

# Alaska Synod Call Process Manual

("Best Practices Model")

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## **CHAPTER 1: The Spiritual Work**

*The Biblical/Theological Grounding for the call process*

### **Chapter Contents:**

Introduction -- Understanding Call -- Prayers -- A Community Bible Study -- Suggested Biblical Texts

### **Introduction**

Calling a pastor is a special time for reflection and prayer in the life of a congregation. This time of transition is an opportunity for the Congregation Council to lead by example, through mutual encouragement, trust in God, unity and spiritual growth. Prayer, bible study, and regular devotions keep the leadership spiritually centered as it guides the congregation in grieving its loss, assessing the current congregational strengths and weaknesses, creating a vision for mission and ministry, and calling a new pastor.

**What:** *Prayer, Bible Study, Devotions, and Theological Reflection...* are means for the Holy Spirit to help you as you move through the call process. With these tools a congregation may be strengthened to deal with the details of the call process and enabled to grow spiritually in the process. The synod has available to the congregation suggested resource materials for prayer (see pg. 4-5) and bible studies.

**When:** Begin with Prayer *every time* members of the congregation gather. *Regularly* include reflections in newsletters and bulletins that tell of the call process and invite people into a deeper understanding of call process.

**Where:** At church, whenever the people gather for *worship* and *meetings*, in *bulletins* and *newsletters*, as part of verbal *announcements*, there should be regular communication regarding the call process and also invitations to pray. All of the places that communicate the work of the congregation are opportunities for sharing the call process and inviting people into a process of spiritual growth.

**Who:** *The whole community* needs always to be in prayer. The congregation focuses its prayer on the call process as well as the other community concerns. Every group and committee should be furnished with information about the call process and be asked to share in this spiritual work.

**How:** The leadership begins its meetings with *bible study, devotions and prayer* before beginning its various tasks. The leadership should also provide suggested prayers, biblical material and other devotional materials to other groups in the congregation. Some sample materials are included in this manual.

## Understanding "Call"

### WHAT IS A "CALL"?

At the heart of our Lutheran theology is what Martin Luther termed "the priesthood of all believers". In our baptism God calls us sons and daughters and incorporates us into the body of Christ. Luther reminded us of the Latin origin of the word "vocation" - *vocare* - which means "to call." All of us take up our vocations - our callings - as God's people. Those are served within family, occupation, neighborhood, and faith community. We are all called to ministry, to serve in and through our daily activities. Within this priesthood of all believers exists the office of ministry, the "office of Word and Sacrament" (see Augsburg Confession, below).

Based on our Lutheran theology, a pastor is **called, not hired**, to serve a congregation. The call process is not the same as the hiring process in other parts of society. Any process that seems to focus on "head hunting", resume' shuffling, or high-anxiety interviews is missing the point in the calling of a pastor. Calling a pastor is one element in the church's seeking to fulfill its mission, to follow God's leading into the future.

The call process is not a pageant, in which contestants present themselves to their best advantage so that they will win the top prize.

The Lutheran call process is unique because it is an effort to discern what God wants for the local church and for the whole church in order that the Gospel may be proclaimed and the sacraments administered in accordance with the Gospel.

In order for a call to be issued first there must be a congregational vote for the candidate; second, the president and secretary of the congregation, representing the congregation's decision, must sign the letter of Call; and finally the Bishop, representing the whole church, must sign the letter of Call.

### WHAT THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION SAYS:

The Lutheran Church looks to the documents called "The Lutheran Confessions" for its understanding of scripture, the faith and the church. Chief among these documents is the Augsburg Confession, written by Philip Melanchthon and other reformers to present before the Holy Roman Emperor in the city of Augsburg (Germany) in 1530. Among other concerns these concise statements help us understand the nature of the office of ministry in the Lutheran Church:

"We cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works or satisfactions. We receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us."

(Article IV, The Augsburg Confession)

"To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel."

(Article V, The Augsburg Confession)

"Nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a proper call."

(Article XIV, The Augsburg Confession)

All Christians are called to the ministry of serving God and neighbor, but for the sake of good order in the church certain Christians are or specifically called to the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament.

## THE CALL TO MINISTRY

Through the church, God calls some Christians to ordained ministry. Once that call is discerned, the candidate normally devotes years to study, training and preparation under the guidance of the whole church, through the Bishop and the Synod Candidacy Committee.

In a similar way, through the church, God calls ordained ministers to a specific pastorate. Not only does the local congregation participate in the call process, but so does the whole church through the office of the Bishop. Just as the whole church took an active role in the call to ordination, so now the whole church takes an active role in the call to a specific ministry.

In fact, once a person is approved for ordination, the candidate must first receive and accept a call to a specific ministry in order to be ordained. Ordination may occur in a local church, but it is always an ordination by the whole church, as shown in the presence of the Bishop at the ordination service.

## THE CHURCH AND CALL

The local church is fully the church, but the local church is not the church in its fullness. The local church calls a person to be its pastor, but the whole church has a stake in who is called and how the call process is handled.

The Call Committee, the Congregation Council and, eventually, the entire congregation participate fully in the call process. As does the Bishop, who represents the interest and commitment of the whole church, in seeing that the pastor who is called is suited to ministry under the call that is extended.

The Bishop's office has a deep concern for the well-being of the congregation's life and ministry. The Bishop has a deep concern for the person and gifts of the prospective pastor. In the call process the Bishop or synod liaison, the congregation and the prospective pastor work together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring about a new partnership that is faithful to the Gospel, empowers the local church in its ministry, and strengthens the whole church as the people of God.

**Prayers** *See Appendix for other prayer resources*

**FOR THE WORK OF THE CALL COMMITTEE**

Almighty God, giver of all good gifts: Look on your Church with grace and guide the minds of those who shall choose a pastor for this congregation, that we may receive a faithful servant who will care for your people and equip us for our ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Lutheran Book of Worship, pg. 46)

**FOR THE DEPARTING PASTOR:**

Gracious God, you have united us all in one body the body of Christ. We give you thanks for the work of Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ among us. As he/she leaves *to a new congregation/retirement* surround *him/her* with your Spirit. Give us the courage to release *him/her* to a new call and bless our remembering of the work that has been done among us. Guide Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ and us as we continue to seek to share the Good News of salvation through your son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

**DURING THE INTERIM TIME**

Loving God, be with us and guide us during this time of discernment. Fill our leaders with your wisdom. Keep us mindful of the work you would have us do. Lead us and guide us O Lord to be about the work of your kingdom even as the search for a new pastor continues. Bless all who have taken on extra responsibility, and fill them with a sense of your love and presence. We pray in your Son's name, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

**DURING INTERVIEWS:**

God, keep us mindful of your presence among us as we seek to discern your will for us. We pray that you will help us see beyond our own needs to the needs of your whole church. We pray that you will open our eyes to new possibilities, and opportunities of being your people. Guide us and lead us, O Lord. Amen.

**AT MEETINGS:**

Life-giving God, create among us a desire to do your will. Open our hearts to your Word. Lead us as we seek to lead. Guide us as we seek to guide. God, we desire a new pastor to be among us, to lead us and walk with us - direct us as we wait. Bless all who serve in the congregation, especially those who have the responsibility to lead us in the call process. Bless us Lord Jesus. Amen

**A Community Bible Study**

*Suggested texts on following page*

LEADER: Open with Prayer:

*Almighty God, we look to your Word for guidance and hope. Open our hearts and our minds that we may hear your Word for us. Guide us through your Word to hear the good news for our lives together, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**A. First person reads the lesson:**

In silence write one word or phrase from the lesson that seems significant to you:

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Each person shares the word or phrase without additional comment.

**B. A second person reads the lesson:**

In silence reflect on what this passage is saying to you.

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Each person may share his/her reflection without additional comment.

**C. A third person reads the lesson:**

Each person reflects in one sentence or less what this passage is saying to the congregation at this time while you are in the Call Process.

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If time allows, a 10-20 minute open discussion may be included at this time.

**Closing Prayer:**

LEADER: *Lord God, we are your servants in need of your love.*

The leader then offers a prayer for the person on his/her right. That person prays for the person on his/her right, continuing around the room until each person has been included.

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

### **Suggested Biblical Texts**

The following are just a few texts that may be used for devotions or bible study during the call process. The lessons for each Sunday may also be used for your study.

The “Great Commission” – Matthew 28:16-20  
The Call of Matthew – Matthew 9:9-13  
Call of the first Disciples – Luke 5:1-11  
“Come and See” – John 1:35-46  
Servant Leadership – John 11:33-35; John 12:20-26; John 13:1-17  
Our New Life in Christ – Romans 12:1-8 (9-21)  
On Church Divisions – 1 Corinthians 3:1-9  
Spiritual Armor – Ephesians 6:10-18  
Being in Christ Jesus – Philippians 2:1-11  
New Life in Christ – Colossians 3:1-17  
Prayer – 1 Timothy 2  
Qualifications of Deacons – 1 Timothy 3:8-13  
A Good Minister of Jesus Christ – 1 Timothy 4:6-16

Reflections on God’s Call:

Call of young people:

Samuel: 1 Samuel 2:1-3; 18  
Mary: Luke 1:26-38

Call of Elderly

Elizabeth and Zechariah: Luke 1  
Abraham and Samuel: Genesis 18; 9:15  
Simeon and Anna: Luke 2:22-38

Call of the Disciples:

Follow Me: Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11

Reflections on being the church:

Read the Book of Acts together. Read one chapter a week. Begin meetings by reflecting on recent readings and the ministry of your congregation.

**CHAPTER 2: Timeline/Flow Chart for Call Process**

	<b>Phase I</b>	<b>Phase II</b>	<b>Phase III</b>	<b>Phase IV</b>
	Leave-Taking. Pastor announces he/she is leaving.	Congregational Mission Profile Development. Pastor leaves, Interim begins, Mission Profile Team starts.	Calling the Pastor. Mission Profile Team work completed. Call committee.	Beginning new ministry. Call issued. Welcome new pastor.
<b>TIME FRAME</b>	1-3 months (may be longer)	3 months to 1 year	2-4 months	
<b>PASTORAL COVERAGE</b>	Pastor's final weeks; supply pastor as bridge to Interim Pastor if needed.	Interim Pastor. (Interim may work with the Mission Profile process.)	Interim Pastor.	Interim. New Pastor.
<b>COUNCIL</b>	Plans Farewell activities for current pastor. Meets with Synod staff person for exit interview, to secure interim, to begin call process. Arranges for pastoral coverage before interim begins. Plans for the review and updating of the congregation's constitution.	Selects the group to be responsible for the development of the Mission Profile. Sets directions for the Mission Profile process. Sees that the ministry and work of the congregation continues. Be in contact with Synod staff person.	Sets congregational meeting to receive Mission Profile Team report. Appoints call committee. Receives report of call committee, sets date for vote. Works with Synod staff to prepare pastoral package. Maintain the ministry and mission of the congregation.	Prepares for welcoming new pastor. Works with Synod staff and new pastor to set installation date.
<b>CONGREGATION</b>	Participates in the farewell activities for pastor.	Maintains the on-going ministry and mission. Participates as invited in the development of the Congregation's Mission Profile.	Meets to hear and approve. Congregational Mission Profile as basis for call. Meets to vote on call committee recommendation for pastor.	Welcomes new pastor.
<b>Mission Profile Task Force, or Long-Range Planning Committee, or Transition Team, or Call Committee, or other designated group</b>	(Not yet formed)	May meet with Synod staff person to define tasks. Develops the Mission Profile, comprised of (a) of congregation's current life and dynamics, and (b) future mission challenges and goals. Writes a final report to present to congregation.	Reports to council. Presents report to congregation. Members may be asked to serve on call committee.	(Finished)
<b>CALL COMMITTEE</b>	(Not yet formed)	Meets to review Congregational Mission Profile as Profile is finalized. Call Committee is formed at the completion of Phase II.	Determines process for interviewing candidates. Receives names. Interviews candidates. Recommends candidate.	(Finished)
<b>SYNOD STAFF</b>	Conducts exit interview with pastor and council. Meets with council to review process. Makes contact with Interim Pastor possibilities.	Helps develop process for development of Mission Profile. Work with Interim if needed.	With Bishop if possible, attends congregation meeting to review Transition report. Meets with Call Committee to set process. Brings names to call committee. Works with council to set salary package.	Bishop or designee present to install new pastor.



## **CHAPTER 3: The Current Pastor Resigns or Retires**

**Chapter Contents:** The Exit Evaluation and Interview -- The Termination Date -- The Farewell Celebration -- Liturgy for Departure of a Pastor from a Congregation – Completion of Obligations -- Future Pastoral Acts of Former Pastors

When the pastor resigns or retires, the primary concern for many congregations is to find a new pastor quickly. No one can guarantee how long the call process will take. Most congregations greatly underestimate the time needed for completion of the call process. Congregations are encouraged not to hurry the process of calling a new pastor. There is work to be done to lay a solid foundation for the next chapter in the congregation's life. The next chapter will explore more fully the dynamics present for an effective period of "interim ministry". In this chapter we give attention to the leave-taking of the pastor whose ministry is ending.

### **The Exit Evaluation and Interview**

The pastor who is leaving has come to know the congregation from a particularly innovative perspective. Both the congregation and the synod are well-served to explore the insights that pastor has to share as she or he takes leave. It is also a time for the congregational leadership to become more fully aware of dynamics that might affect the next pastorate, both positively and negatively. The conversation with the departing pastor is to be held in gratitude, honesty and charity.

The Exit Evaluation Forms on the next page can be used as a format for an exit interview between the Congregation Council and the pastor and the Bishop.

The Process:

- Expect to meet about 1 hour.
- Choose a site that is comfortable and non-threatening - the Congregation Council meeting area for example.
- Adopt the attitude that this should be a positive experience, both in terms of the reflection that will be undertaken and the insights which will be gained about the future.
- Begin with prayer and/or devotion.
- Synod liaison may lead the meeting, using a structured format.
- Council members should be ready to comment, follow up on comments, reinforce, clarify, etc, saying, in effect, "Here is something I can add..."
- Be attentive to both the intellectual and emotional content.
- Honesty, candor and respect should characterize the meeting. It is an opportunity to rejoice in the ministry which has been completed and to begin to anticipating the future ministry.
- The process may vary from the structure to allow for spontaneous discussion relevant to each interview's specific context.
- After the interview has been completed, the process ends with a closing prayer.
- Careful notes should be taken, to be shared with a Call Committee, the synod liaison, and perhaps even the pastor(s) being considered for call. The event should be given structure, but not to the extent that free and open dialogue is inhibited.
- If for some reason the pastor is unable to be present, the exit evaluation process should be completed without the pastor.

