



**SAINT PAUL AREA SYNOD**  
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

# Call Process Manual

January 2018

[www.spas-elca.org](http://www.spas-elca.org)

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Dear Friends in Christ,

I am grateful to present this newly revised call process manual to you. It reflects the work and wisdom of several colleagues on the synod staff, and feedback from dozens of call committee members, interim pastors and other church leaders who have been part of the call process in the Saint Paul Area Synod in recent months.

The call manual is divided into four sections to correspond with the four phases of transition. They include:

- I. Leave Taking
- II. Ministry Site Exploration
- III. Calling the New Pastor
- IV. Beginning New Ministry

Each section is designed for a slightly different audience. Whether you are a pastor wondering about a new call in this synod, the president of a congregation going through a transition, a newly named member of a call committee, or an interim pastor, I hope you will find the process we describe to be clear and easy to understand.

One of the deep joys of our Lutheran way of being church comes as members of the congregation play a decisive role in the Spirit's work of calling a pastor to serve in a specific context. Synod staff is available throughout the time of transition to support this work, the bishop attests to the fidelity of the process, but the congregation is the body that prays and listens and finally votes to extend the call to the candidate the Spirit has led into this new call. Nearly thirty times each year, I marvel as all these steps come together for the sake of God's work in and beyond our congregations.

At the synod office we pray weekly for congregations in the midst of transition. My prayer is that you will grow in your own faith and be strengthened for service during this time.

Yours in God's service,

Bishop Patricia Lull  
January, 2018

	Phase I <b>Leave-Taking</b> <i>Pastor announces s/he is leaving</i>	Phase II <b>Ministry Site Exploration</b> <i>Pastor leaves; interim pastor begins; preparatory work; Mission Exploration Team (MET) develops Ministry Site Profile (MSP)</i>	Phase III <b>Calling the New Pastor</b> <i>MSP completed; call committee works to identify and recommend a new pastor</i>	Phase IV <b>Beginning New Ministry</b> <i>Call issued; new pastor is welcomed</i>
<b>Time Frame</b>	1-3 months	3-12 months	2-4 months	6-9 months
<b>Pastoral Coverage</b>	Pastor's final weeks; supply pastor as a bridge to the interim if needed.	Interim pastor; the interim assists in the development of the MSP.	Interim pastor is not involved in the call process	Interim pastor; supply pastor as a bridge to new pastor if needed; new pastor.
<b>Council</b>	Plans farewell for current pastor. Meets with synod staff contact for exit interview, to secure interim, to begin call process. Arranges for pastoral coverage before interim begins; develops communication strategy.	Introduces interim ministry to the congregation (blessing). Selects the Mission Exploration Team (MET). Sets directions for the MSP process. Sees that the ministry of the congregation continues. Maintains contact with synod staff person. For co-pastor or associate calls, writes job description. Schedules town hall meeting to receive MSP report in consultation with the synod staff.	Appoints (or nominates) call committee. Receives report of call committee. Sets dates for vote. Conducts background check. Works with candidate on compensation package. Maintains the ministry of the congregation.	Participates in congregational meeting to consider call. Plans farewell for interim pastor. Prepares welcome for new pastor. Works with synod staff and new pastor to set installation date. Cooperates with synod "six-month" check-in.
<b>Congregation</b>	Participates in the farewell for the current pastor.	Maintains the ongoing ministry. Participates as invited in the development of the Mission Exploration Process (MEP) and development of the MSP. Meets at Town Hall to hear and affirm MSP as basis for call.	Prays for call committee. Makes nominations within set timeframe. Meets to vote on call committee recommendation for pastor.	Says farewell to interim pastor. Welcomes new pastor.
<b>MET (or other designated group)</b>	Usually not yet formed. (In some cases, following consultation with synod staff, starts to develop the background information for MSP.)	Works with interim pastor and/or meets with synod staff to define tasks. Develop the MSP which provides descriptions of congregation's current life and dynamics, future mission challenges and goals, qualities sought in new pastor. Writes a final report to present to council (who reviews and adds compensation package) and congregation. Presents report to congregation at Town Hall.	Reports to council. Some members may be asked to serve on call committee.	Finished.
<b>Call Committee</b>	Not yet formed.	As MSP nears completion, committee is formed according to constitution. Meets to review MSP.	Determine process for interviewing candidates. Receives names, interviews candidates, hears sermons and checks references. Recommends candidate.	Assists in welcome of new pastor.
<b>Synod Staff</b>	Conducts exit interview with current pastor and council to determine interim needs. Contacts possible interims and provides interim covenant form.	Consults on development of MSP. Works with and support interim through monthly reports and interim cohort meetings. Participates in town hall meeting, if available.	Reviews MSP with call committee. Meets to orient committee to call process. Brings names to committee. Provides synod guidelines and consults as needed on compensation.	Synod representative (bishop or staff) installs new pastor. Bishop does all ordinations. Synod staff returns in 6-9 months for checkin.

