



Upstate New York Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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WELCOME TO THE CALL PROCESS Policy for Congregations Seeking a Pastor Upstate New York Synod – ELCA

View this document electronically at:

http://upstatenysynod.org/download/documents/call_process/welcome-to-the-call-process-pp-1-11-Updated-7-2017.pdf

Pastoral transitions can be anxious times in the life of a congregation. Though synodical leaders have walked through this process many times we recognize that it is often new to congregational leaders. This document outlines the basic process. It also shows the variety of people from the wider church who may accompany you during this time – bishop, synod staff, conference deans, transitional leaders, intentional interim pastors, and synod representatives, in addition to pastors and lay leaders from neighboring congregations. You will find that there is some flexibility for the different circumstances of each congregation, so feel free to ask questions as you move along. Throughout this journey, know that there are many others walking with you, praying for you, and available to assist you along the way.

SENDING:

1. The Pastor resigns.
2. The Pastor's resignation is reported to the Bishop's office by a representative of the Congregation Council. At that time the Bishop will appoint one person to serve as the Lead Synod Staff to work with your congregation during this pastoral transition.
3. The Bishop or representative of the Bishop (normally the Conference Dean, sometimes the Lead Synod Staff) shall arrange to meet with the Congregation Council as soon as possible after being notified of a pastor's resignation. At this meeting the steps in the call process as well as options for pastoral leadership during the transition are reviewed.
4. The Parish Records are examined by the Conference Dean. The departing pastor signs a form certifying that the records are accurate and complete.
5. All financial obligations between the Pastor and congregation must be satisfied before departure.
6. Lead Synod Staff conducts exit interview with the departing pastor.
7. Departing pastor retiring from active ministry or going "On Leave From Call" will write to the Bishop requesting that status.

- A) Once a pastor's resignation becomes effective that pastor becomes a former pastor. Former pastors no longer have any authority, rights, privileges, or responsibilities within the congregation (e.g. visiting the sick, counseling, having responsibility for Confirmation classes, attending meetings of the Congregation Council, performing official pastoral acts such as baptisms, weddings and funerals). During a pastoral transition Congregation Council members are responsible to see that matters of pastoral concern are referred to the Pastoral Leader(s) during a Transition.
- B) Prior to the Pastor's departure, the congregation plans for an event to honor the resigning or retiring pastor and family (if appropriate). Examples include a celebration meal involving the entire congregation, a special coffee hour, or other such event. Saying farewell to a departing pastor and family is important for marking the end of their ministry in a congregation and for taking leave from a community. Some liturgical recognition of leave taking in the final worship service is also important. One example of what this might look like is available in the Healthy Transitions Packet.



DISCERNING:

Anytime a pastor leaves a congregation there is a measure of grief that the congregation must address. The relationship between a pastor and a congregation is unique. Attending to the hopes and expectations that surround a pastorate, along with the feelings that a departure stirs up, is crucial to ensuring that the next pastoral leader begins with a clean state.

Once a pastor has left, it is normal for congregations to be tempted to work quickly to fill the pastoral office. However, experience shows that the transition between pastoral leaders is an important time in the life of a congregation to revisit their congregational identity and their God-given vision for ministry. Congregations that are patient and take their time in discerning their needs in a pastoral leader are more apt to call a pastor who will fit their setting and their unique ministry needs. No two congregations are exactly alike and the length of time between pastorates will vary depending upon the length of tenure of the departing pastor and the circumstances surrounding the departure and the time it takes for the congregation to engage in their discernment process.