**EXIT INTERVIEW FORM**

*(Photocopy-ready copies are in Chapter 12/Appendix, one copy for each participant, one copy to be the official record.)*

Pastor: \_\_\_\_\_ Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What were the compelling reasons that attracted you to accept the call to this congregation?
2. How did your expectations of ministry here compare to the realities of your ministry here?
3. What things have given you the sense of greatest fulfillment? (With which things are you satisfied and pleased?)
4. What things have given you the sense of greatest frustration?
5. What do you consider as the strengths of the congregation?
6. What do you consider the weaknesses of the congregation?
7. What present areas of ministry and program do you think should be contained?
8. What new areas of ministry and program do you think should get emphasis in the future?
9. What do you think that this congregation can do to strengthen and support the incoming pastor
10. What would you like this congregation to do to help you and your family in the transition soon to take place?
11. Are there any critical issues or ongoing concerns that should be addressed in the near future?

**EXIT INTERVIEW FORM  
(Congregational Response)**

*(Photocopy-ready forms are in Chapter 12/Appendix, one copy for each participant, one copy to be the official record.)*

Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_ Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What were the compelling reasons that attracted the congregation to call this pastor to the congregation?
2. How did your expectations of the pastor compare to the realities?
3. Regarding this pastoral ministry: What things have given you a sense of greatest fulfillment? (With which things are you satisfied and pleased?)
4. Regarding this pastoral ministry: What things have given you the sense of greatest frustration? (With which things are you unsatisfied/dissatisfied or displeased?)
5. What do you consider the strengths of the congregation?
6. What do you consider the weaknesses of the congregation?
7. What present areas of ministry and program do you think should be retained and continued?
8. What new areas of ministry and program do you think should get emphasis in the future?
9. What do you think that the congregation can do to strengthen and support the incoming pastor?
10. What would you like the pastor to do to help the congregation in the transition soon to take place?
11. Are there any critical issues or ongoing concerns that should be addressed in the near future?

### **The Termination Date**

When a pastor accepts a new call, the pastor will normally notify the congregational leadership first, then the congregation through a letter to all members. Normally the termination date is approximately 30 days from the time of announcement; any accrued vacation is taken at the end of the tenure. For instance, if a pastor announces her leaving in early September and has two weeks vacation accrued, the pastor may announce; "My resignation will be effective October 30, with the last two weeks of October taken as vacation. My last Sunday will be October 16." The congregation pays all salary and benefits through October 30, though all expenses (car allowance, etc.) would end as of October 16.

### **Completion of Obligations**

The ELCA constitution indicates the pastor is responsible for maintaining congregational records. Similarly, the second statement certifies that there are no outstanding financial obligations of either the pastor or congregation. Both forms are to be filled out and returned to the Synod office as the pastor leaves.

(A) See appendix for "Certification of Completion of Congregational Records"

(B) See appendix for "Certification of Completion of all Financial Obligations"

### **The Farewell Celebration**

A congregation will want to arrange time with the pastor to celebrate and give thanks for the years of ministry together. Often this takes place on the final Sunday. The congregation may invite members of the pastor's extended family and ministry colleagues.

### **Liturgy for Departure of a Pastor from a Congregation**

*When used as part of the Sunday Service, to be used following the Prayers of the Church; at other times, it can be used in conjunction with Responsive Prayer II, after the Evening Prayer before the benediction. An additional version is included in the Appendix.)*

The Pastor (P), a Representative of the synod/cluster designated by the Bishop (B) \*\*, and a Representative of the Congregation (R) come forward.

*(\*\* Due to availability, the bishop may not be able to be a part of this service. For a retiring pastor, it is especially important to have synod representation to express appreciation on behalf of the whole church. The likelihood of representation is increased if the date is first coordinated with the synod office.)*

**R:** Pastor \_\_\_\_, on \_\_\_\_\_, we called you to be our pastor: to proclaim God's Word, to baptize new members into the church of Jesus Christ, to announce God's forgiveness to us, and to preside at our celebration of the Lord's Supper. With the gospel you have comforted us in times of sickness and trouble, and at the death of our loved ones. Sharing our joys and sorrows, you (and your family) have been important to our life together in the Church of Jesus Christ and in our service to this community.

You have served our congregation faithfully \_\_ years. You are now leaving our midst to [become pastor of \_\_\_\_]. As your fellow members of this congregation we wish to honor your ministry among us and bid you farewell and Godspeed in your new endeavor, bringing closure to your ministry at \_\_\_\_\_.

**P:** I thank the members of \_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church for the love, the kindness and support shown to me (and my family) during active ministry among you. I ask forgiveness for the ways I have sinned against you. I am grateful for the ways my ministry has been accepted. As I leave, I carry with me all that I have learned here.

**C: We receive your thankfulness. We offer you our forgiveness and accept that you now leave to resume your ministry [in another congregation]. We express our gratitude for your time among us. We ask forgiveness for the ways we have sinned against you. Your influence on our faith and faithfulness will not leave us at your departure.**

**P:** I forgive you and accept your gratitude, trusting that our time together and our parting are pleasing to God.

**B:** Do you, members of \_\_\_\_ congregation, release him/her from the duties as pastor?

**C: We do, with God's help.**

**B:** Do you offer encouragement for his/her ministry as it unfolds in his/her new [congregation]?

**C: We do, with God's help.**

**B:** Do you, Pastor \_\_\_\_, release \_\_\_\_ congregation from turning to you and depending on you?

**P:** I do, with God's help.

**B:** Do you offer your encouragement for the continued ministry here?

**P:** I do, with God's help.

**B:** On behalf of the Alaska Synod I witness to the words spoken here: words of thankfulness, forgiveness, and release. We will hold you in our prayers as you begin your ministry at \_\_\_\_ [*or* as you retire]. We pledge our support and love to you and wish you God's blessing.

**R:** Let us pray: God, whose everlasting love for all is trustworthy, help each of us to trust the future which rests in your care. During our time together in your name we have know laughter and tears, hopes and disappointments. We give you thanks for the countless ways our lives have been woven together in the tapestry of your church. Guide us as we hold these cherished memories, but move us in new directions, until that time to come when we are completely one with you and with each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**C: Amen.**

**R:** Let us bless the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**R:** The Lord bless us, defend us from evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

**C: Amen.**

*The peace is shared.*

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## **Future Pastoral Acts of Former Pastors**

One of the most troublesome issues in ministry is the question of former pastors performing pastoral acts for former parishioners. It is unethical for pastors to do so, but in any given instance it seems so natural and even desirous. The following is offered as a newsletter piece or bulletin insert to be used shortly after the pastor's departure. The following was originally published in the newsletter of the Alaska Synod. It is intended to give guidance to pastors and congregations alike.

### **Why Not Ask our Former Pastor**

The congregation builds important relationships with its pastors. Some members maintain lasting friendships long after the pastor has transitioned to other ministries. Thus, in times of celebration and deep grieving, it is only natural that families would seek a pastor who has been important to the family. This is especially true when a pastoral act is required, e.g., a wedding, funeral, baptism, etc.

That is where we run into trouble. We need to be clear on what has come to be understood as a “professional ethic” for pastors. When a pastor leaves a parish, she/he is no longer those people’s pastor; he/she may continue to be a friend, but the pastoral relationship has ended. The implications for pastors are clear; it is often (not always) appropriate to do what other friends do—attend a wedding or funeral—but the pastoral act in these moments belongs to the current pastor.

Here are some reflections on how to proceed:

- 1) Congregation members can avoid putting the former pastor in this situation. Do not call the former pastor before speaking to the current one. The family sets up the former pastor, the current pastor, even the Bishop when they do this.
- 2) The former pastor needs to have clear boundaries at the beginning. When asked, you cannot say, “You’ll have to talk to your pastor about that, and if he agrees...” That puts the current pastor in a no-win situation of relinquishing the pastoral role to the former pastor or saying no and the current pastor being regarded by the parishioner as cold, jealous, unresponsive and uncaring. The former pastor just needs to point out that the pastoral role is not theirs anymore.
- 3) As part of the exit interview with the leaving pastor, the church council can request that the pastor write a letter to the congregation thanking them and establishing an appropriate boundary regarding future pastoral acts.
- 4) When the new pastor arrives, the call committee and council may want to communicate with the congregation that the former pastor is not to be asked for pastoral acts. It can be stated that this is the agreement between the former pastor and the congregation. This gives the former pastor a “way out” of difficult situations.

This is not meant to sound arbitrary and legalistic. It is meant to be pastoral. I have found myself caught in this situation both as the former pastor who felt obligated to say yes and as the current pastor finding myself excluded from my pastoral role. Clarity from the outset makes a huge difference. There may be a few situations that are “exceptions” but probably a lot fewer than it seems.

There are also contacts with former pastors over personal life struggles, complaints about the life of the parish, etc., and the same “ethic” applies: we honor our former pastor most highly by recognizing the importance of the work they do and the office they hold by looking to current pastors for these ministry acts.

*Thanks to Bishop Peter Rogness, St Paul Area Synod-ELCA, from whom this article is adapted.*

## **Chapter 4: After the Pastor Leaves: The Transition/Interim Period**

**Chapter Contents:** Increased Leadership by Lay and Remaining Staff -- Response to the Emotional Dynamics Caused by the Pastoral Vacancy -- Planning for Continued Pastoral Support -- Multiple Pastor Situations

Following the resignation or loss of a pastor the congregation will be required to move through a successful transition from one pastor to a new pastor. The pastoral vacancy usually occurs with little advance notice, sometimes catching the congregation off guard. Emotions and anxieties may quickly surface that will need prompt attention. The uncertainties, emotions, and questions about the future of the congregation present significant challenges to the congregation. Yet, the transition period can be an opportunity for the congregation to grow through the challenges created by the pastoral vacancy. The transition/interim period can be a time of revitalization for the congregation.

The transition/interim period will necessitate the following:

- Increased leadership by lay and remaining staff
- Planning for continued pastoral support – the interim pastor.
- Development of the Congregational Mission Profile (ref. Chapter 5)
- Selection of the Call Committee (ref. Chapter 6)
- The Call Process, and calling of the new pastor (ref. Chapters 7, 8, 9)

### **Increased Leadership by Lay and Remaining Staff**

The announcement of a pastoral vacancy will trigger the need for increased leadership among the lay members of the congregation, and the remaining staff members. There will be an immediate need for an ordered process to keep a sense of stability in the congregation's life and to help people stay focused on the mission they share as God's people. In Alaska, often there will be no additional staff—so Congregation Council members and key volunteers may be “contracted” to help lead during this time. When there is staff, the congregation will normally look to remaining staff members (program directors, administrative assistants, etc.) for this leadership. This leadership “team” has the task of overseeing and guiding the ministry of the congregation during this time. At the outset, the leadership “team” may simply attempt to maintain the status quo, which is no small task given the challenges presented by the pastoral vacancy. The leadership “team” should communicate closely with the Synod liaison for assistance during this period.

The following leadership tasks need to be assigned and individuals authorized to handle them:

- Provide to the membership of the congregation reassurance that pastoral ministry will be fulfilled;
- Assist the membership of the congregation in processing feelings related to the departure of the pastor;
- Assure the continuation of services of worship and assist those who lead worship (supply pastors, interim pastor(s), assisting ministers, musicians, and others);
- Give support and guidance to staff persons (office personnel, music personnel, custodial personnel, etc.) who normally function under pastoral oversight (continuation of staff meetings or conferences which help clarify needs, directions and expectations);
- Assure continuation of pastoral ministries (hospital visits, other visitations, emergency pastoral response, funerals, weddings, confirmation, baptisms);
- Support congregational leaders (council members, financial people, etc.) in their various responsibilities;
- Assure confidentiality in regard to sensitive issues that arise during the period of transition.
- Be a resource to the next called pastor and assist her/him in the continuation of immediate and special pastoral ministry needs.

The leadership tools for addressing these needs may include: Newsletter or bulletin items, small group discussions, review of current policies and other current congregational resources.

### **Planning for Continued Pastoral Support**

Although lay and staff leadership can attend too many of the congregational concerns during transition, pastoral presence and support is still needed. The congregation must continue to worship and pray together during the transition period. A congregation that relaxes or ignores the worship needs of its members will find it even more difficult to deal with the pastoral vacancy. It is recommended that close contact be maintained with the Synod as a source for pastoral support resources.

### **Interim Pastoral Care**

When a pastoral vacancy occurs, the congregational leadership, with guidance from the Synod s, will need to determine how best to arrange for continuing pastoral leadership during the transition period. The synod does seek ordained pastors to serve in interim positions. The intentional interim pastor is used in the Alaska Synod, though in Alaska, a trained intentional interim is rarely available. Retired pastors, those serving in specialized ministry, TEEM candidates, rostered AIMS, and seminary graduates not under call have served. In some cases, the local congregation is required to step up to provide pastoral care, including preaching and presiding leadership, program and ministry continuity, and visitation.

However the interim Pastoral Care is provided, a contract for services is appropriate. The synod has Interim Pastor Covenants that define responsibilities of all parties.

### **Pastors and TEEM Candidates under Term Call**

Under some circumstances, particularly after a long pastorate or in a conflicted congregation or other unusual circumstances, a Call may be extended for a specific term to a pastor/candidate who is called by the congregation for a specific term. His/Her availability as a candidate for regular Call following the ending of the term Call must be negotiated prior to the issuance of the Term Call. A congregational meeting is required, with a 2/3 vote in favor of extending a Letter of Call. In most cases, a term call is suggested by the synod because of the particular needs of congregations and the availability of a particularly well-suited pastor. When a term call is issued, the process as identified in this manual may be modified; it is usually put in place more quickly.

Availability of pastors is a significant matter at any given time. The Synod will assist in the search for Intentional Interim pastors and those available for Term Call.

### **Supply Pastors**

Supply pastors may preside at worship, preach, teach and/or may provide a minimum of pastoral care for the seriously ill or those in crisis. *(A list of pastors who have indicated their willingness to serve congregations for this type of ministry during pastoral vacancies is available from the Synod office.)*

These pastors work either for specific, one-time duties, or for very limited work defined in a carefully designed contract that outlines the scope of their work and range of authority. Sunday supply and part-time pastors may be pastors who are retired, on leave from call, or lay persons with special training who have been authorized by the Synod in this ministry.