## **Checklist for Lead/Solo Pastor Call Process**

### **PHASE I: LEAVE-TAKING**

- \_\_\_ Having coordinated with the bishop, the pastor informs council president. Together they plan for giving notice to Church Council, Staff and Congregation
- \_\_\_ In consultation with synod staff, the council president and/or council as a whole reviews the overall transition process
- \_\_\_ Exit interview is scheduled and held with pastor and leadership group, led by synod staff to candidly review ministry; interim needs are discussed after pastor is excused
- \_\_\_ Discuss the expectations for Future Pastoral Acts of Former Pastors (see page 9) with leadership; a letter is sent to the congregation making these expectations clear
- \_\_\_ Synod staff identifies potential interim pastors and the council-designated team interviews (with candid discussion of known issues) and recommends selection
- \_\_\_ Council-designated team negotiates terms of covenant with the interim pastor, including starting date and seeks council approval
- \_\_\_ Pastor certifies to bishop that congregational records are up to date
- \_\_\_ Pastor and council president/secretary certify to bishop that all financial obligations (both of pastor to congregation and of congregation to pastor) are fulfilled
- \_\_\_ Council plans and holds farewell celebration for departing pastor
- \_\_\_ Interim pastor arrives, is welcomed and oriented, and determines needs/issues to be addressed before or during a call process, and sets schedule for moving forward

### **PHASE II: MISSION EXPLORATION PROCESS**

- \_\_\_ Mission Exploration Team (MET) is formed and briefed on tasks
- \_\_\_ MET explores vision & ministry needs of the congregation
- \_\_\_ MET with assistance of interim pastor, council and synod staff develops online Ministry Site Profile (MSP) including gifts/skills needed in a pastoral leader
- \_\_\_ Call Committee is formed (as per congregation's constitution)
- \_\_\_ Congregation holds a town hall meeting to review and comment on MSP profile
- \_\_\_ MSP is reviewed by synod staff approved by council, and posted on ELCA site.

### **PHASE III: CALLING THE NEW PASTOR**

- \_\_\_ Synod staff orients call committee
- \_\_\_ Call committee invites/solicits pastor candidate nominations from the congregation
- \_\_\_ Call Committee prepares candidate packets (including MSP) and interview questions
- \_\_\_ Call Committee meets with synod staff to receive candidate names
- \_\_\_ Call Committee does 1st and 2nd round of interviews, gathers other information (including sermon, reference & background checks) & discerns final candidate
- \_\_\_ Call Committee presents recommendation to congregation council
- \_\_\_ President/Congregation Council does background check and sets the date for the congregational meeting
- \_\_\_ The President/Congregation Council may see the Rostered Minister Profile (RMP) and may meet with the final candidate, while recognizing the decision belongs to the congregation.
- \_\_\_ Call Committee, Council and candidate agree to a proposed compensation package
- \_\_\_ Where appropriate, candidate meets with staff and/or interim pastor
- \_\_\_ A “meet and greet” reception with candidate may be held in advance of the congregational vote
- \_\_\_ Synod staff completes the state law-mandated inquiry with assistance of candidate under Minnesota statute 604.20 (“Sexual Exploitation Background Check”).
- \_\_\_ Congregation votes on candidate and, if necessary, on the compensation package
- \_\_\_ Council president/secretary prepares and signs the Letter of Call including completed *Definition of Compensation, Benefits and Responsibilities of the Pastor* form (Appendix L).

### **PHASE IV: WELCOMING THE ROSTERED LEADER**

- \_\_\_ New pastor arrives
- \_\_\_ Installation of the new pastor is planned, with consideration of availability of synod staff to perform Rite of Installation
- \_\_\_ “Meet and Greet” sessions are planned with the new pastor
- \_\_\_ Between six and nine months in, review occurs with pastor, leadership and synod staff.

