

CHAPTER 1: THE SPIRITUAL WORK

The Biblical/Theological Grounding for the call process

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

Introduction

The time of calling a pastor can be 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 provide 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, Theological Reflection,***

These are tools that will help you as you move through the call process. With these tools a congregation learns not only the mechanics of the call process but also the spiritual nature of what is happening. There are suggested resource materials in this section of the manual.

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.

Where: In church during ***worship***, during ***meetings***, in ***bulletins***, as part of ***announcements***, in ***newsletters*** there should be regular communication of the call process and 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 to always be in prayer. During this process the prayer is focused 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 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 Martin Luther and other reformers in the city of Augsburg (Germany) in 1530. These short, 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 regular call." 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 specially called to the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament.

(Article XIV, The Augsburg Confession)

THE CALL TO MINISTRY

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

In a similar way, it is through the church that 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.

This is shown in the fact that once a person is approved for ordination, the candidate must 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 all the church there is. 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 process. But so does the Bishop, who represents both the interest and the commitment of the whole church in seeing that the pastor called is suited to ministry under the call that is extended.

The Bishop has a deep concern for the well being of the congregation's life and ministry. The Bishop also has a deep concern for the person and gifts of the prospective pastor. In the call process the Bishop, 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.

WHAT IS A "CALL"?

On the basis of 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. A call is one element in the church's seeking and following God's movement into the future.

The call process is not a pageant, in which contestants present themselves to their best advantage so they will be the winners.

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

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. 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

LEADER: Open with Prayer:

(Suggestion: *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. One person reads the lesson:

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

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.

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.

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.

Matthew 28: 16-20

The Call of Matthew: Matthew 9:9-13

Call of the first Disciples: Luke 5: 1-11

Romans 12: 1-8 (9-21)

I Corinthians 3:1-9

Ephesians 6: 10-18

Philippians 2: 1-11

I Timothy 2: Instructions concerning Prayer

3: 1-7 Qualifications of Bishops

3: 8-13 Qualifications of Deacons

4: 6-16 a Good Minister of Jesus Christ

Reflections on God's Call:

Call of young people:

Samuel : I 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, Mk: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..