

Policy for Calling Pastors to Congregations in Northwest Washington Synod

*Adopted by 2003 Northwest Washington Synod Assembly
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Introduction

This policy for calling pastors grows out of our Lutheran understanding of the call to specific ministries. We believe that the call is the integration of three elements: personal, community/congregational, and catholic. In other words, we believe the call involves a person's own discernment of call to the ministry involved, the discernment of the community or congregation extending a call to a specific ministry, and the affirmation of the church catholic with whom we work as partners in the specificity of time and place.

Because the call to a specific pastoral ministry is a call into a relationship of service to the gospel, the call process works best when congregations and pastors are centered on the gospel and its proclamation in the time and place of ministry. The call process, then, is the culmination of a the work during a transition period through which the congregation has identified its ministry, gifts, and vision and now focuses on the selection of a pastor who will be with the congregation as it goes about the ministry to which it is called.

It is recommended that all ELCA rostered pastors consider themselves "open to call" and that they keep their mobility forms current in the Bishop's office. The names of pastors to be presented to a congregation may come to the attention of the Bishop by means such as self nomination, nomination by members of the calling body, recommendations of other Synod Bishops, and the data base of pastors available for call throughout the ELCA. When the Bishop contacts a pastor about a particular call, a time of discernment begins for that pastor. A willingness to participate in a call process should be seen as a willingness of the pastor to prayerfully discern God's call to ministry, just as it is a time of a congregation's discernment of its ministry. It should not be assumed that a pastor engaging the process is seeking to move, only to discern God's call to ministry.

A pastoral vacancy in a congregation affords that congregation also a period of discernment, a time for reflection and prayer on its mission and ministry. This period has been identified as a time of opportunity as well as challenge. Therefore the specific task of calling a pastor is but one part of the transition period between called pastors. The Congregation Council should intentionally provide leadership to the congregation during this transition period, encouraging strong bonds of unity and trust in God, and exercising sensitive care for all the people of the congregation. This important time of transition is a time of self-discovery, decision making, and looking ahead. The Bishop, as the official pastor of a congregation without a called pastor, will support the congregation in transition and normally will appoint an Interim Pastor to more effectively carry out this responsibility.

The following policy maintains the integrity of interdependence within the body of the church, that any action of one of its entities affects other entities. Variations of process and procedures used by congregations/communities in the selection of pastors, then, must be consistent with these policies. It is the Holy Spirit that "calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies and keeps us united in faith." So it is expected that every step of the vacancy period and call process be surrounded by prayer.

Definition of Terms

Call Process: refers to the standard procedures which result in calling a pastor for a congregation or specialized ministry in the NW Washington Synod, ELCA.

Call Committee: refers to the group of people chosen from the active membership of the congregation who are charged with the task of recommending a pastor to a particular position.

Congregation Council: refers to the governing body of the congregation and/or to the governing body of organizations which engage pastors in specialized ministry.

Congregation: refers to the group of people that are formally united with the church or specialized ministry organization according to its constitution and bylaws.

Nominee: refers to a rostered person who has been presented to a congregation for a call to a specific ministry.

Bishop: refers to the Bishop of the NW Washington Synod, ELCA or the Bishop's designee.

Mission Site Profile (MSP): refers to the document form of the ELCA in which the congregation describes its mission and ministry.

Interview: normally refers to the face to face meeting of a nominee and a call committee but may include an initial meeting through video conferencing.

Vacancy: refers to the circumstance of a congregation in which a particular position has been identified but is being not filled by a called pastor.

Transition Period: refers to the period of pastoral vacancy and suggests a series of activities, tasks, and processes to be carried out by the congregation to help them adjust to new circumstances and envision their future. One of these tasks is the calling of a new pastor.

Pastor: refers to an ordained minister as defined by chapter 7.22 of the ELCA constitution.

Procedures of the Call Process

- 1) The departing pastor and the congregation shall notify the Bishop in writing when that pastor's office becomes vacant.
 - a) The Bishop shall declare a congregation vacant and shall meet with the Congregation Council to offer guidance and direction during the absence of a called pastor.
 - b) The Bishop shall clarify who is responsible for pastoral duties during the vacancy and normally will appoint an Interim Pastor to serve the pastoral needs of the congregation during that period.
 - c) When the congregation affirms the Bishop's appointment, it engages in an Interim Ministry Contract with its selected Interim Pastor. The Synod Council then affirms the selection by issuing a Letter of Call.
 - d) The Congregation Council and the Bishop shall provide an opportunity for an exit interview with the departing pastor.
 - e) The congregation may establish a separately identified Transition Team from among its members to work with the Congregation Council to guide and direct the study of vision, ministry and pastoral needs in preparation of the MSP.

