



A GUIDE FOR CONGREGATIONAL CALL PROCESS

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The procedures outlined in this manual are intended to assist congregations in the task of calling a pastor. The calling of a pastor is a special time for reflection and prayer in the life of a congregation. During this transition, Council leadership of the congregation should encourage strong bonds of unity and trust in God, while exercising sensitive care for all the people of the congregation. This transition is a time of self-discovery, decision making, and looking ahead to the future.

We believe it is our Lord Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, who guides the call process of a pastor to be in a mutual ministry with the members of a congregation. This process also represents a valuable partnership between God, the calling congregation and the Indiana-Kentucky Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The Indiana-Kentucky Synod staff and other appointed leaders will be available to work with the congregation during the time of transition. An ideal call process builds on trust, openness, and good communication. When the call process results in a good match between pastor and congregation, the total mission of the church is furthered.

When the pastor resigns, or retires, the primary anxiety for many congregations is to find a new pastor quickly. No one can guarantee how long the call process will take, and several factors play a role in the length of the transition:

- the time it takes to grieve the pastor who has left
healthy grieving helps us to let go of the past and let go of the pastor so we can welcome God's future
- the presence of an interim
interims provide sound care and leadership, giving the congregation the freedom to move through the process in a measured manner
- the availability of pastors
pastors are always available, but congregations will want the one with the right gifts and core values that fit the congregation well
- the time for self-study and preparing of the Ministry Site Profile
this doesn't have to take a long time, but should be done well, giving the congregation the proper amount of time to become acquainted with or to discover anew its mission and purpose

The bishop and assistants to the bishop will encourage the congregation not to hurry the process of calling a new pastor. The time between the leaving of one pastor and the arrival of another is a time for God's Spirit to work and provides the congregation with a valuable opportunity to reassess its mission and to possibly reorder its ministry for the future. This section of the handbook specifically addresses the role and function of the Call Committee. The additional steps can be found in the whole Call Process Manual, <https://iksynod.org/call-process/>

Step 2: Selection

- _____ Understand the role of the Synodical Bishop.
- _____ Arrange for Exploring God's Expectations Workshop
- _____ Determine the Call Committee membership and function.
Agree on some basic understandings of polity, confidentiality, etc.
- _____ Become acquainted with compensation range and guidelines.
- _____ Become familiar with the personnel data forms.
- _____ Become familiar with the "Visions and Expectations" document and the constitutional provisions on rostered ministers of the ELCA.
- _____ Determine the format and agenda for interviewing the candidate(s).
- _____ Receive name(s) of candidate(s) to be interviewed from the Bishop's office.
- _____ Schedule the interview(s).
- _____ Select one candidate.

Step 2: Selection

THE ROLE OF THE SYNODICAL BISHOP IN THE CALL PROCESS

In the ELCA, constitutional provisions and common practice dictate a pastoral relationship of synod bishops with ordained ministers and congregations. The Synod Constitution, Chapter 14, describes this:

S14.16.a Each congregation of this synod shall consult the bishop of this synod before taking any steps leading to the extending of a call to a prospective pastor.

S14.17 No minister of Word and Sacrament shall accept a call without first conferring with the bishop of this synod.

The role of the synodical bishop in the call process, along with the synod staff and other persons, is to walk with the congregation throughout the call process, to provide support through prayer and counsel, to recommend an appropriate candidate or candidates to the congregation, to provide for a person to conduct the Call Meeting, and to sign the Letter of Call. At the time of the recommendation, the bishop or the synod staff will share pertinent information with the Call Committee regarding the candidate(s).

EXPLORING GOD'S EXPECTATIONS WORKSHOP

Exploring God's Expectations is a workshop led by the Director for Evangelical Mission or another facilitator. This workshop helps congregations explore and identify their programs, giftedness and assets, partnerships, context, core values, engagement in the community, and their purpose. As the congregation clarifies its identity, members also begin to envision who God is calling them to be in the next chapter of their life. During the workshop the congregation will also discover ways they can continue to engage in vital ministry during this time of pastoral transition. By participating in the Exploring God's Expectations Workshop, your congregation and its Call Committee will also be equipped to fill out the Congregation Profile, hold productive conversations with candidates, and call a pastor who shares your vision of mission and ministry.

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF A CALL COMMITTEE

After the Exploring God's Expectations Workshop, when the Congregation Council believes that the congregation is clear about its identity and mission, the congregation will form a Call Committee. The constitution governing your congregation will provide for either the appointment or the election of a Call Committee. This is determined by reading

- ❖ *C5.03.j., to see if the congregation elects its committees or not;
- ❖ *C9.01., if not elected by the congregation; and
- ❖ C13.05., for the make-up and membership of the Committee.

(Chapters and sections are as found in the Model Constitution)

Because of additional demands during a pastoral transition, it is recommended that the chair of the Council not be the chair of the Call Committee.

