

CALL PROCESS FOR CALLING A PASTOR

LA CROSSE AREA SYNOD, ELCA

The synod's goal is to help your congregation transition healthily from one called pastor to the next, by means of these steps:

- I. **Schedule a Meeting for the Bishop to Meet your Council and Congregation.** This should be done **before** discussion of forming the call committee. Both meetings should be the same evening (or afternoon), but the meeting for the congregation should be first (with the council in attendance). The Council stays after the congregation leaves for more detailed information and dialogue with the Bishop.
- II. **Call Committee** - Your church council reads and follows your congregation's constitution concerning the calling of a pastor and the naming of a call committee. The call committee is formed after the pastor's farewell and departure.

An interim pastor or Assistant to the Bishop will help guide the congregation into the call process, including guidance on when the call committee should be formed. In some congregations, it is appropriate to first establish a transition team and later form a Call Committee.

- A. In most congregations, the call committee is a group outside the council but representative of the membership of the congregation. It is wise to include one council member (not an officer) to serve as a liaison member of the call committee.
- B. After the call committee is formed the first meeting should be with Pr. Dione Stepanek, the Assistant to the Bishop, to discuss the call process. **To schedule this meeting** contact Pr. Dione at pastordione@lacrosseareasynod.org or call 608-461-2995
- C. The Chairperson is elected. (This may be done before meeting with the Assistant to the Bishop or during that first meeting)
 1. When calling a **solo** or **senior** pastor, the call committee elects a chairperson who shall be responsible for all communication with the bishop and the synod office and chairs all call committee meetings.
 2. When calling an **associate** pastor, the senior pastor may serve as the chairperson and be responsible for all communication with the bishop including submitting the job description for the associate position. If the senior pastor serves as the chairperson, the call committee elects a vice-chairperson to conduct the call committee meetings.

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- D. A recorder/secretary is elected by the call committee. This person:
1. communicates with the congregation through weekly or monthly notices
 2. writes prayer petitions for Sunday worship concerning the calling of a pastor.
 3. is responsible for all letters informing candidates of their acceptance or release and all other correspondence.
 4. returns Report of Interviews to the synod office.
 5. responsible for having and seeing that the call letter of the congregation(s) is on hand and signed by the congregational president(s) and secretary(s)

E. When calling a senior pastor, an associate pastor already serving in the congregation does not normally participate in the call process. However, the associate pastor should have a one-on-one conversation with the prospective senior pastor for at least an hour. Be sure to allow time in the day of the interview for this.

F. Prior to calling a pastor, the council and the call committee should review the synod constitution (Ivory) and their own congregation constitution regarding ordained ministers.

III. The call committee working with the church council begins completing the Ministry Site Profile (Sample - white)

- A. The Ministry Site Profile (MSP) (Sample - white) is filled out on the ELCA website - <http://www.elca.org/Call-Process/Ministry-Sites>. For help in filling out the profile see the lavender section – Getting Started & White page sample
- provides a means for telling the congregations story accurately to prospective pastors
 - gives the call committee information to compose helpful interview questions
 - helps the bishop's office to recruit strong pastors to interview for your congregation
 - The importance of this Profile cannot be overemphasized.
- B. The council officially approves the contents of the completed profile at a council meeting. The bishop may review your profile and make suggestions for improvement.
- C. The call committee will use information from this Profile to help prepare "structured" interview questions (please read *Interviewing a Pastor*, gold section).
- D. This portion of the process will take the longest time.