## **Multiple Pastor Situations**

The call process takes on a different dimension when there is a pastoral staff of more than one pastor. When one pastor resigns a call, the other pastor's relationship and responsibilities in the congregation change dramatically. While most material in this manual will not specifically change when a new Senior Pastor or Associate Pastor is being called, there are a few dimensions of this process that should be highlighted. There are always exceptions, but generally in a staff situation it is best for an Associate or Co-Pastor to begin to seek another call when the Senior Pastor leaves. This is not always possible. It is also important to note that it is rarely advisable for an Associate Pastor to seek the Senior position.

### **When an Associate Pastor Is Being Called**

- The Senior Pastor may, with the support of the Congregation's Council or Call Committee, screen potential candidates before a call committee interview is initiated.
- A Senior Pastor does not necessarily serve on the Call Committee, but in either case there must be a plan for the Senior's input on potential associates.
- A determination should be made regarding two stipulations recommended for inclusion in the Letter of Call to an Associate Pastor (see Chapter 9, p. 47).
- After a Call Committee has selected a candidate, it is an excellent idea for the Call Committee chair to work with the synod staff person to set up a one-day meeting with the Senior pastor, the candidate and an outside facilitator.
- The congregation is responsible for any costs associated with this process.
- It is ideal if the vote for issuing the call takes place after this session and the learning/discernment it provides.
- The process is terminated if the pastors recognize that they will be unable or unwilling to work together.
- The facilitator may make recommendations to the pastors or the congregation regarding ongoing work for this pastoral team.

### **When an Associate Pastor Is Under Consideration for Call as Senior**

As was stated above, "it is rarely advisable for an Associate Pastor to seek the "Senior position". This counsel arises out of the accumulated experience of the church that such pastorates are often less than satisfying. Nevertheless, congregations and pastors continue to express interest in exploring this possibility, which can in some cases turn out very well.

The overarching concern in this scenario is this: *do not shortchange the call process!* This means:

- Attend to the work of saying farewell to the outgoing pastor.
- Do a thorough job of mission exploration – analysis of congregation and community, seeking clarity over the mission profile for the next 5-10 years you believe God is calling you to, and what skills and abilities you will need in a new lead pastor to move into that mission. Complete a new Ministry Site Profile.
- When you reach that point then face the question of considering the Associate Pastor for the call to Senior Pastor. If the decision is to proceed into such consideration, be aware of several factors/steps:
  1. Determine whether you will (a) consider the associate pastor alone and make a decision to call or not call before moving to others, or (b) consider the associate pastor along with several other candidates;
  2. Make the interview experience itself as thorough as you would with other candidates. Don't make any assumptions because of familiarity. Do the same preparation of interview questions, the full interview based on experience and mission profile, the



same evaluation of interview by the committee afterward.

- If the decision is made to recommend the Associate Pastor for call as Senior Pastor, it is strongly advised that there be nearly unanimous support from both the Call Committee and Council. Lacking this invites disaster. Similarly, the congregational call vote needs to be over 90%. A well-known pastor who has over 10% of the congregation voting against him/her would be foolish to accept a call to a divided church.

1. The reasons vary. A few: (a) It is difficult to enter a new chapter of ministry with shared expectations: often the congregations makes such a move for the purpose of continuity, while the pastor is imagining how he/she can make things different when she/he takes the lead. (b) Being well-known, there is likely to be varying opinions over the advisability of “promoting” the associate instead of searching widely for the best fit, resulting in a divided house at the outset. (c) Statistically, the length of stay is significantly shorter than for Senior Pastors coming in new. 2. Each option has a downside: considering only the associate invites concern from the congregation that no one else was even talked to; considering the associate along with others may result in other potentially strong candidates choosing not to go through the process alongside an incumbent.

### **When a Senior Pastor Is Being Called**

The Council will have an initial meeting with the Associate(s) and determine the participation level of the Associate in the Call Process, and review the pastoral status of the Assistant/Associate. The Council shall note:

- What, if any, limitations of Call are placed on the Associate in regards to a Senior Pastor leaving. (May not be called as a Senior, co-terminus provision, Call terminates 6 months after the Senior departs, etc.)
- What are this pastor's intentions? (The Associate may not know, or have a clear idea, and may not be able to share much. But the issue should at least be opened. Confidentiality at this point is essential.)

If an Associate or Assistant Pastor intends to stay under Call to the congregation, or is at least open to that possibility, he/she:

- will need to be kept informed regarding the Call Process;
  - may be asked to advise in the development of mission profile (see chapter 5);
  - may be asked to be a part of some of the Call activities;
  - should not be in on the structured interviews or decision process.
- 
- All candidates should be provided an opportunity in their interview/visitation time to have a private conversation with all program staff, including the Associate(s).
  - After a name is selected by the Call Committee, and before a congregation votes, a day should be arranged for a meeting between the candidate and the rest of the staff. This day should be led by a facilitator from outside the congregation. (See details under Calling an Associate, above.)
  - While the vote for Senior Pastor will take place after the staff meeting, it may be the recommendation of the facilitator, synod staff, and/or the Senior Pastor candidate that the Associate should begin to seek another call.

### **When a Co-Pastor Is Being Called**

- In the case of a *clergy couple*, several considerations:
- A separate call is issued to each, even if one position is being shared.
- Structure the interview so that the Call Committee has some time with each pastor individually and some time with them together. Feel free to ask the same question of each person - don't make assumptions about similarities! Ask about strengths and weaknesses of each, complimentary, etc.
- Note in the Compensation Guidelines the information on benefits.
- In the case of *a co-pastor being called to join an incumbent co-pastor*
- The same advice given above for the calling of a Senior Pastor applies here as well. Especially important are the conversations between the incumbent and the candidate(s), and the outside facilitator described above.

## **CHAPTER 5: Development of the Congregational Mission Profile**

**Chapter Contents:** Introduction -- Mission Profile Development -- The Congregational Mission Profile -- The Congregational "Debriefing" Meeting

### **Introduction**

When a pastor leaves, the primary challenge facing the congregation is not simply calling another pastor as replacement. The vitally important first challenge is to put in place the foundation for a successful next chapter of ministry in the congregation. This means developing a "mission profile" of the congregation – who you are and where God is calling you to go. The process leading up to the calling of a new pastor or an Associate in Ministry is important in four distinct ways. First, it provides the opportunity to review and assess the mission and ministry of the congregation. Second, it provides the Call Committee with basic information and a description of leadership needs which will guide their work. Third, the profile will assist the synod staff in recommending candidates to be considered by the Call Committee. Fourth, it provides a picture of the congregation for the candidates as they consider serving the congregation.

Often, the congregation has not reviewed its Vision, Mission, or Ministry Plan. Completing this work before beginning the Congregational Mission Profile can significantly speed up the work of the Call Committee. It may benefit the process by having the congregation assess itself, for the skills, talents, and resources of its own members.

### **Mission Profile Development**

TIME FRAME: 3 months to 1 year

WHO: It is recommended that your Congregation Council assign the task of developing a Mission Profile to one of several groups:

- The *Council* itself, or a sub-group of council members, could take it on.
- A specially appointed task force could be charged with this work. Some congregations appoint *Transition Teams* to oversee the mission study and other transitional concerns. To help focus outward, some congregations invite one or two participants who are not members of the congregation. (You may consider representation from a neighboring ELCA congregation, partner congregations, the community, the conference dean, or persons from programs housed in your church building. The Synod Staff can help identify persons).
- The *Call Committee* itself can be convened and given this task.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the Mission Profile Process is to enable the congregation to:

- Claim ownership of the mission of the congregation and the call process
- Review the congregation's life and mission as the Church, the Body of Christ
- Discuss the church's challenges/opportunities in next 5-10 years
- Evaluate the congregation's present strengths
- Identify specific areas where the congregation needs to strengthen its ministry
- Identify the congregation's present context for mission
- Specify resources necessary to fulfill the mission of the congregation, including special mission tasks in the parish (neighborhood or whole community).
- Identify issues of conflict that affect the life of the congregation
- Arrive at a current understanding of the mission of the congregation
- Identify the gifts that are most important for the next pastor to possess

## **The Congregational Mission Profile**

A basic document is the Congregational Mission Profile. This is a form used throughout the ELCA. <http://www.elca.org/synods/missionprofile.html> . The Congregational Mission Profile has four parts:

### Part I. Congregational Information (Items 1 through 7)

- Before recording membership or attendance statistics, talk to the people responsible for these numbers. When was the last time the membership rolls were updated? How accurate are your church records? What is the policy for maintaining accurate records? (This should be done annually.)

### Part II- Ministry Practices, Structure, Future

- Copies of newsletters, annual reports, or brochures on various aspects of ministry are good additions to this section.

### Part III- Mission in the Community

- This is an opportunity to take a serious look at your community. Plan a day to have someone from outside your church re-introduce your congregation to the community. (A local history buff, a community organizer, a neighboring pastor may be good resources for this.)
- It is helpful to draw on materials, information and resources gathered during the mission profile process sessions to learn from others how your congregation is perceived and about some of the basic needs of the community.

### Part IV- The Leader We Seek

- Most Call Committees survey the congregation to identify characteristics of the pastor they seek. Note: While helpful, most people will think primarily in terms of worship and their own personal relationship with the Pastor. The call committee is to use this information along with the rest of the profile to establish the key leadership needs.

Each section is designed to create opportunities for a congregation to think about its identity and mission and ministry of the congregation. *It is a guide. Many sections will take a significant amount of energy, research and conversation to complete.*

## **How to Complete the Congregational Mission Profile**

A small group is expected to find the information for the profile. Information gathering can be done in many ways. Congregations often use:

For the statistical information:

- Demographics and congregational statistics from ELCA (go to the ELCA home page at [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org). In box on left, click on “congregations”. Fill in zip code or State/City, click on “Locate”. Click on the name of the congregation. Click on “Trend Report for this Congregation”.)
- The annual Parochial report that your congregation fills out for the synod each year.
- Congregation treasurer
- Other congregational records

For the descriptive, subjective material:

- Surveys – both written and telephone (this can be done at worship over several weeks)
- Focus groups
- Interviews with individuals or committees
- The local chamber of commerce, City Hall, business associations, libraries
- Interviews with interim pastor
- Conversations with other local pastors and/or lay leaders

### **The Broad/Deep Analysis: Mission and Ministry Strategy**

Chapter 12/Appendix has a lengthy description of a process that is designed to assist a congregation in taking an in-depth look at its context for mission and its ministry strategy.

Congregations may want to design their own process or seek outside facilitation. Summarized, those steps should be considered:

### **SECTION 1: WHO WE ARE**

A purpose of the transition team is to review the congregation's present focus of life and mission. A second purpose is to listen to the congregation's hopes and concerns for the future. The goal of this section is to assess where the congregation has been, where it sees itself now, and possible directions for mission and ministry. It is intended to involve the whole congregation.

#### **Key questions in this section of the mission profile process include:**

- What is our history?
- What do we say about ourselves?
- How do others describe us?

### **SECTION 2: WHAT ARE THE MISSION POSSIBILITIES FOR OUR CONGREGATION?**

In the first section the transition team listens to the congregation, in this section the transition team listens to the larger community. The task is to discern the needs in the community surrounding the congregation; and to look at mission opportunities provided in the wider church.

#### **Key questions to be answered in this section include:**

- What is the community we serve?
- What are the assets of our community? (What services are available?)
- What are the needs in our community?
- Who are the invisible people in our community: (The poor, lonely, homeless, hungry, angry, etc.)
- What opportunities for partnership are available to our congregation: locally, synod-wide, nationally and globally?

### **SECTION 3: ASSESSMENT**

In order to develop a proposal for mission, the transition team will need to explore the information gathered, and seek to develop a definition of mission and ministry on behalf of the congregation.

**Key questions to be answered in this section include:**

- What have we learned about our mission and ourselves?
- What is Outreach?
- What is the relationship of the congregation with the community?
- Who are our mission partners?
- What is our mission focus now... where are we being led?

**SECTION 4: DEVELOPMENT OF A MISSION PLAN**

After listening and assessment comes the task of creating the plan for the congregation. The plan needs to include a vision with a specific strategy to work toward the vision.

**Key questions for this section:**

- What of our current mission needs to be preserved? (Current projects, plans, mission statements?)
- What are our gifts?
- What is our Mission?
- How has our mission changed?
- What do we expect of our pastor in our mission work?
- What do we expect of the congregation's members?

The Synod staff can:

- Share examples of congregational mission profiles done particularly well.
- Share suggestions of persons from other congregations that have done this well.

**Tying It All Together - The Congregational "Debriefing" Meeting**

As this work is completed, a report is prepared for the congregation. The report should contain a summary of the material collected for the mission exploration, a copy of the Congregational Mission Profile, and copies of any other documents or materials that will be illustrative of the conclusions. It is very helpful if materials are made available and read beforehand.

While this material is being put together, the committee should be in contact with the Synod to set a congregation meeting for de-briefing.

Usually the Bishop and the Synod working with the congregation will be present to participate in the de-briefing.

At the debriefing, the team responsible for the development of the Mission Profile and Call Committee present the results of their work. The congregation is expected to discuss and approve the document at this meeting, and if possible, it would be good for the Bishop and/or Synod liaison to be present. The purpose of this meeting is to gain clear congregational buy-in, and to insure a good common understanding between congregation, synod, and call committee. The meeting ends with a congregational affirmation of the congregational mission profile and a description of the skills and abilities needed in the pastor to be called. Together, these constitute the Mission Profile which becomes the basis for future decisions.

Upon approval, the bishop will review possible candidates who fit the needs of the congregation based on the Mission Profile presented at the debriefing. (See Chapter 7.) While the bishop is preparing to bring names, the Call Committee prepares for the actual interview process. (See Chapter 8.)

## **Chapter 6: Forming the Call Committee**

**Chapter Contents:** Why--When--Who--How--Recognition--Basics

### **Why do we need a Call Committee?**

Calling a pastor to be in a mutual ministry with the lay members of a congregation is an important event. We believe it is our Lord Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Call Process. Calling a pastor represents a valuable partnership between God, the calling congregation and the synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. 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.

In the call process, the Bishop/synod, the congregation and the prospective pastor work together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring about a new partnership that is faithful to the Gospel, empowers the local church in its ministry, and strengthens the whole church as people of God.

