

## PROCEDURES FOR CONGREGATIONS IN PASTORAL TRANSITION

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.

An overview of the transition process with timeframes is provided in the *Pastoral Transition Timeline* (PT05). This timeline is intended to help your congregation work through the transition in a methodical way that keeps all parties accountable to a mutually agreed upon schedule. In this document we will refer to each activity in the timeline and identify the steps as *Activity 1.a.*, and so forth as they are identified in the timeline.

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 Leader's Profile (RLP)—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 synod staff person 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 termination of your pastor-parish relationship, 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 (*Activity 1.a.*), the synod staff person 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 (*Activity 1.b.*) and to make arrangements for conveying information about the transition process. The purpose of this meeting is to explain the transition process and to conduct an exit interview with the pastor (*Activity 1.c.*). This meeting may occur while the present pastor is still serving the congregation.

The dean or staff person 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;
- possibly arranging for a trained leader who could assist in identifying specific ministry approaches that would be related to your congregation and its environment;
- possibly arranging for a consultant who can provide counseling regarding specific needs, issues, and plans that may be affecting your congregation and which may involve entering an extended period of transition.
- 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 (with the final decision to be made when the synod staff person assigned to the district meets again with the council, *Activity 3.b.*).

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 to five candidates (the norm is three) 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. Appoint the Call Committee**

Being careful not to “crowd-out” the celebration of the departing pastor’s contributions, once the initial meeting with your dean and/or synod staff member 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 (*Activity 2.a.*).

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 (*Activity 2.b.*). The committee members should be active members of the congregation who represent a cross-section of the congregation. 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.

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) project management; (2) leading meetings; (3) writing, designing, and editing questionnaires and letters; (4) public speaking (for the chairperson); (5) interviewing; (6) advocating for others; (7) the ability to maintain confidentiality; and (8) perhaps most importantly, listening.

Members should be persons who are able to fulfill their duties in a timely manner. No congregational staff members should be on the committee.

Although an organizing meeting of the call committee may be held before the meeting of the congregation council and call committee with the bishop (*Activity 4.a.*), no action to identify a candidate should occur until after that meeting. At an organizing meeting or at subsequent meetings, the call committee could also discuss and answer questions raised in the development of the *Ministry Site Profile* (described in more detail in section 3d. of this document) in order to participate in the special council meeting when the *Parish Study Report* is reviewed (*Activity 4.a.*).

It is recommended that you use the order for Thanksgiving at the Conclusion of a Call (see ELW *Occasional Services for the Assembly*) with the departing pastor on his or her last Sunday. This can symbolize the shift in responsibility for the pastoral care of your congregation from the departing pastor to the synod.

### **3. Gather Information for the Parish Study Report**

Councils and congregations have found that the pastoral transition process that you are now beginning is necessary in securing a pastor. Part of that process includes preparing a parish study report from information that you will gather. A copy of this report will be provided for each council and call committee member. This report will be very important when your council and call committee meet with the bishop, and the booklet 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 synod staff suggest the most desirable candidates based on an accurate picture of your congregation.

**a. *Congregational Transition Survey (PT21)*.** Your mission district dean or synod staff member will provide a copy of this survey form during the initial meeting with your council (*Activity 1.c.*). Begin using this survey as soon as you wish. The survey may be started while your present pastor is still serving. Your congregation's president, vice president (if the pastor is the president), or another lay leader designated by the congregation council should introduce the questionnaire to the congregation (*Activity 3.a.*).

Use this survey questionnaire during three consecutive worship services. Introduce the survey questionnaire during the service at whatever point you choose. Allow enough time for people to complete the form, and then have ushers collect the forms. Do not encourage people to take the forms home in order to complete them, and do not mail them to members. Doing either of these two activities will result in a lower rate of participation and lessen the value of the final results.

On the first Sunday hand out questionnaires to everyone and ask all confirmed members to complete them. Lead the members through the survey question by question. On the second and third Sundays ask that only confirmed members who have not yet done so complete questionnaires. Experience shows that you will reach from 50% to 60% of your confirmed members by using this method.

Explain the survey to the congregation as thoroughly as possible when introducing it. Give some reasons for the study to which this survey relates, and explain that the results will help your congregation council and the bishop find the kind of pastoral leadership most suitable to your congregation. Indicate that all forms are to be anonymous (not signed.)

After the congregational questionnaires have been filled out during three consecutive worship services, collect and hold them until they can be given or mailed to a member of the synod staff for processing.

**b. Synod Staff Member's Meeting with Your Council.** After the *Congregational Transition Survey* has been completed, a member of the synod staff will meet with your council (*Activity 3.b.*). The purposes of this important meeting are to

- assess together the progress being made,
- explicitly review the congregation's financial realities,
- decide or confirm whether to use the single candidate process or the multiple candidate process,
- complete the *Checklist* (PT04) by setting target dates for all steps up to and including the meeting with the bishop, and,
- if they have been completed, give the *Congregational Transition Survey* forms to the synod staff member who is attending this meeting.

