

Ministry Profile Report: Metropolitan New York Synod, ELCA

Executive Summary

In preparation for the election of the next bishop, the Metropolitan New York Synod, ELCA, engaged RHW Consulting LLC to support a synod-wide discernment process. Through a comprehensive survey open from February 23 to March 9, 2025, 352 responses were collected from rostered ministers, lay leaders, and congregational members. This report includes detailed quantitative, qualitative, and demographic analysis paired with narrative reflection. It is intended to guide voting members in electing a bishop who reflects the values and vision of this diverse and dynamic synod.

Process Overview: RHW Consulting's Role

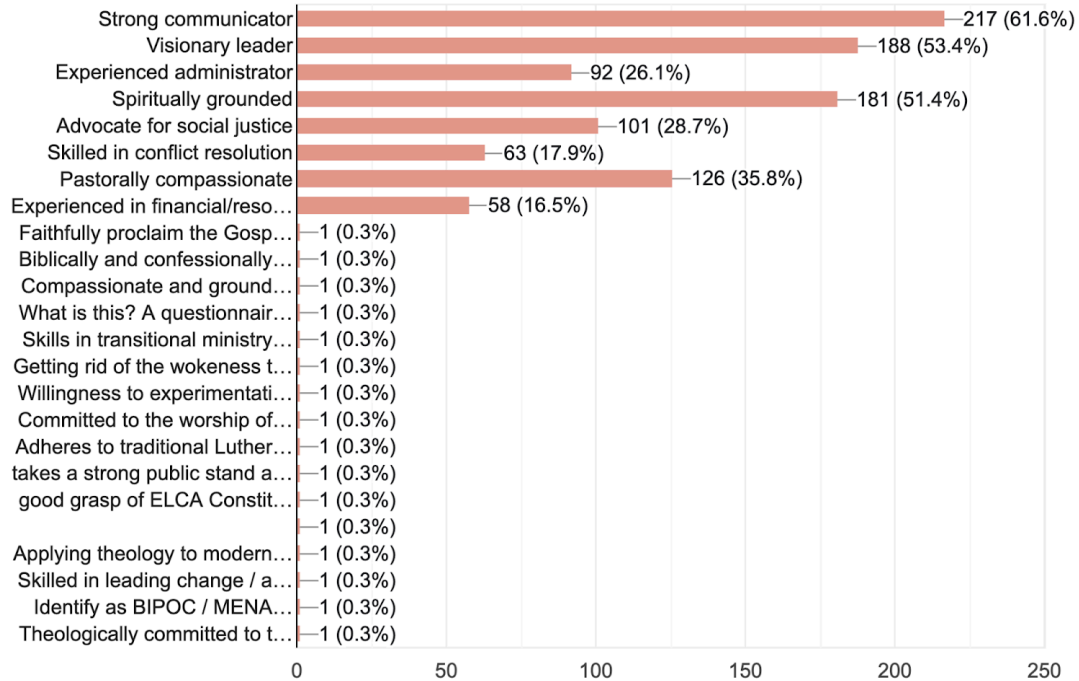
RHW Consulting LLC facilitated the discernment process through virtual listening sessions with synod staff, synod deans, and synod council members. These conversations informed the design of a synod-wide survey that captured the perspectives of congregational members and leaders. This report integrates listening session themes and survey data to inform the Synod Ministry Profile and assist with bishop candidate discernment.

Quantitative Analysis

Top Qualities

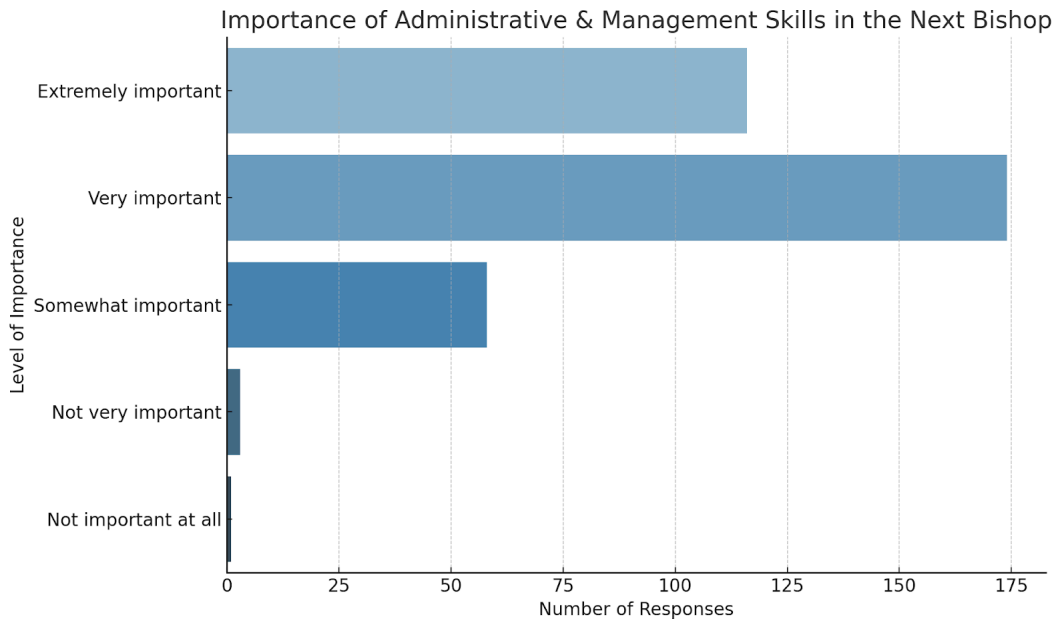
What are the top three qualities you believe are essential for the next bishop? (Select up to three)