### **The Right Question**

It is important for the Call Committee to be clear about its task. The foremost question for the Call Committee is whether this person is the pastor God is sending for this congregation at this time. The following are some wrong questions to be asking: Will the congregation like this pastor? Will it approve of the Call Committee's choice of candidates? Will people feel good having this pastor around on Sunday morning? Will this person do until a better pastor comes along?

Human preferences and personalities never come before the mission to which God calls the church. That is why every meeting of the Call Committee should include prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the work that is being done.

### **The Significance of Service on a Call Committee**

Many people report that serving on a Call Committee turned out to be one of the most important things they ever did as members of the church. It allowed them to experience firsthand how the Holy Spirit works through committed Christians to help the church be faithful to its calling. It gave them an opportunity to see how the local church is vitally connected to the whole church. Finally, it let them participate in opening a new chapter in the life and ministry of their congregation as part of the history of the Church of Jesus Christ.

### **When Should the Call Committee Be Formed?**

There are differing opinions about when the Call Committee should be formed. (See Chapter 5, page 20.) Many congregations believe that the Call Committee should be formed shortly after the pastoral vacancy is announced. This early formation of the committee allows Call Committee members to be part of all transition activities, including the development of the congregation and mission profiles.

Another view is that the Call Committee should be formed after the congregation has defined its ministry, its mission, and its staffing needs. This is often preferred by the synod because it means that the Mission Profile has broad involvement and support from the congregation. This way, the congregation and the Congregation Council can be more focused in its charge to the Call Committee.

### **Who Should Be on the Call Committee?**

The constitution governing your congregation will prescribe appointment or election of a Call Committee. The composition of the Call Committee should intentionally reflect the makeup of the congregation, yet also reflect who the congregation wants to be in three to five years. There should be a diverse representation of gender, age, and ethnic/racial identity on the Committee. All segments of the ministry of the congregation should be represented (Worship, Youth, Education, Evangelism, etc.). Beyond these, there should also be a balance of long-term and newer members, people from different elements of the congregation, drawing upon a variety of contributing styles and gifts. An effective Committee is usually more than five people and fewer than nine. There should be representation from the Mission Profile Task Force on the Call Committee, including the option of inviting one member (non-voting) from outside the congregation. The overarching consideration is that this should be a combination of people in whom the congregation has confidence, and who represent the broad and diverse makeup of the congregation.

### **How is the Call Committee Organized?**

After the Call Committee is selected, one of the members must be designated as the *Chairperson*. The Call Committee Chairperson can be appointed by the Congregation Council or can be elected by the Committee itself. The Chairperson convenes meetings, sets meeting agendas, and may be the primary contact with pastoral candidates. He/she should also be the primary contact person with the Synod. The Chairperson oversees the Call Process.

The Committee will also select a *Secretary* to keep the minutes of Call Committee meetings. While motions may not necessarily be made, Committee assignments need to be recorded for future reference. The Secretary may also be responsible for written communications between candidates and the committee, including letters informing candidates of the Committee's time line and the interview process to be used, confirming invitations and travel arrangements, sending thank you notes and letters informing candidates of decisions reached. The Secretary may send copies of correspondence to the synod office, and may write the newsletter articles, notes for Sunday bulletins, and other materials that keep the congregation informed of the Committee's progress.

It is advisable to have one Congregation Council member sit on the Call Committee as a liaison. The council representative may or may not have a vote on the Call Committee, depending on the constitution of the congregation. The council representative will report back to the Congregation Council on the progress of the Call Committee, but he/she may not violate the confidences of the Call Committee.

### **Recognition of the Ministry of the Call Committee**

It is important that the ministry of those selected to serve on the Call Committee be recognized in some formal way by the congregation. The Committee members will spend many hours in meetings, expending significant energy over many months during the course of their service on the Call Committee. It is a ministry requiring dedication and commitment by persons who will provide leadership in or for the Call Process.



## **AN AFFIRMATION OF A CALL COMMITTEE**

P=Pastor C=Congregation CC=Call Committee members

**P:** Let us pray. Gracious God, in times of change and transition you provide leaders to guide and direct us. Through them, you lead us over the rough places, and comfort us when we are afraid. We pray today that you will send your Spirit to be with these leaders and each one of us during this time of discernment. We ask in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**P:** Do you, the people of \_\_\_\_ (*church*) \_\_\_\_ promise to hold this Call Committee in prayer? **C: We do.**

**P:** Will you accept their leadership, support them in their work, and encourage them in their deliberation? **C: We will.**

**P:** (*To the Call Committee*) You have prayerfully been selected to serve this congregation in selecting a pastoral candidate. You have been asked to give generously of your time. You have been entrusted with this responsibility on behalf of the whole congregation. Do you accept this responsibility and trust? **CC: We do.**

**P:** Will you faithfully participate in the process, support one another in meetings, and call upon the Spirit for guidance and direction in all you do? **CC: We will.**

**P:** Let us pray. Lord, bless the members of this committee, their work and decisions, that through them we might all be strengthened to serve you. Bless each member of the committee, that he or she might have the compassion, wisdom and energy to fulfill this responsibility. Keep us strong in faith and resolute in proclaiming the gospel to all people. We pray in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

### **Call Committee Basics**

- **Prayer** is an important activity for the Call Committee and the entire congregation throughout the Call 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 selected, the names of the members are made public, with a request that special prayers be made on their behalf.

- **Confidentiality** cannot be overemphasized in the task of calling a pastor. Confidentiality boundaries for the Call Committee's work should be clearly agreed upon at the first meeting. Issues that are discussed about candidates need to be open and forthright among the members of the Committee. However, these discussions should be kept in confidence between the Call Committee members. Verbal and written information about prospective candidates must be kept within the confines of the Committee. 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.

The names of candidates must be kept confidential. Mention of specific candidates outside the Call Committee is inappropriate until the Committee is ready with its recommendation to the congregation council. Confidentiality is different than secrecy. The Church Council and the congregation should be kept abreast of the status of the Call Committee's progress, but no names or other identifying information about the candidate can be shared until a candidate is selected and ready for recommendation to the Congregation Council.

• **Communication** is very important to the Call Process. Every means ought to be utilized to keep the members of the congregation informed about the Call Committee's work and progress, including:

1. Newsletter articles explaining the Call Process to the congregation, with follow up articles each time another stage in the process is reached.
2. Notes in the Sunday morning bulletins.
3. Temple talks by members of the Call Committee to update the congregation.
4. Question and answer forums during education hours. Members of the congregation can be invited to meet with the Call Committee to ask questions and find out about the progress of the Call Committee's work.
5. Chart/timeline describing the Call Process displayed in a public place. With the exception of confidential information, there is no such thing as sharing too much information with the congregation. A specific time line for the Call Committee should be proposed and announced to the congregation. This time line may be modified as the Call Process unfolds, but any changes should be communicated to the congregation.

• **Call Committee Authority and Charge.** The congregation and the Congregation Council must give the Call Committee a very specific charge as to its duties. The Call Committee needs to understand fully the needs and desires of the congregation so that the Call Process progresses in a manner consistent with those needs and desires. The Congregational Mission Profile is meant to guide the Call Committee.

The Congregation Council needs to provide the Call Committee with information concerning salary and benefit possibilities that the congregation can offer. Salary and benefit considerations are matters to be negotiated between the candidate and Call Committee in partnership with the Congregation Council. The ultimate responsibility for financial matters lies with the Council. The Synod provides compensation guidelines annually (see the synod website [elcaalaska.org](http://elcaalaska.org) or contact the synod office).

The congregation or Congregation Council needs to authorize funding to the Call Committee for carrying out its responsibilities, such as cost of travel, meals and hotel expense for candidates invited to interview or for travel by the committee to hear a candidate preach at some other location. There may be other Call Committee expenses for training, material, resources, etc.

The Call Committee must be given the authority to develop a process that will allow it to meet with and interview candidates for the pastoral position. At some point the Call Committee will select a candidate to recommend to the Congregation Council (or the congregation depending on the constitution) for selection and Call. Thereafter, in conjunction with the Call Committee, the Congregation Council (or congregation) will consider the candidate. In the end, the congregation is the body that votes to issue a Call to a candidate.

• The **Synod** will serve as a valuable partner and resource during the Call Process. The Bishop or a synod liaison will be assigned to work with the Call Committee. Throughout the process, including providing names of candidates to be interviewed by the Committee, the Synod will provide the following support to the Call Committee as needed: Interpreting the Call Process to the Call Committee and Congregation Council, clarifying the steps and goals;

- Interpreting to the Call Committee their own **calling** to lead and guide the process as a part of their spiritual journey within their congregation;
- Clarifying issues when there are questions or points of confusion;
- Attending, as a participant, the first meeting of the Call Committee to interpret and assist the Call Committee in their process. It is likely that the Bishop's or liaison's involvement will lessen as the Call Process moves forward. However, she/he is available to guide, coach and assist at the request of the Call Committee throughout the entire process;
- Helping the Committee fulfill its responsibilities as they face different issues.

- Reminding the Committee about its goals and tasks and the process most helpful in fulfilling them (e.g. communication, scheduling, deadlines);
- Attending meetings when names of candidates are presented (whenever possible).
- Coaching the Committee, as required, to assist the Committee in fulfilling its calling, (e.g. conducting interviews, presenting a candidate to the congregation, abiding by the rules for the congregational meeting that issues a call, etc.); and
- Providing liaison between the Synod, the Bishop, the Call Committee and the congregation

## **Chapter 7: Identifying Candidates**

**Chapter Contents:** Where they come from -- Candidates selected -- Bringing names -- Rostered Leader Profiles-- Making Contact

As the Congregational Mission Profile and Ministry Strategy are completed and the results are reviewed with the whole congregation and the Bishop, the process begins to focus on the identification of the pastor to be called. This chapter makes clear how the process will unfold.

### **Where Do the Names Come From?**

There are several possible sources:

- Most possibilities surface through the ongoing work of the Synod staff. A great deal of their time is spent in conversations relating to pastoral mobility. There are on-going communications with pastors serving in this Synod, including assessments of a pastor's openness to considering a new call. In addition, pastors from outside the Synod are routinely in contact with other synods where they might be open to serving. The Synod regularly interviews these pastors and talks to other synod offices about vacancies and pastoral mobility. The Synod regularly has conversations with candidates from other synods; they regularly receive Rostered Leader Profiles from around the country and run computer matches.
- Sometimes candidates surface through members of the congregation. When this happens, the Call Committee shares those names with the person working with them. The Synod staff will check with the candidates' synod/s, determine his/her openness to call, consider the suitability of a match, etc. Regardless of whether the Synod recommends him/her for an interview, a report will always be given to the Call Committee regarding these candidates.
- Occasionally a pastor might express interest in a specific position. In such a case, the Synod staff will consider the pastor, primarily considering the match of pastoral gifts and congregational needs.

### **The Candidates Selected...**

The primary criterion used by both the Synod and by the Call Committee in discerning the pastor to be called is the Congregational Mission Profile. The Committee's focus will be on the question: "Where is God leading us, and who will have the pastoral gifts we need to move that direction?" The pastor is to be more than a chaplain to a membership list, and more than a caretaker of the status quo; the pastor is to be part of God's movement of your congregation into the future. As the Synod considers specific pastoral candidates, the congregation's mission needs are the primary focus, and the main question is always whether the skills and interests of the pastor will match the needs of the congregation.

Other considerations also come into play:

- Readiness to move: Neither a Bishop nor a Call Committee can tell a pastor to move, who is still feeling called to the present place of service. Timing is often a major factor.
- Family considerations: You want a pastor to value family life, and sometimes those considerations impact a pastor's openness to considering a call.
- Financial considerations: Most congregations and most pastors assume that salary will fall generally within Synod guidelines. The Synod will not submit the name of a candidate whose salary needs are above the congregation's reach; however, sometimes a question will be raised early on about a congregation's willingness to go higher, or a candidate's willingness to accept less. But financial negotiations should not be a major factor.

- Housing: In our Synod, more than sixty percent of congregational pastor positions include housing allowance rather than a provided parsonage. Again, the Synod will assist in addressing any housing considerations.
- Geographic restrictions: Some pastors, for reasons of family or spouse vocation, may be restricted as to where they can serve. This must be weighed as a consideration, but should never be the primary reason for considering a candidate or extending a call.

### **Bringing Names**

The Call Committee and synod contact person should have conversation about how many names the Call Committee would like to consider. At first look, many committees feel “the more, the better.” In reality, deciding to focus on few names presses the synod to focus attention on the strongest candidates, and generally means the staff has more in-depth conversation with potential candidates. A longer list of candidates often means making decisions on rather superficial factors. For many types of openings, it is increasingly difficult to generate many candidates that fit the profile well. In all cases, the staff will have had conversation with the candidates, giving some description of the congregation and the position, and determining that the pastor is open to considering a call.

The congregation is expected to make contact with all candidates, informing them that their names have been received and letting them know when decisions regarding interviews will be made.

In most cases, a Committee will enthusiastically support one of these first candidates. Occasionally, this doesn't happen. When that is the case, the Synod will have further conversation with the Committee, clarify what is being sought, and move on to other candidates.

(A Committee is sometimes tempted to "hold on to one," release the other two, and look for more; experience has shown a decision should be made before receiving more names – that "holding on" is unfair to both the candidate and congregation, and rarely results in a Call. The Committee needs to decide!)

### **Reviewing the Rostered Leader Profiles**

When names are presented, the Committee will be given a form filled out by the pastor/candidate(s), and signed by his/her bishop, commonly referred to as the "Rostered Leader Profile." A profile is a good start in introducing you to the candidate, but it is not meant to be an exhaustive resource.

- Rostered Leader Profiles include information about the pastor's education and work experience, a self-description of his/her particular areas of interest and skill, and brief responses to a few questions about his/her style, convictions, situation preferences, etc.
- Rostered Leader Profiles also include the names of four references. *Do not neglect to call them all!!* Often, Committees assume the references simply give positive responses because they are, after all, provided by the pastor. But references may provide honest, informative perspective. If the Committee desires to check references beyond these four, the candidate should be informed.
- Chapter 8 will more fully discuss preparation for interviews, which should include consideration of what additional information the Committee will want from the candidates. Mobility forms and the insights of the Synod staff person presenting the name will serve to get you started.

