

PROCEDURES FOR CONGREGATIONS IN PASTORAL TRANSITION

Please Note: This “Procedures” document provides a detailed description of the transition process for identifying and calling a rostered minister. It is important to take into account that, because of local circumstance, or a limited supply of available candidates, or other extraordinary considerations, the sequence and the timing of the process may be affected.

Now that a time of pastoral transition is about to occur in your congregation, please know that the resources of your bishop, synod staff, and mission district dean are available for the important task of securing new pastoral leadership. In addition to securing that leadership, an additional goal is to strengthen the relationship between the synod and your congregation during this time of transition as we “walk together” towards a successful outcome in a timely fashion.

Some procedures concerning pastoral transition are provided in the synod's constitution; others have been developed from experience with many congregations. Some items in the process— notably the Ministry Site Profile (MSP) and the Rostered Minister’s Profile (RMP)—have been established by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In union church or shared ministry settings, some special procedures must be followed; these will be explained as necessary by the associate of the bishop with whom you are working.

Depending on your circumstances and those of neighboring congregations, you may be encouraged to use this time of transition as an opportunity to investigate working cooperatively and/or developing shared ministry with another congregation(s). Please see any such opportunities as just that, opportunities and not threats, and give them your careful consideration.

Please know as well that depending upon the circumstances surrounding the departure of your previous pastor, you may wish to consider using one of the various types of interim ministry, including trained interims, available through the synod to assist you during this time of transition.

1. Meet with the Mission District Dean and/or Synod Staff Person

Soon after your pastor has announced his or her resignation, the associate of the bishop assigned to your mission district and/or your mission district dean will contact your council’s president or vice-president to schedule a meeting as soon as possible with your congregation council. The purpose of this meeting is to explain the transition process and to conduct an exit interview with the pastor.

The dean or associate of the bishop will review the tasks and procedures that are intended to assist the congregation during the period of transition, including

- getting the information necessary to arrange for supply pastors who will serve as worship leaders;

- introducing the materials used in preparing a *Parish Study Report*;
- conducting an exit interview with the pastor who is leaving;
- arranging for persons who can provide pastoral care during the pastoral vacancy;
- scheduling a meeting of the congregation's members for the purpose of receiving their ideas concerning the congregation's needs; and
- introducing the issue of whether the congregation will use the single candidate approach or the multiple candidate approach.

Concerning this last point, there are two ways in which the call committee may carry out its work: a single candidate or a multiple candidate process. (However, if the candidate is a seminarian or a seminary graduate awaiting ordination, only the single candidate process may be used.) In the single candidate process, the bishop will recommend one candidate to the chairperson of the pastoral call committee. In the multiple candidate process, the bishop will recommend two or more candidates with names being conveyed to the call committee only when at least two candidates have been identified. It should be noted that in the single candidate process your candidate will be meeting with your congregation only; in the multiple candidate process the candidates may consider other congregations at the same time as yours.

2. Gather Information for the Parish Study Report

Part of that process that you are now entering includes preparing a *Parish Study Report* from information that you will gather. This report will assist you in identifying the kind of pastoral leadership needed by your congregation. It is important to gather this information and describe your congregation as thoroughly and honestly as possible. This information will help the bishop's staff suggest the most desirable candidates based on an accurate picture of your congregation.

a. *Information to be gathered from all interested members of the congregation.* At a time mutually agreed upon by the congregation council and the associate of the bishop who will be working with your congregation during the pastoral transition, members of the congregation will be invited to attend a "holy conversation." This might follow the final Sunday worship service or be held on a weekday evening. The associate of the bishop will guide the conversation. At the meeting he or she will both share information, reviewing the pastoral transition process, and gather information from those present, using two survey instruments: the ELCA's *Congregational Vitality Survey* (Short Participant Survey) and a sheet with *Reflection Questions* (LT24 in the synod's transition manual). Someone from the congregation will be asked to upload the results of the *Congregational Vitality Survey* on the Congregational Vitality Project's web site (www.congregationalvitalitysurvey.com). The associate of the bishop will collect the completed sheets of *Reflection Questions* to take to the synod office for transcribing and collating.

b. *Ministry Site Profile (MSP).* Your synod staff liaison will provide the congregation council with samples of a Ministry Site Profile (MSP) and instructions concerning how one should be prepared for your congregation. The congregation council (or council and call committee if one has been appointed) will complete this profile. One method to use for the preparation of MSP is to ask each member of your council (or council and call committee) to fill out an individual

MSP. The individual responses can then be compared and combined into one consensus report. The consensus report *must* then be completed online by someone who agrees to do that task on behalf of the council. Pay special attention to Box 8, which is the part of the MSP that is openly displayed in the ELCA.