352 responses



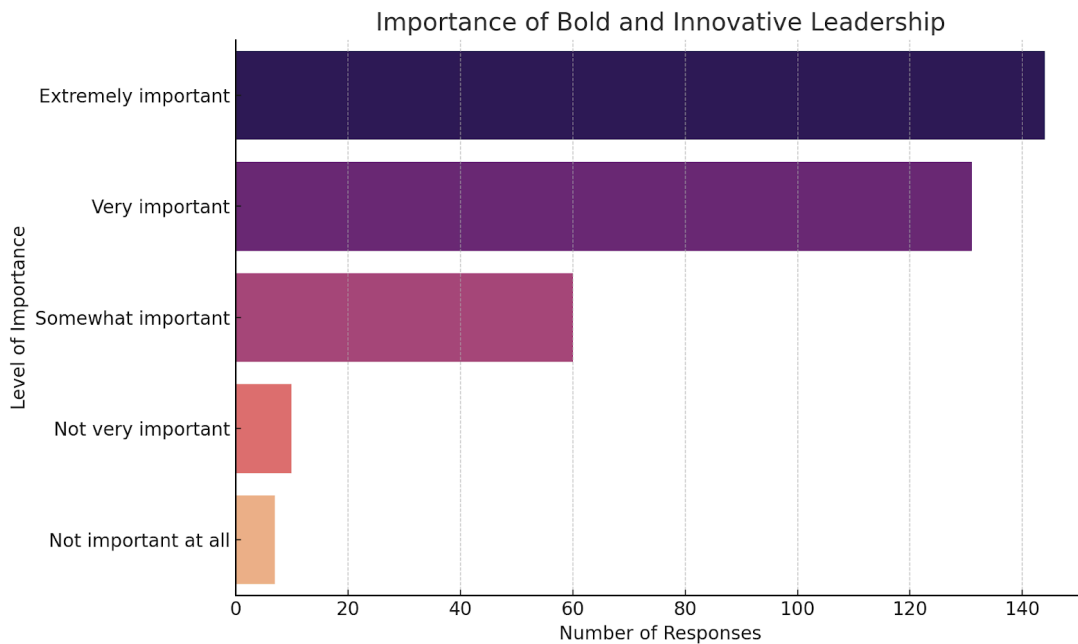
These selections suggest that the synod is seeking a well-rounded leader, which can be embodied in someone who is **deeply relational, operationally skilled, and mission-driven**. Voting members should prioritize candidates who demonstrate tangible examples of embodying these traits in leadership roles.

Administrative Skills



The overwhelming agreement on the importance of administrative skill reflects a desire for practical leadership. **The bishop must manage a complex organization—this is not just a spiritual role but one that requires sound governance.**

Bold Leadership



The synod is ready for risk-taking leadership—individuals want a bishop who is not afraid to lead change, innovate, and disrupt old patterns for the sake of new life. This will require courage and a community ready to support such leadership.

Public Voice

Respondents want a bishop who is **visible, vocal, and engaged in public discourse**. This has implications for the bishop's role beyond the synod—how they interact with civic leaders, ecumenical partners, and social movements.

Spiritual Leadership

Spiritual grounding was seen as foundational—especially in a time of change. Voters should consider candidates who can articulate their spiritual practices and how these shape their leadership decisions.

Qualitative Analysis

Respondents expanded on what characteristics they want to see embodied in the next bishop. Below are the top five themes and what they look like in practice:

Strong Communicator

The bishop must model clear, transparent, and consistent communication. In practice, this means setting expectations, sharing decisions openly, and fostering two-way dialogue between synod leadership and congregations.