### **Making Contact**

Since the Synod has discussed the congregation's Call Process with the candidates, they are aware their names are being recommended. As soon as the Committee receives these names, it should make contact with the candidates by phone. After arrangements are made by telephone, a follow-up letter needs to be sent. If the Committee is prepared to schedule interviews, it can proceed to that directly. If the Committee needs further time for preparations, communicate that to the candidates. They will appreciate knowing that their name has been received, and having some idea of when the next steps of the process will unfold.

In Alaska, it is critical to include the spouse in the visit and the interview process. Many a time, the spouse finds the transition to the “Last Frontier” the most difficult.

### **Phone Interview**

A common practice is to have a phone interview with a candidate before scheduling a physical visit. A phone interview is not comparable to a face-to-face interview. It can be helpful OR hurtful to the process. To only have the verbal responses to a series of questions may determine if this is a good fit or may lead to letting go of a good candidate because of the voice or affect. Sometimes, after an initial phone interview, it is good to have one person follow up with questions that address specific concerns that have arisen.

**Sample Letter - Invitation for Personal Interview Following Initial Contact**

Date

The Rev. Jan R. Doe  
Address  
City, State, Zipcode

Dear Pastor Doe:

This is a follow up to our phone conversation on \_\_\_\_\_.

We wish to invite you to meet personally with (*indicate who would be included in that meeting*), in order for us to become better acquainted and to discuss in greater depth the current leadership needs of this congregation. In preparation for our time together, an exchange of information would be helpful. Enclosed for your review is \_\_\_\_\_. We would like to ask you to share with us at your earliest convenience the following \_\_\_\_\_.

*If married...*

We would be pleased to include your spouse in your visit to us. During the time of the interview itself, we would be happy to arrange opportunity for your spouse to become familiar with our community.

We would like to arrange a time when this visit would be convenient for you. Once we have arrived at a suitable time, we will arrange accommodations for you while you are here. Please plan to spend (*indicate the length of time*) with us so that we might more fully explore our mutual vision for ministry.

Expenses which you incur, including your transportation, will be reimbursed by the congregation. We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. If you have special needs, please make them known and we will try to accommodate them. I can be reached by phone at \_\_\_\_\_ and email at \_\_\_\_\_.

I wish God's richest blessings on your continued ministry.

Sincerely yours,

Your Name  
cc: The Rev. Shelley Wickstrom, Bishop  
Alaska Synod, ELCA

## **Chapter 8: The Pastoral Candidate Visit and Interview**

**Chapter Contents:** Preparation: information, format, plan, evaluation -- Conducting the interview -- Follow-up -- Discernment/Decision

For all parties, a great deal rides on the encounter between the pastoral candidate(s) and the Call Committee. Careful attention should be given to thorough preparation and exchange of information ahead of time, wise use of time during the visit, and carefully considered decision making following the visit. This chapter is divided into those three periods - preparation, the visit, and the decision.

### **PREPARATION FOR THE VISIT**

#### **Exchange of information**

Determine what information you want from the pastoral candidates and what information you want to send to them. Some things other congregations have found helpful are:

*From you to the pastor:*

- The Congregational Mission Profile and Ministry Strategy Report;
- Copies of the congregation's last several annual reports;
- Several newsletters, publicity brochures, etc., describing the congregation;
- Information about the community - Chamber of Commerce info, etc.;
- Topics/questions to be explored in the interview/visit; and
- Sample bulletins from recent Sunday services

*From the pastor:*

- Annual reports from his/her current congregation;
- Any other resume or mobility information not already shared in the Rostered Leader Profile;
- Original material – sermons (including video tapes), class outlines, continuing education projects, etc; and
- A few bulletins from recent Sunday services;

#### **Determine the Format of the Visit.**

Before contacting the candidates, the Committee should plan for the visit. It is important to be open to the candidate's interests as well, but some elements of the visit format might be:

- Time for the candidate to experience the parish community;
- A walking or driving tour;
- A meal in a local place;
- A look at housing, educational facilities, library, and other places that may be of interest, as reflected in your reports and/or the candidate's personal situation;
- An overview of where current parishioners live;
- A time with the interim pastor and/or other staff members; (meeting with the bishop can also serve the process);
- Informal time for the candidate and Call Committee in unstructured conversation. (This often takes place around a meal);
- A formal conversation—the interview. (See the "Conducting the Interview")



The following tasks will need to be covered by Call Committee members in structuring an effective candidate visit. Be clear about who will handle which responsibilities.

1. Set up appointments with candidates.
2. Determine what congregational materials will be given to the candidate and send before the actual visit.
3. Invite the spouse for specified aspects of the visit.
4. Arrange for travel, housing, meals. Whenever possible have the candidate and spouse stay in “neutral” housing (not a member of the congregation), e.g., a local B&B.
5. Determine who will meet and welcome the candidate and/or spouse.
6. Escort the candidate around the facility and allow time to “freshen up.”
7. Escort to Interview with Call Committee.
8. Escort to meal.
9. Provide opportunity to look around the community. This can include time with a realtor.
10. Arrange for conversation with interim and other program staff.
11. Arrange for introduction to the congregation through meetings, prayer time & meals.

Important things to keep in mind regarding the interview stage of the Call Process include:

1. ALL expenses should be covered by the congregation.
2. The spouse may attend but should not participate in the formal interview. (You may ask someone to host the spouse during this time).
3. Tell candidates the anticipated time line for when other interviews will be completed, decisions made, and candidates notified.
4. Determine who will write thank you notes.
5. The Committee may want to audio or video tape the interview for subsequent review. (This is a must if any committee member is absent for any interview.)
6. The Committee may want to consider a telephone interview as a means of gathering preliminary information.

### **Plan the Formal Interview.**

The interview remains a frequently used technique by most congregations. Congregations rarely call a pastor without first having had the opportunity to get to know them through the interview process. However, many members of Call Committees approach the interview with varying degrees of anxiety. Common concerns include: What is the purpose of the interview? What questions should we ask? What questions shouldn't we ask? How will we know if an answer is a “good” one? While each Committee will develop its own interview process and questions, the Committee should consider the following points when developing its approach:

#### **Planning the questions:**

First of all, make sure you have read the information the Synod has provided about the candidate. Identify any information that may need to be clarified by the candidate. **The best way to develop call-related interview questions is by referring to the Congregational Mission Profile and related materials, and the Candidates' Rostered Leader Profile.**

Second, develop a format in which a predetermined list of questions is asked of each candidate. There is wisdom in developing questions that mirror the pastoral profile you are seeking. The Appendix/Chapter 12 has additional materials regarding specific questions.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, spend time exploring the pastor's Rostered Leader Profile, and find questions that help you come to know him/her as a spiritual person and leader.

Make sure the interview is two-way. The Committee is not only learning about the candidate, the candidate is learning about the committee and congregation. Calls are a process of finding the best match between congregation and pastor; the interview itself needs to work in both directions. A committee will interview several gifted and insightful candidates, and call only one. The other interviews can also be learning times, as the committee is open to hearing the questions and observations of the candidates.

**Situation-specific questions:**

The specific content of the interview should reflect the pastoral opening which is being filled. The majority of the interview, therefore, has the potential to vary from parish to parish and from call to call.

An emerging trend in interviewing is the use of so-called “situational interviews”. Situational interviews focus heavily on the behaviors necessary for success in a given setting. These kinds of interview questions ask the candidate what he/she would do in a particular situation, what he/she has done in situations in the past, and for specific demonstrations of relevant knowledge or expertise. For example, let’s say that based on your analysis, one of the factors you identify as important is working effectively with lay leadership. A sample situational interview question addressing this factor might be, “Suppose you and the worship committee disagree on whether Christmas carols may be sung before December 24th... or... Suppose your liturgical preferences are at odds with key members of the worship committee, what would you do?”

By focusing on the most important (or critical) call-related factors, you will be focusing your interview on “what really matters.”

Once the Committee has decided upon the questions to be asked, assign questions to members of the Call Committee, so all members are involved in the conversation. Discuss briefly the issues to be aware of in the interview itself (next section), including the extent of follow-up and spontaneous questions.

It is helpful for the committee to practice interviewing through role playing or a mock interview (with the interim pastor, a neighboring pastor, synod staff person, retired pastor, etc.)

**Discuss and agree upon evaluation criteria/form**

If you have planned well, you should also have agreed upon how you will evaluate what you hear. Using the areas of greatest concern as they have emerged in the Congregational Mission Profile and the interview questions, develop a ranking system for the candidates. This may be as simple as a grid on which each Committee member gives each candidate a 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5, with 5 being the best.

Just a word about using a “ranking format”; each Call Committee member would receive a piece of paper with a grid format. Establish criteria based on your Mission Profile. This will reduce the subjectivity of the interview by helping Committee members listen for responses which correspond with better performance, insight, knowledge, etc. As the interview is held, each Committee member will grade the categories using a predetermined value system. For example, if the category is “strength as a pastoral care person,” each person would rank their impression from the conversation 1-5, with the 1 as lowest and 5 as highest. The ranking should focus on the areas deemed to be most important by the Call Committee, based on the congregational Mission Profile. Scoring the ranking should be done after the interview is completed, not during.

## CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

### Tips on conducting the Interview:

- The Call Committee should designate a Committee member to host the candidate. This person, frequently the chair of the Committee, serves as the candidate's contact person and should be on hand well before the Candidate's anticipated arrival at the interview location.
- Following brief, formal introductions of each Call Committee member and his/her role in the congregation, a member of the Call Committee may conduct an opening devotion.
- Following the devotion, the Committee member chosen to direct the interview should outline the anticipated procedure for the interview.
- Listening, A Crucial Act... A discussion on the importance of listening and other guidance for effective interviewing is included in Chapter 12/Appendix.
- As noted above, the early questions should be foundational in order to allow the candidate to "settle in." Questions which allow the candidate to introduce themselves (e.g., "Tell us about yourself") are appropriate here. Allow ten to fifteen minutes for this portion.
- The formal questioning, with structured questions, should begin. Questions should be situational (i.e., call-specific) and may be asked by more than one member of the Committee.
- If the response received from the candidate is unclear or incomplete, a follow-up question may be posed.
- A Committee member(s) may be designated to record candidate responses using various means (e.g., notes, audio, video), for further scrutiny by the Committee. Audio and video recording should, however, be undertaken only with the consent of the candidate.
- Committees will vary in the length of time devoted to the structured portion of the interview. One hour may be typical, with two hours considered a desirable upper limit.
- Allow time at the conclusion of the interview to answer specific questions posed by the candidate. After answering the Candidate's questions, a "wrap up" phase should be led by a member of the Committee who thanks the candidate for coming and offers to be in phone contact if additional questions arise as a result of the interview. Future steps should be outlined, including the anticipated time line.

While the interview is still fresh in the minds of committee members, a time should be set to reconvene the Call Committee in order to share initial impressions. Impressions should be recorded for use at a later date.

## INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP AND DECISION

### Following up on the Interviews

The Call Committee should send a letter of appreciation to each Candidate for his/her willingness to be interviewed. This letter may encourage the Candidate to address additional comments and/or questions to the Committee. Any expense reimbursement should be provided now. Again, a promise of keeping the Candidate current regarding the Call Process is essential.

***It is crucial that the Call Committee immediately notify the Candidate when he/she is no longer being considered.*** (A sample letter can be found at end of this chapter.) The decision not to consider a candidate further should be submitted immediately to the Synod staff person who is assisting in the Call Process. Because it is the practice of some bishops to invite a pastor to interview exclusively for one call at a time, this notification will allow the Synod staff, in consultation with the candidate, to submit a pastor's name to another congregation currently in the Call Process.

## Discernment/Decision

At a meeting following all interviews the Committee will begin a selection process. Suggested format might be as follows:

1. Begin with Prayer and Devotion

*Lord, we come before you asking for the guidance of your Spirit. As we seek a new pastor, keep us mindful of all that we have learned and all that we have heard. Guide us, grant us wisdom and understanding through this time. Amen.*
2. Select a recorder for gathering information. (It is often helpful to have a sheet of newsprint for each candidate.) If a grid has been developed, these rankings can be compiled.
3. Each member of the Committee then responds to three questions about the candidate.
4. Where did the candidate fit best with our congregational needs?
5. What gifts does this candidate bring to ministry?
6. What areas of ministry are not strengths for this candidate?
7. Could this person serve this parish well? (Could he/she serve as my pastor?)
8. Data or in-put from the interim or other staff may be heard at this time.
9. Review information gained from contact with references.
10. After data is collected on all candidates, the chairperson asks for comments/reflections or observations on the data.
11. Review and
  - a. Ask again for the guidance of the Holy Spirit
  - b. Review and clarify the understanding of what it means to reach consensus
  - c. Allow ample time for each Call Committee member to speak and be heard
  - d. Come to a decision measured against the leadership needs of the congregation (cf., Mission Profile)
  - e. Choose the most suitable candidate, not necessarily the one most likely to accept the call
  - f. While listening to your own heart and impressions, go beyond asking, "Which candidate do I favor?" to "Which pastor can best serve the congregation?"
12. Each committee member shares a statement or word reflecting their response and their choice.
13. Make a choice. Note if the selection is obvious based on comments from Committee. The ranking should be used to guide Call Committee decision-making, but should not be the overriding factor.
14. If the Committee is inclined toward one or more of the candidates, and feels further in-put is needed, a second interview may be scheduled with one or more of the candidates.
15. If the Committee determines that no candidate can be recommended, then usually a meeting with the Synod contact person and the Call Committee is held to "debrief" the experience. This may be done in person or a conference call. This process may help to clarify the Committee's expectations and also answer questions which may have arisen about how to proceed. Discussion with Synod staff will determine the next step.
16. As a decision is made a prayer is offered. Each member of the Call Committee then states that he/she will support the decision.
17. The Congregation Council president is informed of the recommendation of the Call Committee. The Call Committee prepares to present the candidate to the Council and the congregation.
18. All candidates are promptly informed of decision. (The Bishop is also informed of decision.) Please return the "Interview Feedback Form" on each candidate. (You received it when you received the Rostered Leader Profile - copy in Appendix.)

## Sample Letter - Release of Candidate following the Interview

Date

The Rev. Jan H. Doe  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Pastor Doe:

On behalf of the Call Committee at First Lutheran Church, I express our sincere appreciation for the opportunity to visit with you on \_\_\_\_\_. It was a very helpful and informative interview. It certainly allowed us to gain a clearer perspective regarding your many gifts as a Lutheran pastor and we thank you for that. *(make reference to some of those gifts)*

After careful and prayerful discernment, it is our conclusion to release you from further consideration. I hope you will not interpret this decision as a personal reflection on your skills as a pastor. It is intended to be a reflection of our assessment of the current leadership needs of this congregation and our effort to find the person who best meets those criteria.