Although the main body of the *Parish Study Report* is generated from the MSP that you enter online, along with reports from the two surveys completed by the congregation, you may have other information and documents to include as well (for example, recent annual reports). Mail any additional material to the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA, Congregational Study Booklets, 2354 Grove Road, Allentown, PA 18109-3044.

To make this *Parish Study Report* the most valuable tool it can be, please note the following:

- Full disclosure of material facts is necessary. Be open and honest and offer a clear picture of your congregation as it is right now.
- Include the financial reports for the past three years.
- State clearly what you can offer in compensation to your next pastor.
- You may want to make the proposed congregational profile available for review by the congregation for reaction and evaluation prior to entering it online. Is it accurate? Is it complete?

3. Appoint the Call Committee

Being careful not to “crowd-out” the celebration of the departing pastor, once the initial meeting with your associate of the bishop has taken place and the call committee information contained in the *Pastoral Transition Process Manual* has been received, the congregation council may begin recruiting members to serve on your call committee.

A call committee is usually a body of six voting members of the congregation (usually three men and three women, with one of the members being under the age of eighteen). This committee is appointed by the congregation council or elected by the congregation (depending on your constitution) to represent the congregation in the process of finding and selecting a candidate. The committee members should be active members of the congregation who represent a cross-section of the congregation. Typically, no more than one member of the call committee should also be a member of the congregation council, and that one member should not be the president of the council. No congregational staff members should be on the committee.

The call committee’s chairperson should be a person who can build an effective team and establish a climate of trust. Skills that are needed on the committee include (1) public speaking (for the chairperson); (2) interviewing; (3) advocating for others; (4) the ability to maintain confidentiality; and (5) perhaps most importantly, listening.

Although an organizing meeting of the call committee may be held before the congregation’s meeting with the bishop (*Section 4 below*), no action to identify a candidate should occur until after that meeting. At an organizing meeting or at subsequent meetings, the call committee should discuss and answer questions raised in the development of the Ministry Site Profile.

4. Meet with the Bishop

When the *Parish Study Report* is completed, the bishop and the associate who is working with your congregation will meet with your congregation council, call committee, and all interested members of the congregation. The following will occur at this meeting:

- Information in the report will be reviewed briefly for accuracy and interpretation.
- Financial realities will be reviewed.
- Questions will be answered about the remaining steps in the call process.
- Roles will be clearly defined, establishing the expectations of the congregation council, the call committee, and the synod staff.
- Congregation members will have an opportunity to communicate directly with the bishop.

5. Identify a Candidate or Candidates

The next step in the process involves the work of the bishop and staff in seeking potential candidates for the congregation. These candidates will use the information provided by your *Parish Study Report* and information from the bishop's meeting with your congregation.

It is important to allow sufficient time for the bishop and staff to complete this stage of the process. A number of factors will be taken into consideration:

- the type of person the council feels is needed and desired;
- the specific opportunities and problems of the parish;
- the mission of the congregation in its community;
- the financial provisions ready to be offered the next pastor.

The bishop may have to contact a large number of pastors before willing candidates are identified who match the situation of your congregation.

As the bishop and synod staff search for suitable candidates, your congregation council and call committee may suggest specific names to the bishop. Because many other factors are involved, the bishop will make the decision whether or not a specific name can be communicated to a call committee. The synod's Constitution and Bylaws (BL S14.11.c.) states that "nominations for the filling of pastoral vacancies must be made to the Pastoral Call Committee of the pastoral charge through and with the approval of the Bishop and without that approval no nominee shall at any time be considered."

6. Work of the Call Committee

The synod staff person is available to meet with your call committee in order to provide training for its members and to assure that the committee members understand the contents of the Transition Process Manual. That staff person can assist the call committee in preparing to interview candidates. Your call committee should prepare for the interview by reviewing the *Parish Study Report* and the Rostered Minister Profile and then draft appropriate, open-ended questions related to the needs of the congregation and to the specific gifts of the candidate. Your

call committee should also encourage and be prepared to address questions from the candidate. To help you prepare, suggested questions to ask the candidate (PT30) and for the candidate to ask (PT31) are available; however, these questions are only examples.