## **PHASE I: LEAVE TAKING**

**The Current Pastor Resigns or Retires.** When the pastor resigns or retires, the primary concern for many congregations is to find a new pastor quickly. No one can guarantee how long the call process will take, and congregations are encouraged not to hurry the process of calling a new pastor. There is work to be done to lay a sound foundation for the next chapter in the congregation's life.

**News of a Transition.** When accepting a new call, a pastor will normally notify the congregational leadership first, then the congregation via a letter to all members. Usually, the final day for the pastor's service is about 30 days from the time of announcement, with any accrued vacation taken at the end of that time. The synod staff can assist the congregation's leaders and the pastor in setting the ending date, as well as details concerning salary and benefits.

**Exit Evaluation and Interview.** No one knows certain aspects of the congregation better than the pastor who is leaving. The exit interview provides a time to review the ministry of the departing pastor and for the congregational leadership to become more fully aware of dynamics that might affect the next pastorate, both positively and negatively. This is a conversation held in candor, gratitude, honesty, and charity. The Exit Evaluation Template shown below can be used for an exit interview between the Congregation Council (or a smaller group) the pastor and a member of the synod staff.

**Exit Interview Process.** Guidelines for the exit interview are:

- Confer with synod staff about the meeting
- Plan for a 90 minute meeting; 45 minutes with the pastor included, and 45 minutes after the pastor is excused
- Choose 6 to 11 people who have good knowledge of the pastor's ministry to participate. These could be council members or other leaders from the congregation
- Choose a comfortable site
- Begin with prayer and/or devotion
- Identify someone to take notes which can be shared with council, pastor, call committee (if helpful), synod staff, and candidates being considered for call
- Create a climate of honesty, candor, and mutual respect, and identify what information will be held confidential
- Rejoice in the ministry that has been completed and begin to anticipate the future ministry
- Be flexible enough with the structure of the meeting to allow for spontaneous discussion relevant to the specific context
- End the interview with a closing prayer.

### Sample Questions for Exit Interview

*While the pastor is present the following kinds of questions are asked*

- To the pastor:
  - Describe the reasons that moved you to resign this call
  - What would be one word or phrase you would use to describe this congregation?
  - What can this congregation do to help you and your family during your transition?
  
- To Council/Leaders:
  - What would be one word or phrase you would use to describe your pastor?
  
- To Both:
  - What have been some highlights of your ministry together?
  - Describe any low points or periods of conflict you have faced together? What went well? What might have been done differently?
  - Is there anything in your ministry together that you wish you had handled differently?
  - What has been your greatest learning during this time together?
  - What do you believe are the greatest challenges facing this congregation and its surrounding community as it moves into the future?
  - What specific ministry areas need to be addressed by the leadership and interim pastor during the upcoming period of transition?

*After the pastor is excused the following kinds of questions are asked*

- What has been our past experience with interim periods and interim pastors?
- What is our current budget for a pastor's salary, benefits and expenses? Has that budget changed over the past five years?
- What are the activities, issues and concerns that an interim will need to focus on?
- What special skills, aptitudes, attitudes and gifts do we feel are needed in an interim pastor?
- Who will be the point person(s) for working out an interim agreement?
- Any additional questions or comments

**Farewell celebration.** A congregation will want to plan a formal time to celebrate and give thanks for the years of ministry together. Often this takes place on the final weekend or the final Sunday. It is appropriate to invite the pastor's extended family and colleagues in ministry to be present for the celebration.

**Liturgy for Departure of a Pastor from a Congregation.** A liturgy of farewell ("Thanksgiving at the Conclusion of a Call") can be found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship Occasional Services for the Assembly*, p. 111. Synod staff can provide other resources if needed. It is important to offer prayers and words of blessing within the setting of worship even if other words of farewell are offered at a reception or dinner.

**Completion of Obligations.** The ELCA constitution indicates that a pastor is responsible for maintaining congregational records and fulfilling all financial obligations to the congregation before leaving a call. The forms for indicating that these are complete are:

1. “Certification of Completion of Found of Congregational Records”
2. “Certification of Completion of all Financial Obligations”

Both forms are provided in Appendix A and at <http://www.spas-elca.org/resources/for-leaders/mobility-call/>.

