

Chapter 6: Forming the Call Committee

Why -- When -- Who -- How -- Basics -- Authority and Charge -- Synod staff

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. The calling of 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, 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 not appropriate for a Call Committee to be guided chiefly by such questions as these: 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?

The foremost question for the Call Committee always is whether this is the person God requires this congregation to have as its pastor. Human preferences and personalities never come before the mission to which God calls his 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. And it let them participate in opening a new chapter in the life and ministry of their church as part of the history-long, worldwide Church of Jesus Christ.

When Should the Call Committee be Formed?

There are differing opinions over when the Call Committee should be formed. One view is 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.

It is recommended, however, that the Congregation Council, not the Call Committee be responsible for guiding the congregation as it develops the profiles. Consistent with this recommendation, the Call Committee would be formed after the congregation has defined its ministry, its mission, and its staffing needs. 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. 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 Exploration Team on the Call Committee, including one member (non-voting) from outside 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, travel arrangements, 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 who have been 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 of 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 this committee, its work and its 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.

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 and the MET Report are 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 not matters that are to be negotiated between the candidate and Call Committee. The Call Committee, for example, does not have the authority to commit the congregation to a dollar figure or an extra week of vacation or educational leave.

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 come to interview, or for travel by the committee to hear a candidate preach at some other location.

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 vacancy. 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 Staff** will serve as a valuable partner and resource during the Call Process. A Synod staff person will be assigned to work with the Call Committee. The staff person will work with the Call Committee in providing the names of candidates to be interviewed by the Committee. The Synod will provide the following support to the Call Committee:
 - 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 times 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 Synod staff'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 moments or issues that are difficult and potentially derailing or conflicting;
- Reminding the Committee about its goals and tasks and the process most helpful in fulfilling them (e.g. communication, scheduling, deadlines);
- Attending the meeting in which names of candidates are presented.
- Coaching the Committee as required to assist the Committee in fulfilling its calling, (e.g. interviews, presenting a candidate to the congregation, the congregation meeting, etc.); and
- Providing liaison between the Synod, the Bishop, the Call Committee and the congregation