1. Congregational leadership prepares a Ministry Site Profile. If a Mission in Transition team is involved in the process they will work with the leadership in the preparation. If the congregation has completed their annual statistical reports, they will find much of the needed data in their Congregational Trend Report posted on the ELCA website. If the congregation has not completed or has incomplete annual statistical reports, it may be helpful to complete the reports listed below in order to provide accurate data to the Ministry Site Profile. Congregational trend reports and local demographic trends and projections are available through the ELCA Department of Research and Evaluation (<http://www.elca.org>).
2. Congregational leaders should arrange for ways to include a broad cross-section of members in providing input to the Ministry Site Profile, specifically as it relates to the congregational Vision for Mission. Lead Synod Staff or Mission in Transition team members are available to help congregational leaders identify ways to do this in congregations. This review process involves discernment as well as information gathering. Because discernment happens at the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the time for completion will vary between congregations, but it is likely to take months, not weeks.
3. Once the Ministry Site Profile is completed, congregational leaders will arrange to meet with Lead Synod Staff to share the information in the Ministry Site Profile. A copy of the information to be presented should be provided to the Lead Synod Staff so that they have a chance to review it before this meeting. Synod staff will provide feedback to the congregation at this time and will suggest changes to the profile so that it accurately reflects the congregation's life and personality. The Call Committee should be involved in this information sharing and feedback session.



4. As part of the review process, congregational leaders and synod staff will communicate together and reach agreement on the compensation package for the new pastoral leader.
5. A Call Committee is appointed or elected according to the provisions of the congregation's constitution (C13.05 in the Model Constitution for Congregations). Name, address and phone number of the call committee chair are given to the Bishop's office.

Experience indicates that:

- A) The Call Committee should be representative of the diversity of the congregation – youth and older members; men and women; involvement in various programs, organizations and activities. The congregation is best served by call committee members who are team players who can see and understand the needs of the entire congregation.
 - B) The Call Committee shall report on a regular basis to the Congregation Council. Such reports shall be of a very general nature. It is helpful for reports to be shared with the congregation also.
 - C) Once they have received a recommendation from the Bishop, the Call Committee should act in strictest confidence regarding the identity of the Candidate lest members of the congregation become confused or disturbed by rumor; or unwise pressure be exerted on the Call Committee.
 - D) The congregation is responsible for all costs related to the call process including travel/lodging costs for candidates and Call Committee.
 - E) Although it is not always necessary, it is expected that the Call Committee be willing to travel at least several hours by car and possibly spend an overnight in order to interview the Candidate.
6. The Call Committee may suggest names of potential candidates to the Bishop through the Lead Synod Staff.
 - A) The important thing to remember is that no candidate may be approached directly without the prior approval of the Bishop.
 - B) In many cases, the Bishop can give approval for such requests. There are times, however, when the Bishop cannot. Normally it is because 1) the total pastoral needs of the Synod would be harmed by a given pastor making a change in pastorate at that time, 2) personal matters make it inappropriate for a pastor to consider a new call at this time, or 3) the person is coming from another synod and has not been released or recommended for consideration by his/her bishop.



7. The Call Committee will begin to formulate questions and prepare an informational packet on the congregation and the area they serve that can be shared with possible candidates. Call Committees are encouraged to conduct one or more “mock” interviews. Area pastors are often willing to help with this. Interview training may also be available for Call Committees and Congregation Councils. In preparing to interview, call committees should take into account their congregation’s particular vision for mission as well as learnings gained from developing their Ministry Site Profile.
8. It is important for congregations to make sure websites and other communication tools are current prior to receiving a candidate’s name. Potential candidates often visit congregational websites before reviewing any other prepared material. Websites and other electronic communication tools often provide potential candidates with their first impression of the congregation.



INTERVIEWING:

While similar to traditional job interviews, the interview between a candidate for ministry and a congregation is different in significant ways. The interview might more appropriately be thought of as a conversation because both the Candidate and the congregation are seeking to determine if this would be a good fit of skills, abilities, gifts and personalities. With that in mind this conversation is much more focused on discerning the suitability of a potential call as opposed to trying to fill a gap.

Congregations do well to remember that they are also opening themselves to review and evaluation as part of this process. The temptation is great to paint a rosy picture of the congregation – this is not helpful for honest discernment. Instead, congregations should be prepared to show and articulate their strengths, be honest about their history, needs and challenges, and present the best they have to offer a potential candidate.

However, even more importantly than engaging in conversation, in a congregational call process congregations and potential leaders are also engaged in listening for how God is speaking. Listening for God's voice often takes time, silence, study, prayer and a spirit of discernment. You are encouraged to take the time necessary to listen carefully for God's voice throughout this process as well.