**Future Pastoral Acts of Former Pastors.** In the ELCA we have a very clear understanding of what a pastor may not do after leaving a call. This applies to both pastors who move to another call and pastors who retire. After leaving a call a pastor **may not:**

- Do funerals for persons from the former congregation
- Do weddings for persons from the former congregation whether in the church or another location
- Remain a member of the former congregation; the pastor’s spouse and minor age children also need to join a new congregation
- Interfere in the life, pastoral care or mission of the former congregation.

Once a new pastor has been called to the congregation, a former pastor may be invited by that new pastor to special celebrations within the congregation. The newly called pastor may also meet with the former pastor. The bishop can provide a letter to the congregation, at the council president’s request, outlining what a departing pastor may and may not do after leaving.

**Securing an Interim Pastor.** Following the exit interview and discussion of interim leadership needs and qualities, the synod staff will bring one or two names of interim pastor candidates to the council-appointed leadership team for consideration. The leadership team interviews the candidate(s) (candidly identifying and discussing known issues), negotiates the financial terms with the preferred interim, and records them in a covenant. The pastor may serve either part-time or full-time, and compensation is negotiated. This is generally based on the total compensation package of the former pastor but reallocated to meet the specific needs of the interim.

The method of retaining an interim pastor can be as follows:

- I. Intentional Interim Pastors under call.** Intentional Interim Pastors work under an Interim Covenant (see form in Appendix B) and a call from the synod council. The interim pastor is not available as a candidate for a settled call to the congregation. The financial package is incorporated into the interim covenant, which is signed by the congregation and interim pastor and then provided to the bishop for signature.

2. **Intentional Interim under contract.** When an interim pastor is retired, or where the interim assignment is very short (i.e., a “bridge” interim), the pastor may serve as an intentional interim under contract to the congregation. The form of the call is modeled on the interim covenant, but it does not require action by the synod council.
3. **Interim Under Term Call.** Under some unusual circumstances, a call may be extended for a specific term. The availability of the pastor for remaining and in a settled call following the completion of the term must be negotiated prior to the issuance of the term call. The congregation constitutional requirements for extending a call must still be met. In most cases, a term call is suggested by the synod because of the particular needs of congregations and the availability of a particularly well-suited pastor. When a term call is issued, the process as identified in this manual may be modified to move more quickly than usual into a settled call.
4. **Supply Pastors.** Supply pastors may preside at worship, preach, teach on Sunday morning and/or may provide a minimum of pastoral care for the seriously ill or those in crisis. (A current list of pastors willing to serve as pastoral supply is found at <http://www.spas-elca.org/resources/for-leaders/synod-handbook-directory/>.) These pastors work either for specific, one-time duties, or for very limited work defined in a carefully designed contract that outlines the scope of their work and range of authority. Supply pastors may be pastors who are retired, on leave from call, or serving in another part-time call such as another congregation or chaplaincy.

**Work during the Transition Period.** Once onboard, the interim pastor and congregational leadership work together to address the pressing issues and relationships which were identified during the exit interview and/or Ministry Exploration process. Synod staff is available to assist in this effort. In particular, the interim pastor and the leadership team will:

- Attend to grief, loss and pastoral care issues that arise from the pastor’s departure
- Address ministry tasks that may have fallen through the cracks, and empower members to address those tasks, as necessary
- Monitor the general health and needs of the congregation
- Reassure the congregation that pastoral responsibilities will be fulfilled; (e.g., worship, education, hospital visits, other visitations, emergency pastoral response, funerals, weddings, confirmation, baptisms)
- Assure the continuation of worship services of the congregation in coordination with supply pastors, worship staff, assisting ministers, and musicians
- Attend to finances/stewardship
- Support and guide staff who normally function under pastoral oversight (e.g., office personnel, music personnel, and custodial personnel), conducting meetings and taking other actions to clarify

needs, directions and expectations

- Support other congregational leaders (e.g., council members, financial people, etc.)
- Assure confidentiality in regard to sensitive issues
- Be a resource to the next called pastor and assist the new pastor in the continuation of immediate and special pastoral ministry needs
- Provide a communications strategy to inform members about the transition process (e.g. how the call process works, where the congregation is in the timeline, review of current policies, etc.) using such means as announcements, email updates, newsletter, bulletin, small group discussions, electronic and other mailings, congregational meetings, and other current congregational communication channels.

**Organization Matters.** The interim pastor and leadership team should seek to:

- Ensure parochial records and reports are current
- Ensure the congregation's constitution and governing documents are current
- Provide clear and detailed job descriptions for staff
- Establish personnel policies which clearly communicate staff expectations
- Select and apply appropriate and beneficial evaluation tools and procedures.