IV. The Bishop Nominates Candidates for Interview

- A. The synod office will make every effort to provide well suited nominees as quickly as possible after receiving the congregational mission profile; normally this may take a month or more. The Bishop and/or Assistant to the Bishop will nominate candidates willing to be interviewed, who match the leadership profile and are within an acceptable salary range. **These names must be kept confidential by the members of the call committee. (Please do not share names even with your spouse.)**

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- B. The call committee makes arrangements to interview each candidate.
 - 1. The synod office will send the Ministry Site Profile and all the material gathered about your congregation and community to the candidate.
 - 2. Read the pastor's own profile and the constitutional expectations for pastors in Exhibit A carefully.
 - 3. Do all the things necessary to be a good host. On the day of the interview, give candidates a tour of your ministry setting and your community (Please read *Interviewing a Pastor*(Yellow A).
 - 4. The congregation is expected to bear all the expenses of the candidates who come for interviews including their mileage at the most recent IRS rate. Please pay the expenses promptly!
- C. Interview all the candidates before evaluating them. Try to keep your questions the same for each interview. Please return *Report of Interview* (gray or tan section) to the synod office following each interview.
- D. You may ask for an audio or video recording of a sermon to assess the candidate's preaching style. Do not go online to search for such recording yourselves until after an initial interview, but it is still best to ask the pastor to submit a sermon of their choosing. Please do not visit a candidate's church until you have chosen a single candidate as your one lead candidate.
- E. All phone calls, emails or correspondence to candidates or with the synod office should be through the chair of the call committee.
- F. Ask candidates to inform you immediately if they want to drop out of the process. Request they do so before you meet with the council to make your recommendation. Have a date in mind to give them.

V. The Call Committee Recommends a Candidate to the Council

- A. The chair requests the candidate's permission to release their name to your congregation council. Give that candidate the schedule for the congregational action.
- B. The call committee has a background check done on the candidate of choice. The background check may be done through the synod or the call committee may have an equivalent background check done. If completed through the synod, the congregation will receive an invoice ranging from \$20-\$50 for the report. A check for this invoice should be written out to the La Crosse Area Synod with Background Check listed in the memo. Background check applications can be found on the synod website at www.LaCrosseAreaSynod.org

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- C. The call committee keeps the names of the other candidates confidential, thanking them and informing them they will not be recommended, and releasing them to consider another call. Please put your message in a positive vein ("You are a good pastor, with good skills, etc. but one of the other candidates met our needs more closely.") A sample letter is included in the information from the Bishop (please read *Interviewing a Pastor* (Yellow A)).
- D. The call committee meets with the congregation council to recommend that candidate. Please have the council president contact the bishop's office to schedule the bishop to meet with the council following the council's meeting with the call committee. If the council accepts the recommendation of the call committee, the council continues to meet (now with the Bishop) in order to adopt a salary and benefit package for the terms of the call (please read *the Minimum Guidelines for Compensation, Benefit, and Expenses* (yellow B or pink) adopted by the most recent synod assembly). The Bishop will bring the completed Letter of Call (yellow C) (without signatures) to the meeting.
- E. If the council rejects the candidate, the call committee starts the process over again beginning with step number IV.

VI. The Council Recommends the Candidate to the Congregation

- A. Following the council approval, the council recommends the candidate to the congregation for call, looking to the call committee for help in presenting the candidate's name
- B. The council sets a date for the special congregational meeting to call this pastor, according to the provisions in your congregation's constitution or bylaws.
- C. The council with the secretary of the call committee arranges for completing the *Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities of the Pastor* (green sheet).

VII. The Congregation Votes to Extend a Call

- A. The vote shall be done by written ballot.
- B. If the congregation rejects the candidate, the call committee starts the process over again beginning with step number IV.
- C. If the congregation accepts the candidate, the congregational president and secretary sign the *Letter of Call* and "Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities of the Pastor" (green sheet), and mails them to the synod office.
- D. The bishop signs and attests the *Letter of Call* and mails it with the *Definition of Compensation, Benefits and Responsibilities of the Pastor* to the candidate

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VIII. The Candidate Accepts the Call

- A. The candidate replies within two weeks of the date of the congregational vote unless special arrangements are made.
- B. If the call is refused, the call committee starts the process over again beginning with step number IV.
- C. If the call is accepted, the pastor signs *the Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities of the Pastor* (green) and mails it back to the synod office.
- D. The council president and/or the new pastor calls the bishop's office to schedule the installation and the welcome events (see *Installation Guidelines*). The call committee should have a part in that installation service.