

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

BISHOP-ELECT OF THE NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD

1. Name: Chris deForest

2. Current Position: Pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, 357 W Main St., Kutztown, Pa 19530

3. Congregation Membership: Same (Trinity Lutheran Church)

4. Date and Year of Birth: 11/28/1963

5. Date and Year of Ordination: 08/23/2011



6. Previous Positions:

09/1992-Present – Creative and Marketing Consultant – self-employed writer and events manager; serving leaders and organizations to define and to live out their mission, vision, and values.

08/2015-09/2016 – Seminary Engagement Liaison for Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque.

08/2011-12/2018 – Pastor and then Co-Pastor (with wife, Rev. Dr. Allison deForest) of St. John’s Lutheran Church of Mahoning (Lehighton).

10/2010-07/2011 – Admissions Advisor for Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque.

08/2007-08/2008 – Interim Executive Director of the Haitian Timoun Foundation, Littleton, CO.

05/1993-06/2003 – Director of Communication for PartyLite U.S. in Plymouth, MA.

03/1987-11/1992 – Video Creative Specialist for Tupperware U.S. in Kissimmee, FL.

7. Education and Earned Degrees (with institutions and years, most recent first):

Master of Divinity Degree from Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, IA (07/2003-05/2009)

Bachelor of Arts Degree in English/Professional Writing from the University of New Mexico (08/1984-05/1987)

Undergraduate Pre-Med Student at New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, Socorro NM (08/1982-12/1983)

8. List up to five (5) current or past synod or churchwide activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.

09/2014-Present – Served as Chair of the “Synod Assembly Planning Team.” Guided a diverse team of lay and clergy, Synod staff and volunteers, with direction from Bishop Zeiser, to plan and implement the themes and content of the past six Synod Assemblies (2015 was the first).

06/2015-Present – Member of the Planning and Leadership Team for the “Leadership Guild” of Region 7, and the **NEPA Synod “First Call Theological Education” Team.** The Leadership Guild and the FCTE Team provided continuing education to pastors in their first three years of their first call. This training took the form of annual or biannual workshops, for which Pastor deForest did both planning and presenting. Pastor deForest’s focus was on the training of “Adaptive Leadership” to new Pastors.

9. List up to five (5) current or past community-related activities that would inform your service as bishop of this synod.

04/2019-Present – Volunteer Chaplain for the Kutztown Police Department.

08/2019-Present – Vice President of the Board for “Hope Rising For India” Foundation.

01/2019-Present – Pastor for Campus Ministry at Kutztown University (part of my regular call).

05/2005-08/2008 – Leader of Cultural Immersion Trips to Turkey, India, and Haiti.

10. What gifts would you bring to the office of bishop of this synod? (1,000 characters maximum)

Leadership experience with staff and volunteers: 15 years outside of church; 9 years as pastor.

Organizational skills: Planning and organizing events of 10 to 10,000; 6 Synod Assemblies.

Vision/Mission-Development skills: Over 20 years advising on Vision, Mission, Values.

Technology savvy: Comfortable and conversant; patient, diligent instructor.

Experience teaching “Adaptive Leadership”: our NEPS First Call pastors.

Ecumenical, Interfaith, and Global Relationship skills: Raised Catholic, enjoys dialogue and co-ministry across denominations, faiths, interests, including science, engineering, and business; and across cultural, social, and political boundaries. Connections with leaders in Haiti; Turkey; Tanzania; Korea; Rwanda, and southeastern India. He studied in Geneva with LWF in 2005. Also studied the Qu’ran and been in dialogues with Islamic leaders over common goals, understandings.

11. What do you see as the principal challenge to this synod in the next six (6) years, and how would you address it? (1,000 characters maximum)

HEAL THE HURTING. Covid-19 has worsened our two pre-existing conditions: lack of leaders, and unsustainability of congregations. We are ultimately called to move in new and bold directions. We must also find the courage and compassion to keep listening and speaking our struggles, fears and griefs. Healing always starts with hearing – as our God has always shown us.

LOVE THE LAND. We live in a land today filled of fear and division. The very land itself is threatened by climate change. And yet, every congregation could name significant ways they already “love the land.” Imagine a Bishop leading us into asking: “How can we better love the land, together, in our various places?” And then find local solutions we can share and even scale up to spread beyond our border.

SAVE THE STRANGER. “Who feels ‘estranged’ right now, in our communities and in our congregations?” The Stranger who needs saving may be ME. Saved from anything that makes me estranged from another – in need of forgiveness, repentance, turning from old ways of denial, racism, sexism, homophobia and more, to recognize in each other’s common humanity and destiny in Christ.

12. Describe your leadership style. (1,000 characters maximum)

As a leader, if you bring me a dire situation, or an insurmountable obstacle – the Christ who died will invite us to face those challenges with a clear head and a kind heart. And then, the God who raised Jesus from the dead, will challenge us to wonder: “Where is the new life coming from?” So, as a leader, if I know God has ultimately “got this,” I am free to invite us all to experiment, rethink, rework, renew, re-create, letting the Holy Spirit be our Guide.

I will strive to be a good listener, a good collaborator, a good proclaimer of the word, a good pastor to the staff and pastors and the congregations, a good partner with other denominations and faiths and organizations that bring God’s love and life into the world.

Finally, my leadership style includes humor; the willingness to be silly when it builds more community; I have a flair for the dramatic and love for liturgy; and most of all, I want to hear from as many people as possible, before going forward.