## **PHASE II: MISSION EXPLORATION PROCESS**

**The Mission Exploration Process.** When a pastor leaves, the challenge facing the congregation is more than the calling of another pastor. The congregation needs to do the work necessary to lay the foundation for a successful next chapter of ministry. This Mission Exploration Process (MEP) defines future directions and priorities for the mission and ministry of the congregation and culminates in the development of a “Ministry Site Profile” (MSP). The MSP describes in detail who the congregation is and where God is calling it to go in mission, and the qualities needed in the new pastor.

**Overview.** The Mission Exploration Process (MEP) provides:

- An opportunity to review, assess, and claim the priorities of the congregation
- Information for the call committee about the congregation and a description of leadership needs which will guide their work
- Direction for the synod staff in recommending candidates for consideration by the call committee
- A picture of the congregation to the candidates as they consider serving the congregation.

**Formation of Mission Exploration Team.** The congregation council and interim pastor will work together to develop/appoint a Mission Exploration Team (MET). This team will run an interactive mission exploration process for the congregation, compile data, complete the MSP, and possibly manage other transitional concerns. The exploration process is a work of discernment for the whole congregation during the interim period. The MET under the guidance of the interim pastor leads that process, and could be any one of several groups:

- A specially appointed task force
- A long-range planning committee already at work in the congregation
- The call committee (e.g., in a very small congregation).

**Elements of the Process.** The mission exploration process enables the congregation to listen to God, one another and the community, and specifically to:

- Identify and address issues of conflict, grief and/or guilt that affect its life and ministry
- Review its life and mission as the Body of Christ
- Discuss its challenges/opportunities in the next 5-10 years
- Evaluate its present strengths
- Identify specific areas where it feels called to strengthen its ministry
- Identify its present context for mission
- Specify resources necessary to fulfill its mission, especially mission tasks in the community
- Arrive at a common understanding of its mission
- Identify the gifts that are most important for the next pastor to possess.

**Steps in the Process.** Each outlined step contains ideas and activities to engage the congregation in conversation and planning. These are shared here as resources that the MET may employ as it takes on the task of listening to the community and making recommendations for the congregation's future mission and ministry. Further details are provided through the interim pastor.

**STEP 1: Internal Assessment--Who We Are.** The goal of the internal assessment is to name where the congregation has been, where it sees itself now, and identify possible directions for its mission and ministry. The congregation is invited to review the present focus of its life and mission and to decide whether this accurately reflects who they understand themselves to be. Members are invited into reflection and discernment to share their hopes and concerns for their future together.

a. Questions include:

- What is our history?
- What do we say about ourselves?
- How do others describe us?
- What are the gifts of this congregation?
- What is it important that we continue?
- What are our core values?
- What are we willing to give up to better carry out our key purpose?

b. Ideas for carrying out this work may include:

- **Create a wall of history.** To help visualize the history of the congregation, cover a large wall in paper and create a timeline from the beginning of the congregation to today with space for dreams for the future. Have people write important events and people in the life of the congregation or society at large on the wall. Explore your congregation's history by gathering in small groups to analyze what appeared on the timeline. "What do you see? What is missing?" Have each group describe the congregation based on these insights.
- **Community Interviews.** Interview community leaders on what they see are some needs, people such as school social workers, assistant principals, school nurses, local police, business owners, social service agencies, local politicians.
- **Community Development Reports.** Read and summarize key points from community development reports from county or city or regional government agencies, which often indicate trends and the government's plans for addressing them, such as housing policies and economic policies.

**STEP 2: External Assessment--Mission Possibilities.** The goal of this step is to discern the community you serve. You will take under consideration the needs in the surrounding community and mission opportunities in the wider church. You may wish to gather input from the congregation in small group cottage meetings (see Appendix C, “Developing a Shared Vision for Ministry”).

a. Questions include:

- What are the assets and needs of our community?
- Who are the invisible people? (poor, lonely, homeless, hungry, angry, etc.)
- What services are needed and what services are available?
- What is God up to in our community?
- What is our outreach?
- What opportunities for partnership are available to our congregation: locally, synod wide, nationally and globally?

b. Ideas for carrying out this work may include:

- **Community map.** Create a community map of the neighborhood surrounding the church. What resources, needs do you see close by? Invite organizations and other groups in the community to come and share their assessment of the needs in the community.
- **Demographic Information.** Contact the synod staff about registering for the MissionInsite tool and learning about how to use it. This software mapping tool draws on detailed demographic information of the community that is more detailed and multifaceted than census data. Less detailed demographic data can be found at [www.elca.org/research/](http://www.elca.org/research/). Click “View Now” under “Demographic Reports.” Type in the Synod ID (3H) and your congregation ID. If you do not know your congregation ID, call the synod office—we can look it up for you. Additional information on community characteristics is also available at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).
- **Small Group Exploration.** Walk or drive through the community in small groups. Look for signs of hope and signs of despair in the community. Have conversations with people you encounter and ask:
  - What are the best things about living here?
  - What thing could be improved about life here?
  - What could the church do to help make life better?
  - Consider how your congregation is in partnership with the neighborhood and other organizations—how is your relationship with your community multi-directional (or how could it be)?

Share observations and wonderings about what the congregation might be able to address.

- **Outreach List and Event.** List current outreach efforts and intentions of the congregation. Evaluate the church budget as a way of assessing the congregation's commitment to outreach. Have a "mission day" to highlight your partnerships with the ELCA, synod and community.

**STEP 3: Assessment.** The goal of this step is to assess the information gathered in Steps 1 and 2. As you seek to define the top mission priorities of the congregation, do not only consider the needs and desires of the existing membership; think also about the people who are not yet a part of the congregation.

a. Questions include:

- What have we learned about our mission and ourselves?
- What is the relationship of the congregation with the community?
- Has our mission changed?
- What new people is God calling us to reach, and how might we begin to connect with them?
- How will the congregation look in 5-10 years if God has God's way with us?

b. Ideas for carrying out this work under the guidance of the interim may include one or more of the following:

- **Guided Discussion.** Create a small task force to condense information into 3 or 4 realistic potential themes. Then hold a series of discussion table conversations guided by trained table leaders, with the goal of identifying the one main theme or direction.
- **Vision Summit.** Hold a one-day event of highly structured conversation around key themes that democratically narrow and focus the congregation's purpose and direction.
- **Survey.** Survey ideas and attitudes regarding the congregation's future, using a validated research tool, such as the Vitality Survey available through the synod's Director of Evangelical Mission (DEM).

- **Agape Meal.** Hold a Lenten or other special mid-week series focused on specific issues facing the congregation's future, embedded in worship, prayer and holy conversation. Make this a comfortable atmosphere of food and spiritual conversation about God's calling for the congregation.
- **One-on-One Interviews.** Train a small team to use identical scripts to interview other members one-on-one, focusing on a carefully designed research question.
- **Work Session.** Hold a work session to look at church bulletins, newsletters, annual reports, and financial reports, to answer the following kinds of questions: What do these say about how we have been living out our mission? What is missing based on what we learned about our community?

**STEP 4: Develop a Mission Plan.** Develop a clear definition of mission and ministry on behalf of the congregation, including a vision and a specific strategy for working toward it.

a. Questions include:

- Who are our mission partners?
- What is our mission focus now?
- Where is God leading us into the future?

b. Ideas for carrying out this work may include:

- **Position Paper.** Based on the discernment and listening phase, write a brief, one-page "position paper" that is presented to members and interested parties for comment. Set up a formal process for receiving comment. Host a town forum to receive comment.
- **Ministry Development Plan.** Under the guidance of the interim pastor, create a ministry development plan, to be publically reviewed and adopted at a congregational meeting.

**STEP 5: Determine Leadership Needs.** The goal of this step is to take what is learned through listening to God, one another and the community, to identify the characteristics and gifts for ministry sought in the next pastoral leader. Keep in mind that most people will think primarily in terms of worship and their own personal relationship with the pastor. Think of a leader not only ministering to the needs of the existing congregation; consider where God is calling you and what kind of a leader can help you get there. Such a candidate may not look or behave like previous pastors, but may look or behave more like the people you are trying to reach.

- a. Ideas for carrying out this work may include:
  - **Job Description.** Using the Council and/or personnel committee, create a job description for the pastor position, with specifics unique to the congregation (i.e., those expectations, responsibilities and relationships beyond what is found in the congregation constitution and standard form letter of call).
  - **Survey.** Survey the congregation to identify the characteristics of the pastor they seek using the *Ministry Tasks and Gifts for Ministry* section of the MSP form. Be sure to identify the congregation's calling/direction for the next years before identifying pastoral qualities to lead there.