The composition of the Call Committee should intentionally reflect the makeup of the congregation, assuring that a diversity of gender, age, and ethnic/racial identity is represented, as well as representation from various segments of the ministry of the congregation, such as Worship, Youth, WELCA, Men In Mission, Education, Evangelism, etc. Due to potential conflicts of interest, the following persons should refrain from serving on the call committee: any paid church staff members, family members of current or former staff members, both partners of a married couple.

As soon as a Call Committee is formed, the Call Committee and Congregation Council should set up a date to meet with the person on the Bishop's staff who is responsible for the Call Process. That person will come give the Council and Call Committee an overview of the process, answer questions and concerns, and be available in the future should additional questions arise.

Confidentiality cannot be overemphasized in the task of a calling a pastor. Mention of specific candidates outside the Call Committee is inappropriate until the Committee is ready with its recommendation to the Council. It is important to keep all names and both verbal and written information about prospective candidates within the confines of the Committee. This means Committee members will need to establish ground rules and boundaries, not only with the congregation at large, but also with those in their household or place of work. It should be noted, though, that the Call Committee should keep the congregation informed as to where in the process the Call Committee is. What is confidential is information about the candidate(s), not information about the process.

Prayer is an important activity for the Call Committee and the entire congregation throughout this process. Call Committee members are encouraged to commit themselves to pray for one another and for the work of the Holy Spirit among them as they seek to discern God's will for their congregation. Special prayer at worship and during other meetings of the congregation is encouraged. When the Call Committee is appointed or elected, the names of the members are made public, with request that special prayers be made on their behalf. A link to a recommended Service of Installation for the Call Committee may be found on the synod's Call Process web page.

The Council needs to give the Call Committee information concerning salary and benefit figures which the congregation can offer. While salary and benefit considerations are not matters to be negotiated between the candidate and Call Committee, the Call Committee may discuss compensation and benefit ranges with the candidate. The congregation or Council will also authorize funding expenses for the Call Committee's use in carrying out its responsibilities, such as cost of travel, meals and hotel expense for candidates invited to come to interview, or for travel by the Committee to hear a candidate preach at some other location.

If there are existing rostered ministers (pastor/deacon) who will remain on staff, it may be appropriate to involve them in the call process to ensure that the potential candidate will be a good fit within the staff and working relationship. The timing and level of involvement of the current rostered minister(s) will vary by situation – but would likely occur after the call committee has done initial interviews, but before a primary candidate is sent to the church council. The bishop or synod staff can advise on what is appropriate for particular situations.

WHO WILL BE RECOMMENDED?

Names of *possible* candidates are secured from **a number of sources, including the congregation engaged in the call process. All initial contacts with possible candidates are to be made through the Bishop's office.** In order to recommend the best person possible for your congregation, the synod Bishop will:

- a. Review the congregation's parish needs;
- b. Contact potential candidate(s) to see if he/she will permit his/her name to be submitted to the congregation; and
- c. Request a Rostered Minister Profile (RMP) of the person to be nominated.

Candidates names will be selected on the following basis:

- a. Results of the congregational evaluation process;
- b. Nominations by the Council of the congregation in the call process;
- c. Consideration of pastors of this synod;
- d. Consideration of pastors from other synods (this requires consultation between synod Bishops); and
- e. Seminary seniors.

Since it is the policy of the ELCA to ordain women and men, both women and men who have the qualities needed to serve the congregation will be identified and presented. **It is expected that all candidates presented to the Call Committee will be interviewed.** In the consideration of persons for congregational staff ministry positions, it is essential that a job description be developed and shared with the Bishop's office, and that the senior pastor participate in the call process. For additional information concerning Ministers of Word and Service (Deacon) candidates, please see the appropriate documents.

INTERVIEWING CANDIDATES

The Call Committee may request one, two or three candidates when they are ready to begin the interview process. If the Committee requests more than one name, **the Committee is expected to interview all candidates**. Should the Committee not select any of the initial candidates received, normally only one candidate at a time will be sent from that time on.

When the Rostered Minister Profile (RMP) of the candidate(s) is received, **the Chair of the Call Committee should contact the candidate immediately by telephone to inform the candidate that the congregation has received their name and RMP**. The Chair may inquire of the candidate if they would like to receive bulletins, a newsletter, or other information about the congregation at that time (see below for other possible items of information). The candidate will have received already the congregation's Ministry Site Profile (MSP).

Before the interviewing begins, the Call Committee needs to meet to study carefully the oral and written information about potential candidates given to it by the Bishop's office. The Call Committee is encouraged to reaffirm its commitment to trust and confidentiality at this time.

A telephone call is usually used to invite the candidate for an interview. The date, place, and anticipated length of the interview are discussed. If there is a spouse, the Call Committee needs to clarify whether the spouse is invited to accompany the pastor to the interview. Because the decision to accept a call impacts the entire family, it is important that the spouse be able to see the church, parsonage (if there is one) and community, and have a chance to ask questions he/she might have. In the initial interview, the spouse is sometimes invited to accompany the pastor, but not to participate in the interview.

