# Interviewing a Pastor

One of the most interesting and exciting parts of the call process is meeting and interviewing a candidate for call. Once the bishop has submitted the name of a candidate, invite the candidate to come to your community for an interview with the Call Committee. It usually saves time to make these arrangements by telephone.

## I. Preparing for the Interview

Before any interviews are held, gather the Call Committee together to:

- Prepare interview questions based on the pastor's profile and synod constitution (Exhibit A)
- Determine length of time for all interviews

Send the following information to each candidate prior to the interview:

- Annual report
- Recent bulletins
- Newsletter
- Constitution
- Mission Statement
- Community information such as schools, parks, local newspaper, cultural opportunities, recreational opportunities, newspapers
- Other information you consider pertinent to your situation
- A copy of the Congregational Profile

Consistency is most important. For each candidate, the same questions should be asked, the same time should be allowed, the same person should chair the interviews and the circumstances of the interview should be the same.

Members of the Call Committee should meet together for a few minutes prior to each interview to review the procedure for the formal interview.

## II. The Interview

A. Getting Acquainted. This may include a tour (community, church, parsonage), plus a meal and other fellowship time. It is recommended to include the spouse in this part only.

B. Devotions These should be conducted by a member of the Call Committee.

C. Warm-up. As you gather for the formal interview you may want to start with introductions. This is your opportunity to get to know the individual as a person. Suggest that the candidate briefly tell something about him/herself, asking such questions as:

- Tell us about yourself
- Tell us a bit about your ministry

D. Selected Questions. This is the formal part of the interview where you will ask your pre-selected questions. Again, remember that it is important to ask the same questions of each candidate. (Possible questions and notes on asking and listening skills are attached.)

E. Follow-up Questions. These are appropriate after each question to clarify what has been heard. Following the final questions, Call Committee members may have the opportunity to ask questions that pick up on and go beyond information already shared, but do make sure that the candidate also has time to ask their questions as well. The chair takes responsibility for regulating time for each section of the interview, making sure each member of the committee has an opportunity to speak.

F. Candidate's Questions and Response. Allow the candidate to tell the committee further information or ask questions.

G. For Congregations Calling an Associate Pastor. Schedule a significant amount of time (around an hour) for the candidate to meet with the Senior Pastor before and/or after the interview.

### III. Conclusion of Interview

When the interview is completed, thank the candidate for coming and make arrangements for the payment of expenses related to the interview (travel, meals, lodging). Let the candidate know that you will keep him/her informed of your progress until a decision has been reached. Doing this says a great deal about you and your congregation. It is crucial to notify candidates immediately when they are no longer being considered by your committee. (A sample letter is attached.)

### IV. Helps

A. The Art of Listening. Two of the most crucial interviewing skills are the ability to ask the appropriate questions and the art of listening. Listening is more than just hearing words. A young student in a music appreciation class, when asked to distinguish between listening and hearing, replied, "Listening is wanting to hear."

To be a good listener, the following items are important:

1. *Interest.* Consider the person as a vital candidate for your parish who has invested time and effort to be with you.
2. *Patience.* Give the person time to give thoughtful answers.
3. *Linking.* Build the interview on what the applicant has already said, asking questions that pick up on and lead beyond information that has already been shared in the interview. Probing indicates to the person that you are listening and also eliminates the distracting necessity of trying to think up the next question.

4. *Alertness.* Listen for key words and phrases to be sure they are understood. 5. *Concentration.* Listen for main ideas, not just facts and figures. Ask yourself, "What is the person telling me?"

5. *Clarify Questions.* Ask clarifying questions to make certain that you are really understanding what the person is saying. If something isn't clear, by all means ask that it be clarified. This does not reflect ignorance or inability on your part. Instead, it demonstrates that you are truly interested and are trying to understand what the person is attempting to communicate. 7. *Deliberation.* Withhold evaluation and decision until the interview is completed. Hear the person out before deciding.

B. Asking Questions. The delightful children's book, "The Little Prince," is a deceptively simple but profound story which reflects a child's view of the adult world. It includes the little prince's observation concerning the subject of interviewing. He says, "Grown-ups love figures. When you tell them you have made a new friend, they never ask any questions about essential matters. They never say to you, 'What does his voice sound like? What games does he love best? Does he collect butterflies?' Instead they demand, 'How old is he? How many brothers has he? How much does he weigh? How much does his father make?' Only from these figures do they think they have learned anything about him."

