. She moved to MT in 2014 after her husband's death. Kris likes to travel to see her children, garden, read, bike and hike.

Beartooth Cluster Representative

Allen Hansen, Messiah Lutheran Church, Red Lodge, MT

Allen has been a member of three Lutheran congregations in Montana: Pella, Sidney (17 years); Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Billings (5 years); and, currently, Messiah, Red Lodge (9 years). He is currently a Lay Pastoral Associate Candidate being recognized at the 2018 Synod Assembly, Congregation Council President, and a Biblical Storyteller. He believes that bringing scripture alive in worship connects worshipers with gospel and helps the preacher weave real grace and action into the sermon text. He is currently serving on the Corporate Assemblies for both Concordia College and Pacific Lutheran University.

Allen is retired from careers in the U.S. Navy and U.S. Merchant Marine and Merchant Marine education. His wife of 45 years, Suzi, is a retired activities coordinator for an active seniors' center in Massachusetts. Both are avid cyclists including an unsupported trip on a tandem from Montana to Massachusetts in 2011.

Northeast Cluster Representative

Rev. Gretchen Wagner Trinity, Culbertson/First English, Bainville, MT

Gretchen has been a member of the NE Cluster of MT Synod for approximately 5 years. She cares about the goings on of the Cluster and the greater area of Eastern Montana. She will bring a voice that cares for the realities of frontier, rural, and small-town ministry to the synod council. Rev. Wagner currently serves in Culbertson, MT. Prior to her current position she worked in the Aero! Business in Western Washington for a major manufacturer of Airplanes.

Russel Country Cluster Representative

Rev. Anna Merritt Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Great Falls, MT

Rev. Anna Merritt came to the Montana Synod in 2014 from North Carolina where she was raised. She attended seminary in Gettysburg and served her first call in Hickory, NC. While there, she served on the Synod Council and the Lutheran Moravian Coordinating Committee. Anna currently serves as treasurer for the Great Falls Ministerial Association and as secretary on the Board of Directors of Family Promise of Great Falls.

Churchwide Assembly Voting Members

Position 1

Bishop Jessica Crist

Position 2

Rev. Seth Nelson Faith Lutheran Church, Ronan, MT

Rev. Seth Nelson is the pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Ronan, Montana, at the heart of the Flathead Indian Reservation. He serves a diverse community of ranchers, teachers, business owners, tribal members, and everyone in between. He is the author of the book *The Church Unknown: Reflections of a Millennial Pastor*, in which he offers perspectives and insights into how young adults view the church and how the church can live missionally into our shared future across generations. He lives in Ronan with his wife and two children.

or

Position 2 CW assembly voting member (continued)

Rev. Elizabeth Daniels Saint John's Lutheran Ministries, Billings, MT

Pastor Elisabeth Daniels and her husband Wesley recently had their second child, Audrey Anne Daniels. Audrey joins her almost 3 year-old brother Elson Wesley and her four legged furry sister a Golden Doodle named Hufflepuff. The Daniels have been in Billings, MT for almost five years. Before becoming one of St. John's Lutheran Ministries campus pastors, Pastor Elisabeth served in the U.P. of Michigan. She graduated from The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and Luther College. Pastor Elisabeth enjoys baking and trying new recipes. One of her favorite things is meeting monthly with the Mom's Night Out group from American Lutheran Church where she is a member.

Position 3

Rev. Mark Taylor Plentywood Lutheran Church, Plentywood, MT

Reverend R. (Robert) Mark Taylor – Plentywood, Montana, retired from the United States Navy in 2000, and moved back to his home state of Montana in 2003. He served as a Lay Pastoral Associate (LPA) while completing the Theological Education for Emerging Ministry (TEEM) Program and is a 2007 graduate of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California. During his seminary experience, and upon graduation, he served the Upper Musselshell Lutheran Parish of Barber/Ryegate, Harlowton, and Martinsdale/Lennep for 9 years, and was on the Christikon Board of Directors. He currently serves as pastor of Plentywood Lutheran Church and is the Dean of the Northeast Cluster. Pr. Mark recently served on Synod Council, and as the Hospice Chaplain for Sheridan County. He and his wife Clara have two adult children and two grandchildren.