- 2) The congregation shall elect a Call Committee according to the procedures in its constitution.
 - a) The Call Committee shall develop and/or refine the Congregation Profile that reflects the congregation's vision, ministry, and pastoral needs.
 - b) The Call Committee shall implement the Call Process according to the standards of this policy.

- 3) The Bishop shall nominate all nominees to the Call Committee after review of the MSP.
 - a) The Interim Pastor serving a congregation shall not be available for call to that congregation for that position.
 - b) When the congregation is calling an associate pastor(s), the lead pastor shall have a voice in the selection of nominees.
 - c) In consultation with the Bishop, the Call Committee shall decide the level of confidentiality in the process and nominees will be informed of that prior to their names being submitted to the Call Committee.
 - d) A nominee may interview in more than one congregation at a time but may consider only one call at a time. The Bishop shall inform the Call Committee of other interviews of which he/she is aware at the time the Bishop presents the names. If a nominee has been selected by the Call Committee for congregational vote and chooses to continue in that process, the nominee must withdraw from all other processes.
 - e) Nominees shall inform the Bishop of involvement in all career/job search activities and shall keep the Bishop informed of the status of their interviews.
 - f) The Bishop shall make available a copy of the current synod call policy to all nominees when their names are presented to a congregation.

- 4) The Call Committee shall interview each nominee, and may not, without the Bishop's approval, terminate the process with a nominee without an interview. Call Committees may request from one (1) to five (5) nominees from the Bishop to be considered on one slate.
 - a) Seminary graduates who are being considered as nominees for their first call may be considered alone, as a slate of one.
 - b) Call Committees shall interview all nominees within a 30 day period. When this is not possible because of scheduling, the nominees and the Bishop shall be kept informed of the revised schedule of interviews. All interviews shall be completed within 45 days.
 - c) Except in rare circumstances the format for interviewing is consistent with all nominees.
 - d) It is recommended that the initial interview with each candidate being considered by a call committee be done by video conferencing.
 - e) A nominee may withdraw from a process by contacting the Call Committee and the Bishop.

- 5) Should the Call Committee at any point after the initial interview decide not to proceed with a nominee, the Committee shall first inform the nominee and then the Bishop of his/her release.
 - a) The Call Committee may release all of the nominees it has interviewed. After consulting with the Bishop, the Committee may request an additional slate of nominees. The same process for interviewing and selecting shall be followed.
 - b) The Call Committee may request a nominee it has previously interviewed only when all other nominees have been released. The Call Committee shall inform the Bishop at the time the names are released that they may want to consider a nominee again if the call they are recommending is not completed. If the nominee is still available and willing to be considered again, the Bishop shall bring that nominee alone to the Call Committee for consideration.

6) The Call Committee shall make a decision recommending one nominee to the congregation and shall inform that nominee. At the same time, the Call Committee shall also inform the other nominees that their names are being released. The Call Committee shall discuss with the selected nominee and come to agreement upon a compensation package before the nominee is presented to the congregation for a vote to call.

a) The Bishop shall provide the Synod Compensation Guidelines to the congregation for reference and instruction.

b) All expenses incurred by the nominee for the purpose of interview(s) shall be reimbursed by the interviewing congregation.

c) All expenses related to the move of the called pastor shall be the responsibility of the calling congregation.

7) The Congregation Council shall set a date for a congregational meeting to vote on the selection of the nominee and the compensation package according to the congregation's constitution, normally within 30 days.

a) The nominee selection and the compensation package shall be presented separately to the congregation.

b) The Bishop shall be informed of the date and time of the call meeting so that he/she may be represented at said meeting as required by the Synod constitution.

c) The vote to call a pastor shall be by two thirds (2/3) majority of eligible voters present and voting unless in consultation with the bishop a larger percentage is required.

8) The president and secretary of the congregation shall prepare the Letter of Call and forward it to the Bishop for signature and attestation. The Bishop shall forward the Letter of Call to the nominee who will sign and return it accepting or declining the call, normally within 30 days.

a) An accepted call shall constitute a continuing mutual relationship between the congregation and pastor and shall be terminated only as provided for in S14.13 of the synod constitution.

b) In some cases a call may be issued which is co-terminus with a particular event. In such cases the circumstances of termination shall be agreed upon before the Letter of Call is attested.

9) A service of installation shall be the responsibility of the congregation in consultation with the Bishop.

a) The Call Committee continues to aid in the pastoral transition until the installation service.

b) The Call Committee may meet with the Bishop at the conclusion of the Call Process to evaluate the process for the sake of the congregation, the Bishop's office, and the nominees.

10) This policy shall be reviewed by the Synod Council at least annually and shall be published with the Synod Compensation Guidelines with any modifications approved by the Synod Council.