The arrangements are confirmed by a letter to the candidate following the phone conversation. The letter may include a packet of information about the congregation, if that has not already been sent. Suggested items to be included are: a current annual report, worship folders, newsletters, a listing of staff, Council members, Call Committee members and the congregation's constitution and mission statement. If you have a Chamber of Commerce, you may ask it to provide an introductory packet of information about the community to include in this mailing. The letter also contains travel directions to reach the interview site, and congregational provisions for reimbursement of all expenses for the pastor and spouse, if attending. Prompt reimbursement of the candidate for expenses incurred should follow the interview.

When planning to interview more than one candidate, every effort should be made to conduct each interview in the same setting and manner. The same person should lead the interview each time and committee members should ask the same basic questions of each candidate. This will assure that all the bases are covered in each instance once the interview process begins.

Interviews with a candidate should be friendly and personal, as well as professional and spiritual. Remember that you are interviewing a fellow sister or brother in Christ. This is not a job interview; this is a process of communal discernment about God's call. Begin the process assuming that this might be your pastor sitting in front of you and begin building a solid relationship rooted in your common baptism into Christ.

Begin the actual questions with more personal questions aimed at getting to know the candidate as a person. Then move toward the more professional, educational, spiritual questions. This list of possible questions is not comprehensive, but merely suggestive for the committee:

1. How do you care for yourself physically, emotionally, socially?
2. How do you nurture yourself spiritually?
Tell us about your prayer life.
3. What events led you to prepare for the ministry?
4. What books have you read recently that have made an impression on you?
5. Briefly state your personal faith.
6. Which of the synod's core values and operating principles are best reflected in your life and ministry? [Be sure these have been shared with the candidate ahead of time.]
7. What does it mean to you to be a mission director?
8. How do you describe yourself theologically?
9. What personal traits and gifts do you have that make it possible for you to be effective as a pastor?
10. What books have you read recently that have made an impression on you?
11. How do you prepare a sermon?
12. Describe the areas of pastoral ministry you enjoy the most.
13. Describe the areas of pastoral ministry you enjoy the least.
14. What role do you see yourself fulfilling in relating to committees?
15. Tell us about your philosophy and style of pastoral visitation.
16. Discuss your expectations concerning catechetical instruction.
17. Share your thoughts regarding the worship life of a congregation.
18. In what ways do you participate in the community? In the synod?
19. What areas of involvement in your last/current parish gave you personal satisfaction?
20. What is it about our congregation that interests and challenges you?
21. What are the roles of lay people in the ministry of the congregation and in God's mission in the world?

An effective interview is a two-way conversation, with the candidate also bringing questions and concerns. Allow time and opportunity for the candidate to ask questions and be prepared to address them. Remember, the candidate is also interviewing you! This is communal discernment.

CALL COMMITTEE FOLLOW-UP

The Call Committee sends a letter of appreciation to the candidate for his or her willingness to be interviewed. This letter may encourage the candidate to address any additional questions or concerns to the call committee. Again, a promise of keeping the candidate current regarding the call process is made. **It is crucial that the Call Committee immediately notify the candidate when he or she is no longer being considered. The decision not to consider a candidate further is also submitted immediately to the synod office. Please note: it is the Call Committee's responsibility to inform a candidate that they are no longer being considered.**

SELECTING ONE CANDIDATE

Following the interview(s), the Call Committee will need to agree on one candidate to be recommended to the Council. Discussion should focus on the gifts and abilities of the candidate relative to the congregational ministry needs, rather than on a comparison of candidates. Normally, the recommendation should require a near unanimous vote of the Committee. [The final vote of the congregation will require a 2/3 majority. If only 2/3 of the Call Committee is supportive, it increases the likelihood that 2/3 of the congregation won't. Further, many pastors would not accept a call where 1/3 of the congregation has not voted for them. So, the stronger the Call Committee vote, the better.] The size of the Committee is a factor. A smaller Committee would have a greater need for a unanimous vote. When the Committee has agreed on a candidate, the name is referred to the Council. The Council then has the responsibility of interviewing the candidate to determine whether or not to forward the candidate's name to the congregation for consideration.

Primary Candidate: Once the call committee has selected one candidate, be in contact with that person to determine if their discernment agrees, and they desire to move forward in the process. If the candidate agrees to move on to meet with the council – they are now the primary candidate. The congregation cannot consider any additional candidates at this time, and if the individual was engaged in any other call processes elsewhere, they should withdraw themselves from those places. It is important to clarify this step of becoming the primary candidate with the individual.

Once a candidate has been selected, the Call Committee will present this candidate's name and copies of the RMP to the Congregation Council. The Call Committee will also inform the Council as to the particular leadership skills and characteristics which has led them to recommend this particular candidate. The entire Council then will want to become thoroughly acquainted with the candidate. This is accomplished by an interview with the candidate and would include a visit with the spouse if that has not previously happened.