Or

Rev. Arne Bergland Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Helena, MT

33 years of ordained ministry and a lifelong Lutheran. He has served congregations in Montana (3) Iowa, Washington and Alaska (internship) and worked extensively with congregations in region 2 as director of church relations for California Lutheran University. He was the past President of Associated ministries of Pierce County Washington (an interfaith organization that unites people of faith to build stronger communities and has a membership that includes 250 congregations and interfaith partners. Pastor Bergland has served in the church (ALC and ELCA) in lay and ordained positions since 1979. His diverse experiences in the church has given him a deep love and understanding of the ministry of the ELCA. His spouse Susan is a retired school teacher. Together they have two daughters who live in Minnesota. Born in South Dakota and raised in Minnesota, he is a graduate of Augsburg College Luther Seminary.

Position 4

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Position 5

Richard Brown Trinity Lutheran, Cody, WY

Member of Trinity Lutheran Church Cody Wyoming since 1978. Successful Business owner for 10 years. 21 years with CARQUEST AUTO PARTS, 3 years as local salesman, 11 years managing various stores in Montana and Wyoming, 7 years as Area manager in charge of 3 stores. Retired in 2010. Now enjoying daily contact with our youth as school bus driver.

Graduated L.P.A. program in 2016. Active leader in congregation. Currently serving sixth term on church council, four terms as council president. Involved with T.G.I.F (Teens Growing In Faith) youth group. Organize and present lesson plans for Adult Ed. and youth group. Currently doing local mission outreach with low in-come special needs for last three years. Mission co-leader for last three missions (1 international, 2 in U.S.) Still expanding and strengthening my faith.

or

Paul Armstrong Atonement Lutheran, Missoula, MT

Paul is the Technical Supervisor in the Laboratory at St. Patrick Hospital in Missoula, MT. In this position he manages and mentors people as well as managing quality and regulatory processes. He is married to a wonderful woman named Karla and is the father of two boys named Erik and Jason. He sits on the Church council at Atonement Lutheran in Missoula, Montana. He worked at Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp for 5 years (a long time ago).

Position 6

Gordon Oelkers Trinity Lutheran Church, Culbertson, MT

Gordon has been a lifelong member of the Trinity Lutheran Church. He was fortunate to own and operate a service station that has been in the family for over 65 years. He is currently a Roosevelt County Commissioner after serving as the Mayor of Culbertson for 18 years. Gordon is married to Ardis and they have three children and a daughter-in-law.

Gordon has been the President of the Trinity Lutheran Church in Culbertson, Montana for the past 25 years. He represented the Synod at the Montana Association of churches where ecumenical issues were discussed. Gordon is currently on a committee for building the new Montana Synod house. Gordon is very interested in the decision-making process for the ELCA organization.

or

Peter Metcalf Our Savior's Lutheran, Bonner, MT

Peter grew up in western Oregon where he split time between the suburbs of Portland during the school year and Camp Lutherwood, a Lutheran summer camp in the coastal mountains. It was here that he first experienced the love, laughter, and challenges of life together in Christian community, experiences that formed him for a life of discipleship. He attended Whitworth College, where he ran track and cross country, worked on the school newspaper, and graduated with a B.A. in English Literature. After college, he came to Montana to work one summer as a counselor at Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp. Like many others, he fell in love with the camp and the state and looked for ways to stay. From 2002 - 2005 he led the youth and family ministry programs at Atonement Lutheran in Missoula. He then earned a Master's in Environmental Studies at the University of Montana, where he focused on how Christian faith practices can shape a praxis of creation care. After graduation, he worked as a guide leading commercial wilderness river trips in Idaho and as an environmental educator in Montana and Central America. He was promoted to Operations Manager of the river company, but after two years decided his heart was in education and returned to the University of Montana to pursue a Ph.D. in the conservation social sciences with emphases in the human dimensions of wildlife management and natural resource policy. He currently teaches courses on natural resource governance. When not working on his dissertation, he continues to guide river

trips, teach field education courses, and serve on a variety of committees with the church, university, and a conservation organization. He is also an avid skier, trail runner, river runner, hunter and angler who roots for the St. Louis Cardinals baseball team. "

Position 7

Sue Ost First Lutheran Church, Havre, MT

Sue is committed to the work of the Church at all levels. She has served on numerous boards and committees at the local level, six years on Synod Council, and was elected Synod Treasurer in 2015. Sue is active in ELCA Mission Builders as a builder and was recently selected as the first woman to serve on their national advisory board.