Once the name(s) and resume(s) has/have been received by your call committee, the committee will meet and interview the candidate(s). This may require more than one meeting. Normally a spouse/partner does not participate in the interview(s). The congregation pays any travel expenses for the candidate(s).

At the initial interview with a candidate, arrangements will be made to observe the candidate conducting worship and preaching. Typically, this takes place at a neutral site, although it may happen at the pastor's current congregation, if the pastor is willing. Holding this service at a neutral site may help keep the pastor's current congregation from knowing that he or she is involved in a call process. Any expenses the committee incurs in visiting and hearing the candidate(s) preach should be paid by the congregation.

Your call committee chairperson should have regular weekly or bi-weekly check-ins with your associate of the bishop in order to provide regular status reports and to maintain the agreed upon schedule. This contact enables the chairperson to make regular reports to the congregation.

No matter whether your council has selected the single or the multiple candidate process, it is essential that the call committee keep all candidate names in strict confidence. Although the chairperson of the committee should report regularly to the congregation council and to the congregation itself about the work being done by the committee, names and other revealing information about the candidates should never be divulged.

In a single candidate process, if there is a continuing interest in the candidate after the interview(s) and worship observation have taken place, a special meeting of the council and the call committee will be held to interview the candidate. Unless there is a compelling reason, the call committee should be unanimous in its decision to recommend a candidate to the council. Prior to the meeting with the council, the call committee chairperson and the council president should meet with (or be in contact with) the candidate to complete compensation understandings. However, if either party shows no further interest at any time in this process, the bishop of the synod must be notified. A new name will be submitted and the interview process will begin again.

In a multiple candidate process, after interviewing all candidates, the committee will normally observe each candidate conduct worship and preach. (An exception may be allowed if, following the initial interviews, the committee is unanimous in agreeing that a candidate is not acceptable. If this be the case, the committee chairperson should contact the bishop or the associate of the bishop right away.) After initial interviews, worship visits, and possible follow-up interviews with one or more of the candidates, your committee should either (1) recommend one of the candidates to your council or (2) notify the bishop that none of the candidates will be recommended. Once candidates have been dismissed, normally they may not be considered again if the process with the preferred candidate does not move forward as expected. As with the single candidate process, prior to the meeting with the council, the call committee chairperson and the

council president should meet with (or be in contact with) the candidate to complete compensation understandings. Also, unless there is a compelling reason, the call committee should be unanimous in its willingness to recommend a candidate even if the candidate finally selected was not the first choice of all committee members.

Note: At any time during the committee's work, it may be necessary to call a special congregational meeting to approve financial arrangements. It is best to separate the business of approving a compensation budget from the congregational meeting at which a candidate is voted upon.

7. Special Meeting of the Congregation Council with Candidate

Your call committee chairperson should ask the council lay president or vice president to call a special council meeting to which the recommended candidate and the call committee should also be invited. The candidate, along with his/her spouse, if any, should be invited to visit your community on this day to tour the church, parsonage (if applicable), and general area. The candidate should not be introduced throughout the community as a potential pastor for your congregation, however. Your congregation should pay the candidate's expenses for this trip. After dinner, the candidate's spouse may be entertained in the home of a congregation member while the candidate attends the council meeting.

At the council meeting the council and candidate should get to know one another and discuss the possibility of a future pastoral relationship. First, the call committee should meet alone with the council to explain and discuss why they are making this recommendation. Second, the candidate should be invited into the meeting to welcome the candidate, conduct an interview, and discuss any issues raised in the council concerning this recommendation. Finally, a formal vote should be taken recommending the candidate to a congregational meeting for election. The candidate should not be present in the council meeting for this final discussion and vote, but he or she should be informed of the vote as soon as it has been taken. It is preferable that the vote be unanimous and that any dissenting votes are clearly understood and considered not to be detrimental to the eventual acceptance of the candidate as the pastor of the congregation.

If the council and candidate agree to proceed to a congregational vote, a date should be set for a special congregational meeting for that purpose. Please follow your own congregation's constitution for the steps to be taken to call and announce such a meeting. When a date has been set, your president or vice president should immediately notify the bishop as to the date and time of the meeting. If a supply pastor has already been scheduled to lead worship on that date, the supply pastor should be notified directly (if you made the arrangements yourselves) or through the synod office (if the synod office schedules your supply pastors) so that the supply pastor knows that he or she is not needed. That is, your candidate will be the person to lead any worship services on the day of the congregational vote.