1. The Bishop shall normally recommend one pastor at a time to the Call Committee for their consideration. This recommendation is made only after the Bishop or synod staff have consulted with the congregation and others regarding the needs and mission of the congregation and its resources. In making a recommendation to the Call Committee, the Bishop will provide the usual biographical material and will also indicate why this particular recommendation is made to the congregation. The Bishop will specify a minimum salary figure, housing arrangements and a benefit package which would be reasonable in terms of the Candidate's experience and present salary, and in keeping with the Congregation Council's financial parameters and in accord with the Synod's compensation policy. This minimum compensation recommendation for that particular candidate cannot be changed downward without express approval of the Bishop.
2. The Call Committee shall review the Bishop's recommendation, mobility papers and any other background documents that are offered. These are a starting place for conversation with the Candidate. Members of the Call Committee are responsible to check the Candidate's references. Reference checks are best completed after the initial interview.
3. The Call Committee shall make an initial contact with the Candidate as soon as possible within one week upon receiving the Bishop's recommendation to ascertain a mutually agreeable date to meet with the Candidate. The Conference Dean should also be contacted within the week to begin making arrangements for a synod representative to be a part of the process.



4. At the first meeting between the Call Committee and the Candidate, the committee experiences the Candidate preaching, leading worship and has a significant interview. The interview is done at a neutral site away from the calling congregation and away from the Candidate's current setting. Immediately following the interview it is helpful to have each committee member privately record their own reflections of the Candidate including such things as strengths, weaknesses, impressions and unanswered questions. These reflections can serve as the starting point for a subsequent meeting of the Call Committee when they will continue the process of discerning if the Candidate is a good fit for their congregation and their ministry needs. A synod representative will be present at the interview and make a report to the Bishop's Office. Following the initial interview, additional information on the Candidate, including reference checks, are sought. An additional interview is occasionally helpful in the discernment process.
 - A) Because candidates have a variety of gifts, a Call Committee should never fail to interview as well as listen to the Candidate's preaching. Often it is the interview that will truly open the Candidate's character, interests, and quality of leadership.
 - B) Candidates from a considerable distance away may be heard and interviewed by the Call Committee in a congregation in a neutral site. If this is necessary, the Conference Dean can assist in making these arrangements. While bringing a candidate to the area will involve travel costs, it can be a good investment for it affords the Call Committee the opportunity to get to know the Candidate well.
 - C) Although the Candidate's spouse does not normally participate in interviews, it is recognized that there are often family considerations that must be taken into account during the call process. Therefore the congregation shall be responsible for covering the costs of at least one visit by the Candidate's spouse during the call process. When that visit takes place is based upon the mutual agreement of the Candidate and the Call Committee Chair.
5. Following the initial interview(s) and information gathering time, the Call Committee meets to prayerfully reflect on the Candidate and to consider if the Candidate is a good fit for the congregation's pastoral needs. It is helpful to have each member of the Call Committee share the reflections recorded after the initial interview. At this meeting the Call Committee considers whether they have enough information to make a recommendation, or if they have additional questions or need additional information from the Candidate. It is advised that the Call Committee take at least 24 hours between the interview and this follow-up discussion in order to reflect on what was spoken and heard.



6. When the Call Committee feels that their discernment process is complete they shall share their decision.
 - A) When the discernment results in a favorable recommendation, the committee prepares a written report for the Congregation Council with their recommendations and rationale. The chair (and perhaps members of the committee) meet with the Congregation Council to share the report. This is done before the Candidate is invited to meet with the Council. A copy of this recommendation should be shared with the Conference Dean, the Lead Synod Staff, and the Bishop.
 - B) When the discernment results are not favorable, it is the responsibility of the Call Committee to notify the Candidate and the Lead Synod Staff as soon as possible with the reasons for the Committee's decision. This should be done first by phone or personal contact and followed immediately by a letter addressed to the Candidate with the same information. This letter should be copied to Conference Dean, the Lead Synod Staff, and the Bishop. The recommendation process will then begin again.
7. Upon receiving a positive written recommendation from the Call Committee, the Council President immediately begins the process of initiating a Background Screening of the Candidate. It is important that one person be designated to receive the information from the screening and that the results are received prior to the congregational call vote. If such a criminal background screening reveals information that was not known or that is contradictory to what has been provided by the Candidate, the Council President (or Council designee) should confer with the Bishop or the Lead Synod Staff. The Synod will identify some resource people who can assist in interpreting such information.