or

Jayne Groseth Hope Lutheran, Bozeman, MT

Jayne Drange Groseth is originally from Billings Montana where she was raised in American Lutheran Church. Being of Norwegian Heritage, the entire Drange family were active in the church and all celebrations. Jaynee enrolled at Montana State University in Fall 1969 and was a founding member of New Genesis, a Christian student group, that brought contemporary worship throughout the state of Montana and in the surrounding region. Following graduation, she traveled as a National Collegiate Advisor for Kappa Delta sorority, traveling to over 75 campuses throughout the country. Upon her return to Montana and MSU in a professional position, she served as Assistant Director to the New Genesis, a role she held for 12 years. Jaynee has been a member of Hope Lutheran Church, serving on church council and mission planning committees. She currently serves as the Chair of the MSU Lutheran Campus Ministry Board of Directors and is involved in engaging students in their life of faith. She also serves on the Board of Regents for Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. Jaynee is retired from Montana State University where she served for 40 years, 20 as the Director of Admissions and 20 as the President of the Alumni Association. She and her husband Rolf live in Bozeman. They have two sons, Peder, in Bend, Oregon and Anders in Bozeman.

Position 8

Laura Lee Ullrich Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Broadus, MT

Laura Lee has a well-rounded and varied background in church work both at the local and synod levels. She is a person of deep faith and continues to challenge herself in her faith commitment as evidenced by her enrollment in the current LPA East class. She also has a wide range of life experiences and has been active in the local community as well as State-wide. She is well-respected by her peers. She would represent the synod well at the churchwide assembly, listen critically and enter into decisions prayerfully. She would be enriched by the experience and it would deepen her faith and commitment to the wider church as she shares that experience with others.

or

Autumn Keller Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, Helena, MT

Autumn was raised in Great Falls, Montana and has lived in Montana her whole life. She is married to Steve and has three grown sons. She was on staff at King of Glory Lutheran in Billings, MT for 12 years as worship and music coordinator and youth choir and bell choir director. Six years ago, she moved to Helena, MT and is a member of Our Redeemer's Lutheran. She currently volunteers as a musician during worship and directs the hand bell choir. She is passionate about creating a relevant church family for all ages and a meaningful worship experience that encompasses Lutheran tradition and liturgy while blending new and innovative elements.

Position 9

Kim Moss Sunburst Lutheran Church, Sunburst, MT

Kim has lived in Sunburst Montana since 1994. She became an LPA in 2016 and has been busy providing pulpit supply around the Hi-Line area as well as serving on the Synod's Comprehensive Ministry Review Team. Kim appreciates the MT Synod, ELCA and our commitment as a worldwide church to care for people in need, who are oppressed and those who have no voice. Kim has two daughters, Katie and Kylie and one granddaughter, Brooklyn.

or

Amanda Nelson Saint Paul Lutheran Church, Missoula, MT

Amanda Nelson is a 31-year-old graduate student at the University of Montana studying Clinical/Mental Health Counseling. Prior to this graduate program, Amanda served her ELCA congregation at St. Paul Lutheran in Missoula as the full time Youth and Family Director. While she is pursuing a career in counseling, Amanda also has an MA in Children, Youth, and Family Ministry from Luther Seminary. Outside of work and school, Amanda enjoys taking advantage of the mountains of Montana; going hiking, mountain biking, rafting, and backpacking.

Position 10

Cheyenne Damron Zion Lutheran, Glendive, MT

Cheyenne chose to be baptized when she was in third grade. This active choice on her part has spurred her on to pursue the life of faith in a personal and communal manner. Cheyenne was active in high school in both clubs and sports and was seen as a leader. At Zion in Glendive, Cheyenne served as a full member of Council while in high school and actively participated in worship and youth group. Cheyenne has worked (and is currently working) as a counselor at Metigoshe Lutheran Bible Camp in North Dakota. She is involved in campus ministry at Carroll College in Helena, as well as being active in an ELCA congregation there.

or

Alex Tooley New Hope Lutheran Church, Great Falls, MT

Alex has been interested in being a part of the role the Church has in the world for 10 years. He started on the MT Synod Council as the Youth Representative in 2015 and is finishing his second term in that position. He is in training to be an LPA, and recently became a liaison to the Prison Ministries for the MT Synod Council. He hopes to continue his journey with God through the church and through the world. Alex will be a Senior at Great Falls Central Catholic School.