8. Preparing the Congregation for the Candidate

It is helpful to arrange an informal reception in order for the congregational members to meet the candidate and his/her family, if any. Normally this reception should occur no earlier than the

Saturday prior to the congregational meeting, which is usually held on a Sunday morning following worship. At that reception, congregational members should be given the opportunity to address questions to the pastoral candidate. An information sheet about the candidate should be distributed at this reception and with the bulletin at the worship service.

9. The Congregational Meeting

The council should be careful to observe your constitution's requirements in calling a special congregational meeting. The announcement of the meeting should say only that "on _____ (day and date) at _____ (time) there will be a special congregational meeting to take action on a recommendation of the congregational council relative to calling a pastor. That motion on calling a new pastor will be the only business conducted at this meeting." The name of the candidate should not be given in the notice of the meeting.

Congregations usually hold these elections following a worship service; this may be a special service or a regular service, at which time the prospective pastor conducts worship and preaches the sermon. The candidate is then excused immediately following the service but should remain on site until the ballots are tallied and reported.

A representative of the bishop will be appointed to conduct the special congregational meeting; this is to carry out the synod bylaw that states that "an election shall be conducted under the supervision of the Bishop or a deputy appointed for the purpose" (BLS14.11.c.). The order for this special meeting should include

- prayer;
- the presentation of the motion by the congregation council to elect the candidate: the motion should read "that _____ (name) be extended a call as pastor of _____ (congregation or pastoral charge)";
- discussion of the motion, which should include a presentation of biographical information about the candidate as well as an opportunity for members to ask questions of the call committee; and
- a vote by secret ballot of the "voting members" present, that is, those confirmed members who have a right to vote in congregational meetings as defined in your constitution.

Ballots should be provided by the council and should be blank pieces of paper on which the voters are instructed to write either "yes" or "no." This vote is being taken on the recommendation of the congregation council, and only this single nomination from the council may be voted upon. That is to say, it is out of order to try to substitute another person's name for that of the recommended candidate. No absentee ballots are permitted.

In order for a call to be issued, the candidate must receive at least two-thirds affirmative votes of the total votes cast. In the case of a multiple congregation pastoral charge, at least a majority is required in each congregation and two-thirds of the total votes.

When the voting results in a call, the bishop's representative will report the exact number of affirmative and negative votes to the pastor-elect, bishop, and mission district dean. Call forms furnished by the synod should be completed by the congregation council president or vice

president, whichever is the congregation's lay leader, with all copies of the forms being returned to the synod office for the bishop's signature. Next, the candidate needs to formally accept the call by a written reply, indicating the effective date; a copy of this letter should be sent by the candidate to the bishop. Until this written reply is received, there should not be any publicity or social media reports concerning the election.

In the event that the council does not accept the call committee's recommendation of the candidate, or if the congregational vote falls short of the two-thirds needed to offer a call, or if the candidate declines to accept the call (such as if there are a significant number of negative votes even though the two-thirds requirement is met), the process begins again at the step of finding a new candidate.

10. Pastor Moves to New Congregation—Installation

After moving to the new parish and beginning service there, the pastor will arrange with the synodical bishop and the dean of the mission district for installation. The installation should occur as soon after the start of the new call as practical and may take place in a special worship service or in a regular service of the congregation.

Moving expenses for the pastor relocating to a new congregation are the responsibility of the congregation or pastoral charge that issued the call.

11. Ongoing Relationships—Mutual Ministry Committee

Your congregation council should establish an ongoing Mutual Ministry Committee to provide feedback and support for your new pastor. Guidelines for the establishment of such a committee are available from your associate of the bishop.

12. Pastor-Congregation One-Year Checkup

Approximately one year after a pastor begins his/her ministry in a new congregation, a checkup meeting should be held with the following people in attendance: the council, the pastor(s) of the congregation, and a liaison from the bishop's staff. Agreements should be made to resolve any concerns expressed by the council or the pastor.

13. Conclusion

This process may seem to be very long and complex, but it is meant to bring about a pastoral relationship that can be affirmed by your congregation, the new pastor, and the synod. Taking time now to do a careful and honest job in discerning who your new pastor should be will, it is hoped, serve God's mission in and through your congregation well into the future. It is also to be hoped that this process will have strengthened your relationships within the congregation and with the rest of the synod. Use these steps as a process, but also and always pray for God's guidance as you carry out these tasks.