If you have questions or concerns about the interview, I would be happy to discuss them with you. You may contact me at \_\_\_\_\_

I wish God's richest blessings on your continued ministry.

Sincerely yours,

Your Name

Cc: The Rev. Shelley Wickstrom, Bishop  
Alaska Synod, ELCA

## **Chapter 9: Calling Your Pastor**

**Chapter Contents:** Staff building -- Council Recommendation -- Compensation Package -- Meeting the congregation -- Call meeting -- Call Letter – Pastor’s Response

### **Consultation for Staff-building**

In multiple staff situations, it is very helpful to take an extra step, asking that the Candidate to meet with existing staff and with a consultant in staff dynamics. The synod can assist in identifying consultants skilled in doing this. During this time, usually several hours, the candidate and staff can explore how well they will relate to each other. The facilitator can discover areas where the "mix" of the candidate and staff is solid; and also where the "mix" may need work. It is most effective if this process can be completed prior to the call being issued, so the call decision can be considered in the light of insights into staff dynamics.

### **Recommendation to the Council**

In most congregations, once the Call Committee has decided upon a candidate to recommend. The council president will call a meeting of the Congregation Council. The entire Call Committee or only the chair of the Committee may be present at this meeting. The Call Committee member chosen to present the candidate should prepare carefully. Thorough information about the candidate, with ample opportunity for dialogue between the Call Committee and the Council, will enable the Congregation Council to come to a decision regarding concurrence with the Call Committee’s recommendation.

The Congregation Council may choose to meet the candidate the Call Committee recommends, or the Council may decide to accept the recommendation and forward it directly to the congregation. The Council should not assume the position of a further interviewing body, making its own independent judgment. The Council meets the candidate only to lay groundwork for a strong working partnership.

### **Determining the Compensation Package**

Normally the Synod contact person who has worked with the Call Committee will meet with the Congregation Council (or Executive Committee, or Call Committee) to work through the specific figures in the Letter of Call and Definition of Compensation and Benefits (See <http://www.elcaalaska.net/call-process>) It is expected that the guidelines for salary and benefits as set forth in the Synod’s Compensation Guidelines will be followed. (Call Committee Chair and Council President have copies).

Should questions arise about any particular issue, the Synod can be consulted. It is most helpful for the Synod staff person to facilitate communication between the pastor and the congregation. Sometimes, it may be advised that they have direct conversation.

In any event, the compensation package should be worked out prior to the congregational meeting at which the call is officially voted.

### **Meeting the Congregation**

If a second visit is deemed necessary, the congregation will invite the recommended candidate to come, along with spouse/family, to be introduced to the congregation prior to the congregational vote. This visit may entail:

- conversation with the Congregation Council (if it did not happen previously);
- a congregational gathering, primarily social in nature, with time for a whole-group session of questions as well as informal mixing time. The pastor might be invited to open the group time by leading a devotional reflection;
- opportunity for the candidate and family to more fully explore the community - housing, schools, spouse job possibilities, etc.

### **The Congregation Call Meeting**

The Congregation Council will set a date for a special congregational call meeting. Once the date has been established, the officers should follow the congregation constitution in notifying all eligible voting members of the special meeting. The mailing to notify members may include a brief statement from the Call Committee and information about the recommended candidate's experience and qualifications.

In preparation for the congregation call meeting, the officers should review and have at hand portions of the congregation constitution relative calling a pastor, including number of voters required for a quorum and definition of a voting member.

Before the beginning of the meeting, all qualified voters must be invited to "sign in." Make sure that all confirmed young people are invited to participate (even if they have only contributed through their family). The special meeting of the congregation to consider the calling of a pastor should open with a devotional time. The Council President may then establish that a quorum of members is present and ask that this number be recorded in the minutes. Information concerning the proposed candidate should then be presented to the congregation. The congregation may then address questions about the proposed candidate to representatives of the Congregation Council and Call Committee.

The vote to call a pastor will be by written ballot. **A two-thirds majority of those present and voting is necessary for call.**

Tellers should be appointed by the Council President to distribute, collect and count the ballots. The chief teller should then report the vote outcome to the Council President who announces the results to the congregation. Detailed minutes must be taken.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the chair should express gratitude to the Call Committee for its work and assistance in the Call Process. If an approval to call takes place, the congregation should be informed that the candidate has three weeks to consider the Call and will normally notify the congregation of his/her decision within that time.

If the required two-thirds majority vote to call is not met, the Council President declares that the candidate has not been called. When possible, the Congregation President and chair of the Call Committee are advised to meet with the bishop or bishop's representative to discuss the failure to call and to initiate a renewal of the search process. Other Congregation Council members and Call Committee members may be included in this meeting, if desired.

### **Preparing the Letter of Call**

If the congregation votes affirmatively, the Letter of Call and "Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibility of the Pastor" (the green sheet) are signed and forwarded to the Bishop for his signature. A sample Letter of Call is included in Chapter 12/Appendix. (Please note the instructions to fill out the "working copy" of each, leaving the final copy with signatures to be filled out by the Synod office.) The Synod office completes the Letter of Call and Statement of Salary and Benefits. The Bishop signs the Letter of Call. The Synod office sends them to the pastor, with copies made and sent to the congregation for its records.

See Chapter 12/Appendix for copies of the forms.

### **Call to Associate Pastor**

It has been the practice of the Synod to recommend two stipulations be included in calls issued for Associate Pastor positions. They are:

- *"In the event of a vacancy in the position of Senior Pastor, the pastor here called shall under no circumstances be considered for the position of Senior Pastor."* Rationale: There is inevitably some sentiment by those closest to the Associate Pastor to "elevate" that pastor to the Senior Pastor position. Just as inevitably, there is sentiment among other members for seeking a new Senior Pastor. The experience of the church over the years is that there is a high frequency of failed or unsatisfying ministries when such a call is issued. The associate was initially called for that particular, not as a Senior Pastor. Experience has taught the wisdom of having all parties agree at the outset that such a move is not a possibility.
- *"This Call terminates six months after the arrival of a new Senior Pastor."* Rationale: This condition is preferable to the previously used "co-terminus" language which implies the Associate leaves simultaneously with the Senior Pastor. This recommended language allows for pastoral continuity during the Interim/Transition period; it gives the Associate Pastor time to consider the changing nature of the ministry; it leaves open the possibility that a new Senior Pastor and congregational leadership may wish to continue the Associate Pastor's ministry. If the latter comes to be the case, the congregation is free to issue a new call to the Associate Pastor at that time.

### **Call to a Newly-Ordained Pastor to His/Her First Call**

One of the most dramatic transitions in the life of newly called leaders is the transition from seminary or non-rostered status to the first call to public ministry. For that reason, the ELCA has prescribed standards and expectations for continuing theological education during the first three years of a public minister under call.

The First Call Theological Education Program in the Alaska Synod is administered by a partnership between five of the six Region 1 synods. This group meets once a year normally near Seattle, WA.

While it is strongly suggested that every pastor participate in 50 hours of continuing theological and leadership education every year, it is a requirement for First Call leaders. The costs of the program are intended to fall within Synodical guidelines for continuing education funding.



### **Pastor's Response**

The Congregation President or Call Committee chair should notify the pastor of the call immediately following the meeting. The pastor normally has three weeks to respond beginning from the time the letter actually arrives in his/her hands. (It is helpful to notify the Synod staff person also.)

The candidate's decision to accept or decline the Call will be delivered to the congregation via the Council president. In accepting, the pastor should be asked to indicate a start date, usually within one or two months. Any variance will need to be negotiated between the congregation and the candidate. Acceptance of the call should be conveyed promptly to the Bishop.

### **Sample Letter - Following Successful Vote of the Congregation**

Date

The Rev. Jan H. Doe  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Pastor Doe:

I am pleased to confirm following our telephone conversation of *(indicate when)*, that the members of the congregation at a specially called congregational meeting on *(indicate date)* voted to extend to you a Letter of Call to become Pastor of \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church.

The Letter of Call, along with the "Definition of Compensation, Benefits and Responsibilities of the Pastor" has been delivered to our Bishop's office for signature. Once you have received these documents we understand, according to the constitution of the ELCA, you have thirty days to consider your decision. When you respond, please send a copy of your response letter to our synod office. We pray for the guidance of God's Spirit through your deliberation and place our hope in God's hands that you will be led to a favorable response to our invitation to become our pastor.

We await your answer with excitement and enthusiasm at the prospects of engaging with you as our spiritual leader in service to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through the ministry of \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church.

Sincerely yours,

Name

cc: The Rev. Shelley Wickstrom, Bishop  
Alaska Synod, ELCA

## **Chapter 10 : Welcome & Installation**

Moving -- Installation -- Welcome & Getting Acquainted -- 6-month Review – Periodic Evaluation

### **Moving**

Moving expenses are the obligation of the calling Congregation (see "Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities of the Pastor", and the "Synod Salary Guidelines"). There should be clear understanding of arrangements and reimbursements. It is common to ask the pastor to submit an estimate of moving expenses (provided by a mover) to the congregation for approval prior to the move. (An editorial observation for any congregational members who may want to choose a pastor on basis of proximity: When you consider that you will be investing many hundreds of thousands of dollars in this pastor over the full length of ministry, not to mention the health of the congregation depending on the best possible selection, the difference in moving costs between someone nearby and someone far away is insignificant!)

### **Installation**

The Congregation President and the pastor-elect need to confer to decide upon a date for installation, in consultation with the Bishop or bishop's representative. The Presiding Minister for the Rite of Installation is usually the Bishop or Synod liaison, or someone else representing the synod. It is a fitting symbol, especially if the installation happens shortly after arrival, for the bishop or staff (in the case of a solo pastorate) or another pastor on staff (in the case of multiple staff settings) to preside over the service up until the point of installation. Upon the completion of the Rite of Installation, the newly-installed pastor becomes the presiding minister for the remainder of the service. This symbolizes the pastoral care of the whole church over the congregation during this time of transition.

In most cases the installation takes place on Sunday morning, facilitating the best possible participation of the congregational members. If there are multiple services, the Rite of Installation is usually conducted at each service.

It is encouraged that invitations to the Service of Installation be extended to neighboring ministers and congregations. In areas where these relationships are already significant, the Service of Installation is sometimes held in the afternoon, allowing for greater participation by ministry partners from outside the congregation.

### **Order of Service**

The Service of Installation is printed in the *Occasional Services Book for the Assembly*, published by Augsburg-Fortress. An electronic copy of the liturgy for installation of a pastor can be downloaded from <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Resources/Ministry-Rites.aspx> If the Council wants a copy of the service to review, call the synod office and one will be sent to you. The Service of Installation is normally inserted between the Hymn of the Day and the Sharing of the Peace. Feel free to creatively adapt the service to your setting - Call Committee members writing prayer petitions, offering words of blessing, etc.

## **Press Release**

A press release about the arrival of your new pastor is an opportunity for outreach.

Consider what usually appears in the religion section of the newspaper: a pastor's educational background, congregations served, major accomplishments, and sometimes information about the family. Look at it from the perspective of church members. Think about those who are inactive. Are there unchurched people waiting for a congregation to show interest in them, rather than just itself? These folks are asking themselves, "What difference does the new pastor make to me?" "How might I benefit?" "Why should I care?"

People look for congregations offering a clear biblical message, an interest in their needs, and a place that makes them feel wanted. Using the press release for outreach means that the image of the pastor and congregation portrayed in print must be what people experience in the church. Think of it as truth in advertising.

How does the congregation benefit from this approach? First, it's free. Second, as a public article, it shows that the newspaper sees the event as genuinely newsworthy. The press release as an outreach tool helps to create a congregational image in the community as well. It also provides a way to evaluate ministry. Congregations must ask what benefits people might receive by participation in their services, programs, and special events.

A well-planned public relations effort not only makes outreach more effective, it also keeps a congregation's mission focused and relevant.

## **Invitations**

Don't overlook the importance of the Installation Service as a time to lift up the life of the whole church. Invite neighboring and partner congregations to be present, even if the congregation is holding the Installation on Sunday morning, other congregations may send representatives or greetings. Think ecumenically - including sister communities of faith is an important witness to your own people and the whole community. Congregations are encouraged to hold the installation at a time when the community can participate. Please coordinate the scheduling of the service with the synod office.

## **Welcome & Getting Acquainted**

It generally falls naturally to the leadership of the Call Committee and/or Congregation Council to stay in close contact with the newly-arrived pastor in the first weeks. Close communication for both professional and personal matters is appreciated by the pastor and family, and establishes a good posture of mutual support. Some kind of welcoming event helps celebrate the new beginnings. Often the day of Installation involves a special reception or luncheon to which congregation and neighbors are invited.

*(Optional – a new initiative/idea...)*

### **Six months later... the 6-month review**

It is helpful for the Synod contact person to come back 6 months or so after the beginning of the new ministry for conversation with the pastor and the congregational leadership. Usually this will involve a personal conversation with the pastor, then a conversation with the Congregation Council. The purpose is to provide opportunity to use this early stage to compare expectations with actual happenings. The Congregational Mission Profile can be reviewed, and questions posed to each: What were you expecting as you entered into this Call? How has reality compared? What are the pleasant surprises? What may some unexpected findings be? What has been the focus of the first 6 months? Would it be good to think about some early-course corrections?

Some questions that evaluate the impact of this entire calling process might be:

1. Does the decision to call this pastor still “feel right?” Explain.
2. What have you learned about your pastor that is consistent with the image you had of him/her during the Call Process?
3. What have you learned about your pastor that varies from the image you had of him/her during the Call Process?
4. Based upon what you now know, how could the Call Process have been better designed?
5. What impact has the pastor made since he/she has started?
6. What progress has the congregation made toward fulfilling its missional objectives?
7. What have you learned about being on a Call Committee that you feel may benefit others who will serve in the future?

Generally, these conversations are very affirming. The review provides a non-threatening, supportive setting for raising any concerns or issues from either perspective. It is helpful, before patterns are too ingrained, to review the unfolding ministry.