**c. Discussion Questions (PT24) and How Are We Doing? (PT25).** Your dean or synod staff person will provide you with copies of the forms titled *Discussion Questions* (PT24) and *How Are We Doing?* (PT25). These forms will be used at a meeting of the congregation (*Activity 3.c.*), and the dean or staff person relating to your congregation will join with you in arranging the date and time for this meeting. In fact, your synod staff person will probably be the person to lead the discussion at this meeting. All of the members of your congregation should be invited to join in this important discussion about your congregation and its challenges, strengths, and changes. (See the sample invitation, Form PT20). After this meeting, collect all of the responses and tally them. The synod staff person will give you a tally form and instructions on how to carry out this task.

**d. Ministry Site Profile (MSP).** Your synod staff liaison will provide you with samples of a Ministry Site Profile (MSP) and instructions concerning how one should be prepared for your congregation. Your congregation council and call committee will complete this profile (*Activity 3.d.*). The form which becomes the basis of the profile should be completed after the results have been obtained from the *Congregational Transition Survey* and the *Discussion Questions* so that insights gained through those steps can be included in the MSP.

Before a final version of the MSP is prepared, each member of your council and call committee should fill out an individual MSP. The council and call committee should then meet to discuss their individual responses and combine them 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, you will have other information and documents as well. Mail that 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?

This information will be used to make a study booklet describing your congregation, which will be reviewed when the bishop meets with your council and call committee (*Activity 4.a.*). Please note: this meeting with the bishop cannot be held until this information has been returned and compiled by the synod staff into the Parish Study Report.

#### **4. Meet with the Bishop**

When the Parish Study Report is completed, the bishop and your district's synod staff person will meet with your congregation council and call committee (*Activity 4.a.*). The following will occur at this meeting:

- Information in the booklet will be reviewed for accuracy and interpretation.
- Financial realities will be reviewed.
- The effects of the council's earlier decision concerning whether to use a single candidate process or a multiple candidate process will be reviewed.
- Questions will be answered about the remaining steps in the call process.
- The checklist with target timeframes will be completed for the remaining steps in the call process in order to ensure mutual agreement.
- Roles will be clearly defined, establishing the expectations of the congregation council, the call committee, and the synod staff.
- Information will be shared concerning the establishment of a mutual ministry committee.

## **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 council and call committee.

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 persons 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. Approximately six to eight weeks are required to submit a name (see Form PT28, *Guidelines for Pastoral Call Committee*, for details). A name is not recommended to the call committee without the candidate's permission. 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 (*Activity 6.a.*). That staff person can assist the call committee in preparing to interview candidates. For example, a mock interview could be set up if the committee so chooses (refer to PT29). In any case, your call committee should prepare for the interview by reviewing the Parish Study Report and the Rostered Leader 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.

As part of its training, a call committee may consider consulting with a layperson from another congregation that has recently completed the call process. Your synod staff person could help to facilitate that connection.

Once the name(s) and resume(s) has/have been received by your call committee, the committee will meet and interview the candidate(s) (*Activity 6.b.*). This may require more than one meeting. Normally a spouse/partner does not participate in the first interview. The congregation pays any travel expenses for the candidate(s).

Your call committee chairperson should have regular weekly or bi-weekly check-ins with your synod staff person assigned by the bishop to “walk with you” through the call process in order to provide regular status reports and to maintain the agreed upon schedule (*Activity 6.f.*). 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.

If there is a continuing interest on both sides, the committee will observe the candidate(s) conducting worship and preaching (*Activity 6.c.*). This may take place at a pastor’s current congregation or at a neutral site, as determined by both the committee and the pastor. There may be an advantage to visiting a candidate’s current congregation to observe the pastor’s interaction with congregational members, in addition to assessing the sermon; but holding this service at a neutral site may help keep the pastor’s 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.

**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 (*Activity 6.d.*). 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 (*Activity 6.e.*). 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 (*Activity 6.d.*). 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 (*Activity 6.e.*). 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 (*Activity 7.a.*). The candidate, along with his/her spouse/partner, 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/partner may be entertained in a home of the congregation 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 evening just prior to the congregational meeting, which is usually held on a Sunday



morning following worship. Sunday morning, just prior to the worship service, is another possibility for this informal reception. 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 definitely not be given.

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 (*Activity 9.a.*). 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 form being returned to the synod office for the bishop's signature (*Activity 9.b.*). 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 (*Activity 9.c.*). 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 (*Activity 6.b.*).

## **10. Pastor Moves to New Congregation—Installation**

After moving to the new parish and beginning service there (*Activity 10.a.*), 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 (*Activity 10.b.*).

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 (*Activity 11.*). Guidelines for the establishment of such a committee will be provided when the bishop meets with your council (*Activity 4.a.*).

## **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 synod staff (*Activity 12.*). 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.