8. The Congregation Council invites the Candidate and the spouse (if applicable) to the site for a significant interview. The expenses for this visit are the responsibility of the congregation. During this visit the Candidate and the spouse will have the opportunity to see the church facilities, including the parsonage (if there is one). They should also be provided with an opportunity to visit the community, including sights of significant interest for the Candidate (i.e. schools, community facilities, realtor). This date is set with the approval of the Conference Dean or the Lead Synod Staff. A synod representative will be present. Decisions on all facets of ministry, including the financial package, but no less than the Bishop's minimum recommendation, are made here. The council and candidate must agree to the financial package. The decision on whether to recommend the Candidate to the congregation is made.
 - A) When the discernment results in a favorable recommendation, the Congregation Council proceeds to the next step in the process.
 - B) When the discernment results are not favorable, it is the responsibility of the Congregation Council to notify the Candidate and the Lead Synod Staff as soon as possible with the reasons for the Congregation Council's decision. This should be done first by phone or personal contact and followed immediately by a letter addressed to the Candidate with the same information. This letter should be copied to the Lead Synod Staff, the Bishop and the Conference Dean. The recommendation process will then begin again.
9. If the Candidate is invited to meet the congregation, the date is set at a time convenient to the Candidate, the congregation and the availability of a synod representative, arranged through the Conference Dean. The Congregation Council President notifies the Bishop's Office, requesting call forms to be sent to the congregation.



CALLING:

1. A Special Meeting of the Congregation is called according to the provisions in the congregation's constitution to consider the Congregation Council's motion to call the Candidate to the pastoral office. There should be some informal contact with the Candidate (the evening before, coffee hour, or something similar) in addition to experiencing the Candidate leading worship. A synod representative will be present and may be invited to conduct the meeting. Elections shall be by written ballot with exact results announced. A background check of the Candidate must be completed and any outstanding questions resolved before the congregational call vote can take place.
2. The Synod Representative phones the results into the Syracuse Synod office that day, and completes the Synod Representative Report on the Calling of a Pastor form. The Congregation's Officers complete the three copies of the "Letter of Call" and "Initial Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Expenses of the Pastor" within one week and sends them to the Bishop. The Bishop will attest the "Letter of Call" and the "Initial Definition of Compensation, Benefits and Expenses of the Pastor" if it meets or exceeds the Bishop's minimum recommendation for compensation for this particular candidate. The Bishop will send one copy to the Pastor-Elect and one copy to the congregation. The call cannot become effective unless attested to by the Bishop.
3. The Pastor-Elect will send a formal letter accepting the call to the congregation with a copy to the Bishop. Normally a candidate who agrees to stand for call by a congregation has indicated a willingness to accept the call if it is extended by an overwhelming vote of the congregation. However, a candidate must respond "yes" or "no" to the call within 30 days.
4. Ordination arrangements (if applicable) are made with the Bishop of this synod. Installation arrangements are made with the Conference Dean. The Installation of the new pastor should not be scheduled until the Bishop has officially attested to both the "Letter of Call" and the "Initial Definition of Compensation, Benefits and Expenses of the Pastor."

Normally the Installation of the new pastor should be held as close as possible to the start of the pastor's service in the new congregation. Arrangements for the Installation should be made with the Conference Dean.

5. Lead Synod Staff will set up a meeting with the new pastor and the Congregation Council sometime within the first 9 to 15 months of the new call to check in on the transition and to provide insights and resources that may be useful as the pastor and congregation engage in their mutual ministry.

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