### **Moving Forward - Periodic Review and Evaluation**

As discussed in Chapter 5, the Ministry Strategy can be profitably used apart from the Call Process. Periodic review and evaluation of ministry can be life-giving. The performance of a called pastor needs to be evaluated in the context of overall mission and ministry goals of the whole church. The synod has forms that can be used for ministry evaluation. A Staff Support or Mutual Ministry Committee is a helpful vehicle for on-going, supportive review and evaluation.

## **Chapter 11: Evaluation of the Process**

Good evaluation is the foundation of a good Call Process. We need to draw on the experience of those who are regularly involved in Call Processes (i.e., Synod staff) and those who are involved only once in a while (i.e., parishioners comprising a Call Committee). We need to develop an understanding of what's good and what's bad that extend beyond our personal experiences so others will benefit from our experience.

Evaluation is more than asking, "Did it go well?" It includes questions like: Were your needs met? Was it well designed? Did it work? Did you learn anything? Did you use the recommended steps? What could have been done differently?

This booklet has included some questions for evaluating the Call Process *along the way*, rather than merely after it is over:

- *Needs Evaluation:* How well did we identify our congregation's needs (found in this manual at the end of Chapter 5, to be completed after the congregational profile/leadership profile have been created)?
- *Design Evaluation:* How well was Call Process designed (in this manual in Chapter 8, between Preparation and Interview, to be completed after the Call Committee has mapped out its process, but prior to implementing it)?
- *Impact Evaluation:* How did the Call Process benefit the candidate, Call Committee, and the congregation (in this manual at the end of Chapter 10, to be used as part of the six-month review)?
- *Implementation Evaluation:* How well did the Call Process work ? (To be completed after the Call Process has been completed. It's very helpful to the Synod staff for your responses to be shared with them as well. *(Photocopy-ready form is included in Chapter 12/Appendix.)*)

1. Did the Call Committee find the process that was used helpful? Why or why not?
2. Did the congregation find the process that was used helpful? Why or why not?
3. What parts of the Call Process worked well?
4. What parts of the process didn't work so well?
5. Were there unexpected problems? If so, how could they be avoided next time?
6. What parts of the process produced frustration, confusion, mistakes, etc.?
7. What did you find helpful about the role played by Synod staff?
8. What didn't you find helpful about the role played by Synod staff?

# Chapter 12 - Appendix

## Response to the Emotional Dynamics Caused by the Pastoral Vacancy

Following the resignation or loss of a pastor, there is often a period of time when the experience of loss finds expression in various ways among members of the congregation. Often there appears to be a pattern, depending on the circumstances, surrounding the resignation and the quality of the member's relationship with the pastor. The congregation's response may take the form of the pattern described below even though the stages may or may not follow in the order they appear. These are some of the typical emotional responses members may have to the departure of their pastor. These emotions should be dealt with intentionally and with compassion during the transition period in order to bring about final resolution and closure to the ministry of the departing pastor.

### Stage One - "Shock and Denial"

Members of a congregation may respond to the resignation of their pastor with surprise and disbelief. "I can't believe he/she is leaving. There must be some mistake." Shock and disbelief is usually a temporary state and will likely be followed by one or more of the following stages.

### Stage Two - "Abandonment - Panic"

Feelings of being abandoned may set off a temporary state of disorganization with fear and panic about the future of the congregation. There may be a fear of the loss of the congregation's "future story", its mission and its plans for future programming. "He/she can't possibly leave us. There's too much at stake right now." Feelings of betrayal may be expressed.

### Stage Three - "Anger and Resentment"

Anger and tears may accompany feelings of unfairness and regret. Anger may become displaced on church leaders, church council members, other staff members, or it may be directed at the departing pastor or the synod. Anger may precipitate members transferring their membership to other congregations, withholding funds, or

### Stage Four - "Guilt - Bargaining"

As the reality of the pastor's departure settles in, anger and regret may become displaced on self or others in the congregation, taking the form of guilt which might be accompanied by pleading, frantic prayerfulness, and bargaining with the pastor, church council or the synod. "Is there something we've done to make you decide to leave? Is there anything we can do to persuade you to stay?"

### Stage Five - "Acceptance - Resolution"

Through mutual support members can be helped to accept the loss, make peace with their pain and bring about a sense of reconciliation without revisiting earlier stages. They can finally talk about their sense of loss without tears or resentment and begin to approach a sense of appreciation and even celebration of the life they and the pastor have shared together.

### Stage Six - "Closure"

Closure occurs when members and the departing pastor have reconciled any differences that may have occurred and have released one another from previous commitments. Members and the departing pastor can bid one another farewell and Godspeed.

**Prayers**

**FOR THE WORK OF THE CALL COMMITTEE**

Almighty God, giver of all good gifts: Look on your Church with grace and guide the minds of those who shall choose a pastor for this congregation, that we may receive a faithful servant who will care for your people and equip us for our ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Lutheran Book of Worship, pg. 46)

**FOR THE DEPARTING PASTOR:**

Gracious God, you have united us all in one body the body of Christ. We give you thanks for the work of Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ among us. As he/she leaves to a new congregation/retirement surround him/her with your Spirit. Give us the courage to release him/her to a new call and bless our remembering of the work that has been done among us. Guide Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ and us as we continue to seek to share the Good News of salvation through your son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

**DURING THE INTERIM TIME**

Loving God, be with us and guide us during this time of discernment. Fill our leaders with your wisdom. Keep us mindful of the work you would have us do. Lead us and guide us O Lord to be about the work of your kingdom even as the search for a new pastor continues. Bless all who have taken on extra responsibility, and fill them with a sense of your love and presence. We pray in your Son's name, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

**DURING INTERVIEWS:**

God, keep us mindful of your presence among us as we seek to discern your will for us. We pray that you will help us see beyond our own needs to the needs of your whole church. We pray that you will open our eyes to new possibilities, and opportunities of being your people. Guide us and lead us, O Lord. Amen.

**AT MEETINGS:**

Life-giving God, create among us a desire to do your will. Open our hearts to your Word. Lead us as we seek to lead. Guide us as we seek to guide. God, we desire a new pastor to be among us, to lead us and walk with us - direct us as we wait. Bless all who serve in the congregation, especially those who have the responsibility to lead us in the call process. Bless us Lord Jesus. Amen

**A Community Bible Study**  
*Suggested texts on following page*

LEADER: Open with Prayer:

Almighty God, we look to your Word for guidance and hope. Open our hearts and our minds that we may hear your Word for us. Guide us through your Word to hear the good news for our lives together, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A. First person reads the lesson:

In silence write one word or phrase from the lesson that seems significant to you:

---

Each person shares the word or phrase without additional comment.

B. A second person reads the lesson:

In silence reflect on what this passage is saying to you.

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Each person may share his/her reflection without additional comment.

C. A third person reads the lesson:

Each person reflects in one sentence or less what this passage is saying to the congregation at this time while you are in the Call Process.

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If time allows, a 10-20 minute open discussion may be included at this time.

Closing Prayer:

LEADER: Lord God, we are your servants in need of your love.

The leader then offers a prayer for the person on his/her right. That person prays for the person on his/her right, continuing around the room until each person has been included.

Close with the Lord's Prayer.



**Suggested Biblical Texts**

The following are just a few texts that may be used for devotions or bible study during the call process. The lessons for each Sunday may also be used for your study.

The “Great Commission” – Matthew 28:16-20  
The Call of Matthew – Matthew 9:9-13  
Call of the first Disciples – Luke 5:1-11  
“Come and See” – John 1:35-46  
Servant Leadership – John 11:33-35; John 12:20-26; John 13:1-17  
Our New Life in Christ – Romans 12:1-8 (9-21)  
On Church Divisions – 1 Corinthians 3:1-9  
Spiritual Armor – Ephesians 6:10-18  
Being in Christ Jesus – Philippians 2:1-11  
New Life in Christ – Colossians 3:1-17  
Prayer – 1 Timothy 2  
Qualifications of Deacons – 1 Timothy 3:8-13  
A Good Minister of Jesus Christ – 1 Timothy 4:6-16

Reflections on God’s Call:

Call of young people:

Samuel: 1 Samuel 2:1-3; 18  
Mary: Luke 1:26-38

Call of Elderly

Elizabeth and Zechariah: Luke 1  
Abraham and Samuel: Genesis 18; 9:15  
Simeon and Anna: Luke 2:22-38

Call of the Disciples:

Follow Me: Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11

Reflections on being the church:

Read the Book of Acts together. Read one chapter a week. Begin meetings by reflecting on recent readings and the ministry of your congregation.

**EXIT INTERVIEW FORM**

(Pastor's Response)

(One copy for each participant, one copy to be the official record.)

Pastor: \_\_\_\_\_ Person filling out the form: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What were the compelling reasons that attracted you to accept the call to this congregation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How did your expectations of ministry here compare to the realities of your ministry here?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What things have given you the sense of greatest fulfillment? (With which things are you satisfied and pleased?)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What things have given you the sense of greatest frustration? (With which things are you unsatisfied/dissatisfied or displeased?)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What do you consider as the strengths of the congregation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What do you consider the weaknesses of the congregation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What present areas of ministry and program do you think should be retained and continued?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. What new areas of ministry and program do you think should get emphasis in the future?

9. What do you think that this congregation can do to strengthen and support the incoming pastor?

10. What would you like this congregation to do to help you and your family in the transition soon to take place?

11. Are there any critical issues or ongoing concerns that should be addressed in the near future?

**EXIT INTERVIEW FORM**

(Congregational Response)

(One copy for each participant, one copy to be the official record.)

Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_ Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What were the compelling reasons that attracted the congregation to call this pastor to the congregation?
  
2. How did your expectations of the pastor compare to the realities?
  
3. Regarding this pastoral ministry: What things have given you a sense of greatest fulfillment?  
(With which things are you satisfied and pleased?)
  
4. Regarding this pastoral ministry: What things have given you the sense of greatest frustration?  
(With which things are you unsatisfied/dissatisfied or displeased?)
  
5. What do you consider the strengths of the congregation?
  
6. What do you consider the weaknesses of the congregation?
  
7. What present areas of ministry and program do you think should be retained and continued?
  
8. What new areas of ministry and program do you think should get emphasis in the future?
  
9. What do you think that the congregation can do to strengthen and support the incoming pastor?
  
10. What would you like the pastor to do to help the congregation in the transition soon to take place?
  
11. Are there any critical issues or ongoing concerns that should be addressed in the near future?

## Certification of Congregation Records at the Time of a Pastoral Transition

(to be submitted by a representative of the synodical bishop)

In anticipation of a pastoral vacancy,<sup>1</sup> I have examined the Parish Register of

Name of Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address of Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Pastor: \_\_\_\_\_

and testify that the records have been maintained in good order during the tenure of this pastor, in accordance with the ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations which stipulates, “The pastor shall keep accurate parochial records of all baptisms, confirmations, marriages, burials, communicants, members received, members dismissed, or members excluded from the congregation, and shall submit a summary of such statistics annually to the synod” (\*C9.12. [1999]).<sup>2</sup>

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

- “The parochial records of each congregation shall be kept in a separate book which shall remain its property. The secretary of the congregation shall attest to the bishop of this synod that such records have been placed in his or her hands in good order by the departing pastor before:
  7. Installation in another field of labor, or
  8. Issuance of a certificate of dismissal or transfer” (S14.15.).
- For a description of the contents of the Parish Register, see “Maintaining the Parish Register” at [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org).

**Certification of Completion of Financial Records**

Upon the resignation of a pastor, the following policy of the Alaska Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American applies:

“The pastor shall make satisfactory settlement of all financial obligations to a former congregation before installation in another field of labor, or the issuance of a certificate of dismissal or transfer.” (S14.16.)

And, from the Model Constitution for Congregations:

“The congregation shall make satisfactory settlement of all financial obligations to a former pastor before calling a successor.” (C9.08.)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This is to certify:

11. That all financial obligations, salary, pension, health, death benefits and allowances together with continuing education funds have been met and paid to the Rev \_\_\_\_\_ up to the effective date of termination of services.

12. That satisfactory settlement of all financial obligations have been made by the Rev \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ (name of church), located in \_\_\_\_\_, Alaska.

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Treasurer of the Congregation

\_\_\_\_\_  
Pastor

Please return to the Alaska Synod Office  
1847 W. Northern Lights Blvd. #2 Anchorage, AK 99517  
[elcaalaska@gmail.com](mailto:elcaalaska@gmail.com)  
Fax: (907) 274-3141

### **Why Not Ask our Former Pastor**

The congregation builds important relationships with its pastors. Some members maintain lasting friendships long after the pastor has transitioned to other ministries. Thus, in times of celebration and deep grieving, it is only natural that families would seek a pastor who has been important to the family. This is especially true when a pastoral act is required, e.g., a wedding, funeral, baptism, etc.

That is where we run into trouble. We need to be clear on what has come to be understood as a “professional ethic” for pastors. When a pastor leaves a parish, she/he is no longer those people’s pastor; he/she may continue to be a friend, but the pastoral relationship has ended. The implications for pastors are clear; it is often (not always) appropriate to do what other friends do—attend a wedding or funeral—but the pastoral act in these moments belongs to the current pastor.

Here are some reflections on how to proceed:

- Congregation members can avoid putting the former pastor in this situation. Do not call the former pastor before speaking to the current one. The family sets up the former pastor, the current pastor, even the Bishop when they do this.
- The former pastor needs to have clear boundaries at the beginning. When asked, you cannot say, “You’ll have to talk to your pastor about that, and if he agrees...” That puts the current pastor in a no-win situation of relinquishing the pastoral role to the former pastor or saying no and the current pastor being regarded by the parishioner as cold, jealous, unresponsive and uncaring. The former pastor just needs to point out that the pastoral role is not theirs anymore.
- As part of the exit interview with the leaving pastor, the church council can request that the pastor write a letter to the congregation thanking them and establishing an appropriate boundary regarding future pastoral acts.
- When the new pastor arrives, the call committee and council may want to communicate with the congregation that the former pastor is not to be asked for pastoral acts. It can be stated that this is the agreement between the former pastor and the congregation. This gives the former pastor a “way out” of difficult situations.

This is not meant to sound arbitrary and legalistic. It is meant to be pastoral. I have found myself caught in this situation both as the former pastor who felt obligated to say yes and as the current pastor finding myself excluded from my pastoral role. Clarity from the outset makes a huge difference. There may be a few situations that are “exceptions” but probably a lot fewer than it seems.