It is astounding how the questions we ask and how we ask them affects what we find out about an individual. Consider, for example, the difference in the information you are apt to obtain by these two sets of questions:

*Set 1:* How old are you? Are you married? How many children do you have? What ages are they? What previous positions have you held?

*Set 2:* Tell us about your family. What do you most enjoy doing? What are your personal and work goals that would be important in considering a call to another parish? Describe what you would consider to be your most enjoyable kind of ministry and tell us why.

The first set of questions is closed and limits the information you receive. An information sheet on the candidate may include much of that statistical data and could be shared before the interview with the Call Committee. The second set of questions is open-ended so you receive better information..

C. Composing Questions: Prepare about ten questions you wish to ask each candidate. You may use these questions as a guide for preparing the questions. Write questions appropriate to your own situation. It is suggested that the Call Committee meet privately to review the interview procedure and the questions to be asked before inviting the candidate into the room for the interview.

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1. Tell us about your theology and how that gives direction to your ministry.
2. What are your goals in ministry?
3. Tell us an example of a time when you clearly saw God active in your life and ministry?
4. What areas of ministry have you found frustrating and/or difficult?
5. What are some dreams that you have as a parish pastor? What pisces of ministry bring you joy?
6. Tell us about your call to be a pastor.
7. What do you think a sermon should do?
8. What do you believe it mean to be a good pastor in our world today?
9. Share a specific story that has shaped your life and faith.
10. How would you describe your style of leadership?
11. How do you view your ministry as related to singles, senior citizens, men's groups, young children, and youth?
12. What is your understanding of worship in the life of the congregation? How important is the sermon? Baptism? Holy Communion?
13. What do you understand to be the purpose of worship and how are others involved in it?
14. What do you see as a pastor's role in pastoral care and what is your approach to pastoral care?
15. How do you emphasize mission? And further, what do you understand to be the mission of God?
16. What role do you like to take in the education programs of the congregation, Sunday School? Vacation Bible School? Confirmation? Adult Education? Church Women? Youth? - knowing that they may be different in different settings.
17. How do you understand evangelism and how would you help us implement it during your ministry?
18. What is your approach to stewardship? What is its function and how do you talk about it?
19. Considering today's world and our North American culture, what do you think the church is called to say and do? Is there anything special that we as Lutherans ought to be saying and doing?
20. What would you hope that the church's involvement in the community would look like and how do you see yourself involved in the community?
21. What do you do for growth in your spiritual and devotional life?
22. What kind of continuing educational opportunities have you found most meaningful and why?
23. Give an example of a time where you were in conflict and how did you handle it?

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D. Role of the Candidates' Family. If the pastor is married, the Call Committee should remember that they are interviewing and calling the pastor and not the spouse. Therefore, normally the spouse would not be present during the interview. Please invite the spouse to join in all other parts of the visit such as a tour of the community, tour of the church buildings and parsonage, meals, etc. The committee should see if children will be coming. If so, be sure that proper child care is available. Please be consistent.

E. Terms of the Call. Salary and benefits are not discussed at the interview. Once the Call Committee has recommended a candidate to the congregation's council, the bishop will discuss terms of the call with the council prior to the congregational call meeting. Synod salary guidelines, passed by the Synod Assembly, have been worked out carefully to consider the experience and training of the pastor as well as the ministry demand of the parish.

F. Checklist.

- Phone candidates to arrange interview.
- Send information packet to candidates.
- Prepare interview questions.
- Make arrangements for meals, tours, and overnight accommodations, if necessary.
- Send thank you letters and expense checks after the interview.
- Be hospitable. Designate someone to greet and welcome the candidate and host them until the Call Committee is ready to begin the interview.
- Complete Call Committee Report of Interview form and return to synod office.
- Immediately notify the candidates who are no longer being considered. A sample letter has been provided for your use. Also, a copy of the release letter should be sent to the synod office.

Sample Release Letter

*Dear Pastor :*

*On behalf of the Lutheran Church, I wish to thank you for interviewing with us. During this time of decision we are pleased that we had the opportunity to meet strong candidates with many talents.*

*After much deliberation and prayer, the Call Committee has made the decision to no longer consider you for a call.*

*We appreciate your interest in our congregation and wish you continued success in ;your ministry.*

*Sincerely,*

*Chairperson of Call Committee*
*cc: Bishop Felix Malpica, La Crosse Area Synod – ELCA*