Visionary Leader

The next bishop should articulate a compelling vision for the future of the synod—one that builds on its assets, addresses challenges directly, and inspires hope. This includes courageously adapting to societal changes and shaping ministry to meet the needs of today.

Experienced Administrator

Administrative acumen includes supervising staff effectively, managing complex budgets and property issues, navigating conflict, and establishing clear operational systems that support congregational vitality.

Spiritually Grounded

Respondents expressed a deep desire for a bishop who leads from spiritual rootedness. This involves a visible prayer life, theological integrity, emotional intelligence, and the ability to nurture the spiritual lives of others.

Advocate for Social Justice

In action, this includes speaking publicly on justice issues, equipping congregations to do the same, and modeling what it looks like to embody God's love in community, especially among the marginalized.

Open-Ended Responses: Key Themes

Challenges

Survey respondents repeatedly named pressing challenges such as declining worship attendance, congregational closures, overwhelmed staff, and a perceived disconnect between synod leadership and local congregations. There is also fatigue around lack of transparency and clarity in decision-making. The next bishop must lead with both clarity and empathy, helping congregations navigate transitions while restoring trust and shared purpose across the synod.

- "Loss of membership"
- "Decrease in worshippers"
- "Help with building larger congregations"
- "Attendance"
- "Shrinking membership"

Opportunities

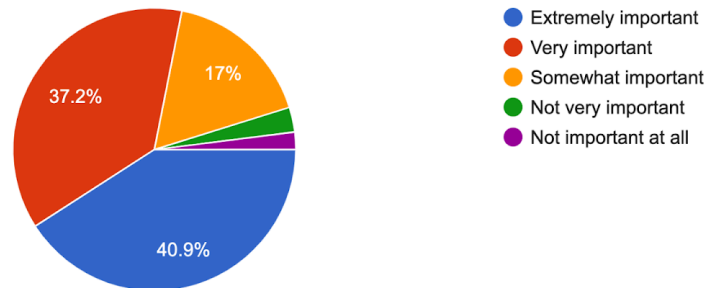
Despite challenges, many expressed hope and identified clear opportunities for growth. This includes renewed focus on youth and young adult ministries, collaborative community partnerships, creative use of properties, and vibrant multicultural engagement. The bishop must be a catalyst for innovation—identifying and supporting experiments in ministry that reflect the present and future church.

- "Out of the box approaches regarding the staffing of (small and dying) congregations; being a prophetic voice in the merciless times we currently live in."
- "The raising up of more synodical deacons"
- "More community based initiatives"
- "Increasing church attendance and membership."
- "Leading us in the battle against Faux-Christians spewing hate and exclusion. Becoming a visible voice of Christ's love."

Bold Leadership

How important is it for the synod under the guidance of the bishop to take bold and innovative action to reimagine ministry?

352 responses



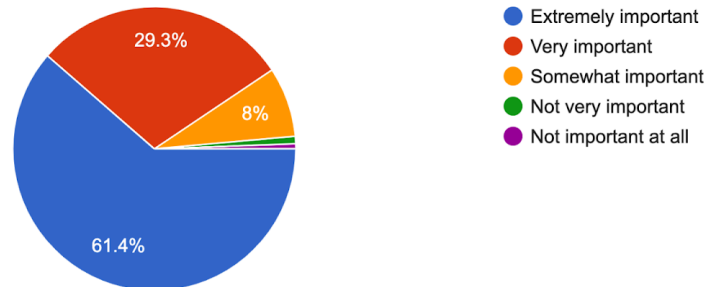
Respondents are calling for a bishop who is courageous and willing to lead change. This includes confronting outdated systems, publicly addressing justice issues, and encouraging congregations to take risks in order to thrive. Bold leadership looks like standing firm in gospel-rooted values, even when such leadership is countercultural.

- “Encouraging ecumenical partnerships and creative usages for property assets.”
- “Being responsive to congregations and recruiting individuals to the ministry.”
- “Outreach to the community, including the marginalized.”
- “Stronger interactions with congregations and pastors. Engagement of youth.”
- “Engaging people who are not engaged in churches.”

Spiritual Practices

How important is it for the bishop to model a strong and visible spiritual life?

352 responses



A consistent theme was the desire for a bishop whose leadership flows from deep spiritual grounding. This includes a visible prayer life, scriptural fluency, emotional intelligence, and pastoral presence. The bishop must embody these traits not just in private life, but in meetings, communication, and moments of public witness.

- “Moral, principled, honest, excellent communication with all people.”
- “Faithfulness in the practices and pieties of historic Christian Word and Sacrament ministry.”
- “Strong bible scholar”
- “The bishop must be rigorous in biblical and theological study and willing to be critical of questionable exegetical and theological assertions - a central episcopal responsibility.”
- “Youthful exuberance of faith, zealous willingness to reach those in need.”