There are also contacts with former pastors over personal life struggles, complaints about the life of the parish, etc., and the same “ethic” applies: we honor our former pastor most highly by recognizing the importance of the work they do and the office they hold by looking to current pastors for these ministry acts.

Thanks to Bishop Peter Rogness, St Paul Area Synod-ELCA, from whom this article is adapted.

### Thanksgiving at the Conclusion of a Call

This order is appropriately set within the service of Holy Communion on the final Sunday of a minister's service under call in a congregation. The order follows the prayer after communion.

This order may be led by a pastor of the congregation (unless the pastor's call is the one concluding), another rostered leader, a representative of the congregation, or a representative of the synod.

#### Address

*The person whose call in concluding and representative/s of the congregation come before the assembly.*

*A representative of the congregation addresses the pastor whose call is concluding with these or similar words.*

Name, on date of call, we of name of congregation called you to be pastor in this place: to proclaim God's word, to baptize and teach, to announce God's forgiveness, and to preside at the Lord's table. With the gospel you have comforted us in times of sickness and trouble, and at the death of our loved ones. Sharing our joys and sorrows, you [and your family] have been important to our life together in the church of Jesus Christ, in our service to this community, and in God's mission to the whole world. [As you leave this community of faith, we say farewell, and we pray for God's blessing.]

*The leader addresses the assembly with these or similar words.*

People of God, members of name of congregation,  
do you release name from service as your pastor?

*Response:* We do, and we give thanks to God for our ministry together.

*The leader addresses the person whose call is concluding.*

Name, do you recognize and accept the completion of your ministry with name of congregation?

*Response:* I do, and I give thanks to God for our ministry together.

#### Prayer of Thanksgiving and Sending

*The presiding minister leads the assembly in prayer.*

Let us pray.

Almighty God, through your Son Jesus Christ

You gave the holy apostles many gifts and commanded them to feed your flock.

You equip your people with abilities that differ according to the grace given to them,  
and you call them to various avenues of service.

We give you thanks for the ministry of name among the people of God in this place.

You watch over our going out and our coming in:

Bless this time of ending and beginning.

Your surround your people in every time and place:

keep us close in your love.

You accompany your people in times of joy and in times of trial:

prosper all that has been done to your glory in this time together;

heal and forgive all that has fallen short of your will for us.

Help name [and her/his family] and all of us

to live with courage and gladness in the future you give to us.



As they have been a blessing to us,  
so now send them/us forth to be a blessing to others;  
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Blessing

*The presiding minister, or the pastor whose call has concluded, proclaims God's blessing in these or similar words.*

The Lord bless you and keep you.  
The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.  
The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.  
Amen.

*A sending song may be sung.*

Dismissal

*The assisting minister may send the assembly into mission.*

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

### **The Mission Exploration Process**

- The Mission Exploration Team (MET) leads a process that seeks to define future directions and priorities for the mission and ministry of the congregation.
- The Team is appointed by the Congregation Council in conversation with the Synod staff person. Along with representative members from the congregation at least two persons who are not members are to serve on this team. The team plans an interactive process which involves the congregation in building a vision for mission and compiling data for the profile. (See Possible Format for Mission Exploration Process - next page)
- A facilitator should be identified as the team is formed. This key role can be played by the Synod staff person, a conference dean or member of another congregation experienced in the MET process, or a skilled member.
- The expected outcomes of the MET process:
  - A statement of mission including completion of the Congregational Mission Profile.
  - A definition of the outreach expectations for ministry in the community of the congregation.
  - Identification of the Mission Partnerships of the congregation within the community, in the Synod, and beyond.
  - A defined commitment to at least 4 mission strategies for the congregation for the next 5 years. (i.e. working with community youth, developing a community based bible study, working on an anti-racism program, building a hospitality relationship with gay and lesbian persons.)
  - A concrete plan for evaluating the mission strategy, and a plan for accountability to others in the community.

#### Further comments on the MET PROCESS:

- This work may be undertaken apart from a pastor announcing her/his intention of leaving, (It can profitably be an ongoing part of congregational planning.)
- The focus is on the congregation and its mission and not on the pastoral leadership
- The intent is to increase congregation awareness and participation in the mission of the congregation.
- The mission exploration time helps a congregation see itself through the eyes of the community, and in the larger picture being a congregation in the ELCA
- The involvement of community resources, other congregations and the synod staff is important to this process.

**A Possible Format for the Mission Exploration Process**

Before a Call Committee or MET process begins the work of filling out the Congregational Mission Profile, it is helpful to gather a sense of the congregation, its neighborhood, and the community. The following suggestions may serve as guides for your group to plan a time for the congregation members to be involved in the process.

Session 1:       Who are we?  
                  What is our history?  
                  What do we say about ourselves?  
                  How do others describe us?

Idea: Create a wall of history. Cover one wall of the fellowship hall with paper. Create a time line from the beginning of the congregation through today. You may want to leave a portion at the end for dreams for the future. Give everyone a marker and have them put important events and people on the wall. Information can be about your church, or society at large. (Wars, depressions, disasters effect the ministry too.) Have people gather in small groups and review the wall. ASK: "What do you see? What's missing?" Ask each group to create one or two sentences that describe who you are.

Session 2:       Where are we located?  
                  What is the community we serve?

Idea: Create a community map. Break into small groups with a piece of newsprint ... put in all the details. Put the various maps on the wall. Ask: "What do you see?" Have small groups walk or drive through the community. Silently each person notes the signs of hope and the signs of despair in your community. Have people gather afterwards to share their observations.

Session 3: What is Outreach?

Idea: Arrange for a presentation time to clarify outreach. Look at the difference between self-interest and selfishness. Define current outreach efforts and intentions of the congregation. Evaluate the church budget as a way of assessing the commitment to outreach.

Session 4: What are the assets and needs of our community?  
                  What services are needed?  
                  What services are available?  
                  Who are the invisible people? (The poor, lonely, hungry, angry, etc.)  
                  What is the relationship of the congregation with the community?

Idea: Have a community fair. Invite as many organizations, institutions, groups as possible to come and display information about themselves. Ask each representative to take 5 minutes to share with you their impression of your congregation, their assessment of the strengths and needs of your community.

Session 5: Who are our mission partners?  
How do we support others?  
How are we supported by others?

Idea: Have a mission Day. Include Synod and churchwide missions you support in your Benevolence as well as congregation partnerships.

Session 6: What is our Mission?  
How has our mission changed?  
What do we expect of our pastor in our mission work?  
What do we expect of ourselves in our mission work?  
Write a mission statement or review current statement for relevancy.

Idea: Have working session to look at church bulletins, newsletters, annual reports, financial reports.  
Ask:

- What does this say about our mission?
- What is missing?
- How might we strengthen our mission emphasis?

Session 7: What are our Gifts?

The purpose of this session is to:

- Introduce giftedness
- Look at gifts of leadership
- Assess gifts needed for mission
- Identify resources in congregation and community
- Identify needs

Session 8: Writing Task

At the final meeting the written materials produced should include:

- A mission statement
- A mission strategy for the next five years
- A list of mission partnerships both active and potential
- A set of 1- 5 year goals
- A plan for evaluation and review of mission plans
- The Congregational Mission Profile

A FINAL NOTE:

In reading this description of the Mission Exploration Process some will think this is a lot of unnecessary work-“Let’s just fill out the forms.” It is true it is hard work. But it is also true that congregations who take time to do the work invariably describe it as among the most useful elements of the entire call process. It is well worth the effort.

The Mission Exploration Team will take time to present the Mission Exploration information, the Congregation Mission Profile, and recommendations for style and characteristics of pastoral leadership to the council, the congregation and the call committee at the congregation de-briefing meeting.

## AN AFFIRMATION OF A CALL COMMITTEE

P=Pastor C=Congregation CC=Call Committee members

P: Let us pray. Gracious God, in times of change and transition you provide leaders to guide and direct us. Through them, you lead us over the rough places, and comfort us when we are afraid. We pray today that you will send your Spirit to be with these leaders and each one of us during this time of discernment. We ask in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

P: Do you, the people of \_\_\_\_ (church) \_\_\_\_\_ promise to hold this Call Committee in prayer?

C: We do.

P: Will you accept their leadership, support them in their work, and encourage them in their deliberation?

C: We will.

P: (To the Call Committee) You have prayerfully been selected to serve this congregation in selecting a pastoral candidate. You have been asked to give generously of your time. You have been entrusted with this responsibility on behalf of the whole congregation. Do you accept this responsibility and trust?

CC: We do.

P: Will you faithfully participate in the process, support one another in meetings, and call upon the Spirit for guidance and direction in all you do?

CC: We will.

P: Let us pray. Lord, bless the members of this committee, their work and decisions, that through them we might all be strengthened to serve you. Bless each member of the committee, that he or she might have the compassion, wisdom and energy to fulfill this responsibility. Keep us strong in faith and resolute in proclaiming the gospel to all people. We pray in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**Sample Letter - Invitation for Personal Interview Following Initial Contact**

Date

The Rev. Jan R. Doe  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Pastor Doe:

This is a follow up to our phone conversation on \_\_\_\_\_.

We wish to invite you to meet personally with (indicate who would be included in that meeting), in order for us to become better acquainted and to discuss in greater depth the current leadership needs of this congregation. In preparation for our time together, an exchange of information would be helpful. Enclosed for your review is \_\_\_\_\_. We would like to ask you to share with us at your earliest convenience the following \_\_\_\_\_.

If married...

We would be pleased to include your spouse in your visit to us. During the time of the interview itself, we would be happy to arrange opportunity for your spouse to become familiar with our community.

We would like to arrange a time when this visit would be convenient for you. Once we have arrived at a suitable time, we will arrange accommodations for you (and your spouse) while you are here. Please plan to spend (indicate the length of time) with us so that we might more fully explore our mutual vision for ministry.

Expenses which you incur, including your transportation, will be reimbursed by the congregation. We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. If you have special needs, please make them known and we will try to accommodate them. I can be reached by phone at \_\_\_\_\_

I wish God's richest blessings on your continued ministry.

Sincerely yours,

Your Name

cc: The Rev. Shelley Wickstrom, Bishop  
Alaska Synod, ELCA

**Interview questions (Chapter 8)**

- Tell us how your spiritual journey has brought you here to consider the possibility of this call?
  
- Your forms say your first call was at \_\_\_\_\_. Tell us about that ministry. What were your major accomplishments in that call?
  
- What were some of the things you did less well?
  
- What did you learn about yourself in that call?
  
- What aspects of the call were most challenging? (If there have been several calls, you may want to combine questions about major accomplishments, areas of weakness, learning's, challenges, etc.)
  
- What sort of ministry would you like to be doing five years from now?
  
- How have you found your ministry being shaped by specific context - congregation, community, events, etc.?
  
- How does your/our ministry relate to the ministry of the whole church?
  
- In your forms, you describe your leadership style as \_\_\_\_\_. Help us think about how our congregational leadership would best work with you.

**Interview Evaluation Form**

Please complete a copy of this form for each Candidate you interview and fax, email or mail to the synod office.

Name of Candidate: \_\_\_\_\_  
*The information provided here will enable the bishop's office in partnership with you to better understand your needs and the gifts of pastors in the call process.*

1. What kind of contact did you have?
  
2. For which of your competencies and characteristics was this candidate a good match?
  
3. For which of your competencies and characteristics was this candidate not a good match?
  
4. What appear to be the major strengths of the candidate?
  
5. What appears to be the significant weaknesses of the candidate?
  
6. What works would you use to describe this candidate's ministry style?
  
7. What other factors affected your decision to: (please check correct box and elaborate)  
 return this name  
 keep this name and interview others  
 to have a second interview

Do you need an additional name?                       Yes                       No

Call Committee Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_



**Sample Letter - Following Successful Vote of the Congregation**

Date

The Rev. Jan H. Doe  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Pastor Doe:

I am pleased to confirm following our telephone conversation of (indicate when), that the members of the congregation at a specially called congregational meeting on (indicate date) voted to extend to you a Letter of Call to become Pastor of \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church.

The Letter of Call, along with the “Definition of Compensation, Benefits and Responsibilities of the Pastor” has been delivered to our Bishop’s office for signature. Once you have received these documents we understand, according to the constitution of the ELCA, you have thirty days to consider your decision. When you respond, please send a copy of your response letter to our synod office. We pray for the guidance of God’s Spirit through your deliberation and place our hope in His hands that you will be led to a favorable response to our invitation to become our pastor.

We await your answer with excitement and enthusiasm at the prospects of engaging with you as our spiritual leader in service to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through the ministry of \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church.

Sincerely yours,

Name

cc: The Rev. Shelley Wickstrom, Bishop  
Alaska Synod, ELCA

**Sample Letter - Release of Candidate following the Interview**

Date

The Rev. John H. Doe  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Pastor Doe:

On behalf of the Call Committee at \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church, I express our sincere appreciation for the opportunity to visit with you on \_\_\_\_\_. It was a very helpful and informative interview. It certainly allowed us to gain a clearer perspective regarding your many gifts as a Lutheran pastor and we thank you for that. (make reference to some of those gifts)

After careful and prayerful discernment, it is our conclusion to release you from further consideration. I hope you will not interpret this decision as a personal reflection on your skills as a pastor. It is intended to be a reflection of our assessment of the current leadership needs of this congregation and our effort to find the person who best meets those criteria.

If you have questions or concerns about the interview, I would be happy to discuss them with you. You may contact me at \_\_\_\_\_

I wish God's richest blessings on your continued ministry.

Sincerely yours,

Your Name

Cc: The Rev. Shelley Wickstrom, Bishop

**Call Meeting**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Church \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

Chairperson \_\_\_\_\_

Total in Attendance \_\_\_\_\_ Quorum Needed \_\_\_\_\_ 2/3 Vote is \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary \_\_\_\_\_

Dates of notices of meeting:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

\*Position title for clergy being called \_\_\_\_\_

Pastors Presented	Ballot Number							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Totals								

\*As needed associated statements for associate pastor such as coterminous clause or the words “serve with” or “serve under.”

**Implementation Evaluation**

1. Did the Call Committee find the process that was used helpful? Why or why not?
2. Did the congregation find the process that was used helpful? Why or why not?
3. What parts of the Call Process worked well?
4. What parts of the process didn't work so well?
5. Were there unexpected problems? If so, how could they be avoided next time?
6. What parts of the process produced frustration, confusion, mistakes, etc.?
7. What did you find helpful about the role played by Synod staff?
8. What didn't you find helpful about the role played by Synod staff?