Position 11

Loni Taylor Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Rocky Boy, MT

Loni was born and raised in Rocky Boy, MT, home of the Chippewa/Cree Tribe. Her daughter is Aynjel'lya "Gigi" and her husband, is Jeremy Taylor (Many Bears) from the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe in South Dakota. Both Loni and her husband are EMT's at the Rocky Boy Health Center. She has been an employee at the Rocky Boy Health Center for 18 years. She dances the Jingle Dress Style at Powwows and was baptized at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church when she was a baby and grew up attending church and being involved there as much as she was able.

or

Position 11 (continued)

Elias Nawawieh Good Shepherd Lutheran, Polson, MT

Elias is a Palestinian Christian, born and raised in Bethlehem. Elias became an ELCA member in 2015 when he moved to MT. Elias is part of The Isaac Ishmael Initiative, a leadership development, and job creation program for Syrian and Iraqi refugees in the Middle East. In addition to speaking and teaching at churches and college campuses across the United States, he has been leading groups of young adults and pastors to the Holy Land to engage with the local residents.

ELCA Church Council

Choose 2

Lisa Carlson Bethel Lutheran, Great Falls, MT

Lisa has been born and raised in the Lutheran community in Montana. She has always been an active member of her congregation. She has served on a number of committees and in many volunteer positions since her youth. She recently completed a term on the Montana Synod Council. She will always support the ELCA and its missions in the future.

Lisa is qualified for this position for a number of reasons. She has been a member of the Lutheran community her whole life. She is dedicated and enthusiastic, and if nominated, she would be fill the role of ELCA Church Council Representative well.

Jan Martin Our Redeemers Lutheran Church, Helena, MT

Education: BA History, Washington State University. 1 semester Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary 2013
Profession: Valley Bank of Helena 1986-2017. Vice President, Compliance Officer, BSA Officer. Duties included monitoring of all bank activities for compliance with federal and state law, training of staff, presentation to staff, board of directors, other organizations.
Current Volunteer: Family Promise of Greater Helena – Treasurer and sleep over host coordinator at ORLC. Montana Association of Christians – Treasurer Rural Dynamics – VITA certified tax preparer/site coordinator Soroptimist International of Helena – member, District 4 Secretary, Past Region Governor, Soroptimist International of the America’s board member and Secretary/Treasurer
Church: active member of ORLC, member of Hunger team, Church Council member- Treasurer, assists with worship
Synod: LPA, past Synod Hunger Coordinator.

Mary Hutchinson American Lutheran, Billings, MT

Mary was born and raised in Billings, MT. She graduated from MSU with a Bachelor degree in Nursing and has been employed at Billings Clinic and has been in a leadership role for the past 20 years.

As lifetime member of American Lutheran Church, she served on the church council for 2 terms representing the Youth Group. Two of the years she served as president. Currently Mary is serving on the Montana Synod Council. She started her term in 2016.

Mary is married to Chris and they have 3 children, Corbin, Courtney and Connor.

Synod Nominating Committee

1 clergy

Rev. Mark Taylor Plentywood Lutheran Church, Plentywood, MT

With his recently completed tenure on Montana Synod Council and his continuing pastoral leadership in the Northeast Cluster, Mark has a wide base of synod knowledge and has gained personal contacts. These qualities are necessary to work with others to secure future nominees for open positions.

1 lay male

John Munding Saint John's Lutheran Church, Helena, MT

John is a former employee of Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks. He was an active member in previous Lutheran congregations and has been an active member of St. John's since transferring to that congregation in 2000. He served on the Church Council! , including three years as Council President.

John has also served in various capacities in the Montana Synod, including Synod Council, Consultation Committee, Candidacy Committee and on the Mission Table, as a Churchwide voting member and is a Lay Pastoral Associate.

1 lay female (2021)

Barb Arensmeyer Trinity Lutheran Church, Choteau, MT

Barb has been a life-long member of Trinity Lutheran Church, in Choteau Montana. It was here that she was confirmed, married and had each of her children baptized. She is and LPA in the Montana Synod and has provided pulpit supply twice monthly at Bethany Lutheran in Dutton, Fairfield Lutheran Parish and at Trinity Lutheran in Choteau. Barb has also served numerous times on the Montana Synod Congregational review team.