Final Hopes and Expectations

In the final comments, respondents expressed the need for authenticity, compassion, integrity, and vision. People want a bishop who shows up—who is accessible, engaged, and not afraid to name hard truths. The synod is hungry for leadership that is transformational, not transactional.

- “Good listening skills”
- “Be accessible”
- “We need someone with imagination and not stuck in the status quo.”
- “Getting a response from the main office...many different staff is very difficult. It acts as if they do not care.”
- “My hopes are that the Bishop can inspire their pastors to be shepherds of their members and go beyond into their communities. Also, I hope they can

inspire and support their lay leaders in a way that they can be shepherds as well.”

Demographic Analysis

Age Distribution

- 65-74: 101 respondents
- 55-64: 90 respondents
- 75+: 82 respondents
- 45-54: 31 respondents
- 35-44: 27 respondents
- 25-34: 14 respondents
- Other: 2 respondents

Race/Ethnicity

- White or European Descent: 285 respondents
- Prefer not to answer: 20 respondents
- Black or African American: 12 respondents
- Latino/a/e or Hispanic: 11 respondents
- Multiracial or Biracial: 4 respondents
- Asian or Pacific Islander: 3 respondents
- White or European Descent, Native American, First Nations, or Indigenous: 2 respondents
- Latino/a/e or Hispanic, White or European Descent, Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American, First Nations, or Indigenous, Middle Eastern or North African, Multiracial or Biracial, Through Ancestry DNA I've recently discovered I am a genetic mix of everything but present as White European: 1 respondent
- White or European Descent, Native American, First Nations, or Indigenous, Multiracial or Biracial: 1 respondent
- Latino/a/e or Hispanic, Native American, First Nations, or Indigenous: 1 respondent
- Asian or Pacific Islander, Multiracial or Biracial: 1 respondent
- Mixed ancestry that does not fit these categories: 1 respondent
- Latino/a/e or Hispanic, Multiracial or Biracial: 1 respondent
- White or European Descent, Asian or Pacific Islander, Multiracial or Biracial: 1 respondent
- Black or African American, Latino/a/e or Hispanic, White or European Descent, Multiracial or Biracial: 1 respondent

- White or European Descent, Middle Eastern or North African: 1 respondent

Gender Identity

- Woman: 219 respondents
- Man: 110 respondents
- Prefer not to answer: 10 respondents
- Woman, Man: 1 respondent
- Man, Genderqueer/Genderfluid: 1 respondent
- Non-binary: 1 respondent

Sexual Orientation

- Heterosexual/Straight: 286 respondents
- Prefer not to answer: 24 respondents
- Gay: 11 respondents
- Queer: 5 respondents
- Lesbian: 5 respondents
- Bisexual: 4 respondents
- Lesbian, Queer: 2 respondents
- Heterosexual/Straight, Lesbian: 1 respondent
- Pansexual: 1 respondent

Disability Status

- I do not identify as a person with a disability: 281 respondents
- I identify as a person with a disability: 28 respondents
- Prefer not to answer: 24 respondents
- Long Covid. Kind of a disability in my case, also kind of not: 1 respondent
- I have some age limitations but would not say disability: 1 respondent

Primary Language

- English: 328 respondents
- English, Spanish: 7 respondents
- Prefer not to answer: 6 respondents
- Spanish: 5 respondents
- English, ASL: 1 respondent

Perspectives Reflected

- Sometimes: 163 respondents
- Yes: 110 respondents
- No: 42 respondents
- Unsure: 36 respondents

Narrative Profile of the Synod

The Metropolitan New York Synod is a complex and vibrant community of congregations with deep commitment to faith and justice. Through the survey, it is clear that people across the synod are looking for **a bishop who is spiritually grounded, a courageous change agent, and a relational leader who communicates clearly and consistently**. Rostered leaders often emphasized the importance of having a bishop who is a 'pastor to pastors'—someone who understands the burdens of ministry, offers care and encouragement, and can guide through crises. Lay leaders and members, on the other hand, lifted up the need for administrative transparency, responsiveness, and clarity about the bishop's role in congregational vitality.

What's at stake in this election is the future of leadership in a synod facing real decline in attendance, finances, and energy. If the voices captured in this report are not taken seriously, there is a risk of perpetuating patterns of disconnection, burnout, and lost opportunity. However, if the input from this discernment process is embraced, the synod has the potential to elect a bishop who will lead with wisdom, courage, and love—renewing trust, deepening relationships, and reimagining what faithful leadership looks like for a new day.