**STEP 6: Putting together the Ministry Site Profile (MSP).** The goal of this step is to write and submit the Ministry Site Profile for the congregation. This document is used throughout the ELCA by congregations who are seeking a new rostered minister.

- a. Accessing the computer form
  - The MSP is available online at <http://www.elca.org>
  - Click on the *Call Process* button in the upper right portion of the screen. Then click *Ministry Sites* in the blue boxes on the left
    - Explore the resources available here for creating the profile including a sample version of the MSP
  - To access the online MSP to submit to the ELCA database, you will need to create an account including an email address and password
    - Keep a record of the email and password, share with all who will be working on the online MSP, and track for future reference.

**Creating the Ministry Site Profile (MSP).** This document has five sections, divided into smaller parts.

- I. **Who We Are** (items 1-5). *This section tells the story of your congregation and community through data and commentary.* Congregation Statistics are available at [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org). At the bottom of the page, click on *Find a Congregation*. Search for your congregation and then click on its name in the search results. Click on *full trend report for this congregation*. Be mindful of your congregation's process for recording membership or attendance statistics. Talk to the people responsible for these numbers. When was the last time the membership rolls were updated? How accurate are your church records? Does the congregation file a parochial report annually? (Remember, the ELCA report is only as good as the data reported to it by the congregation.) What is the policy for maintaining accurate records? An interim pastor can help if work needs to be done in this area.
- II. **Our Vision for Mission** (Items 6-9). *This section describes the characteristics of your congregation and your purpose, giftedness and mission.* Note that the congregation's response to Item 8 will be publicized on the ELCA Call Process website among descriptions of call openings in the synod, so this should be prepared with great care.
- III. **Leadership Needs** (Items 10-17). *This section presents the gifts and skills needed in your next ministry leader.* The MSP also needs to address compensation, benefits and pastoral expenses (including moving expenses) that the congregation can offer. Salary and benefit considerations are matters that will need to be negotiated between the recommended candidate and representatives of the Congregation Council with input from the call committee chair, recognizing that the ultimate responsibility for the budget lies with the Congregation. The Synod publishes compensation guidelines annually and are posted on [www.spas-elca.org](http://www.spas-elca.org) (click on *Resources*, then *Forms & Reports*) which should inform all these conversations.
- IV. **Commentary** (Item 18). *This section allows you to add any additional information that will help communicate who you are and where you believe God is calling you.* Remember, the call process is one of mutual discernment, and this section helps you complete the story. The optional "Seven Reflections" are another helpful way for you to portray the congregation fully.
- V. **Completion of Profile** (Items 19-21). This section provides details for the next steps in the process, forms for references, and contact information for your call committee.
  - a. Item 19: Describes the discernment process of the congregation including how this profile was reviewed and adopted by the congregation.
  - b. Item 20: Call Process Contact Person is the name of the synod staff person who

is working with your congregation's call process.

- c. Item 21: Reference's Recommendation. Choose someone outside your congregation who can speak to your mission and ministry. Consider asking former pastors, neighboring pastors, or people who used to work for or belong to the congregation but are no longer involved.

Once you have completed the form, save a copy for your records and 'Submit' it for activation by the synod staff.

**Communication to Congregation.** All through the transition process, the congregation should be fully informed in multiple ways, perhaps including a highly visible time line that can track progress through each step. As the mission exploration process is completed, a report is shared with the congregation in advance of the town hall meeting. The report contains a summary of the material collected in the exploration process, a copy of the Ministry Site Profile, and copies of any other documents or materials that will be illustrative of the conclusions. The congregation is invited to come together for a town hall discussion of the MSP. Date and time for this meeting is determined in collaboration with the synod staff working with the congregation through the call process.

**Congregational Town Hall.** At the town hall meeting, the team responsible for the development of the MSP presents their work. The purpose of this meeting is to gain clear congregational buy-in, and ensure a common ground of understanding between congregation, synod, and call committee. The call committee's presence at this meeting is vital so they can understand the background to the formulation of the MSP. The meeting ends with an affirmation of the MSP and description of the needed skills and abilities contained therein. Appendix D is a sample agenda for the town hall meeting.

**Multiple Pastor Situations.** The call process may differ when there is more than one pastor, as the remaining pastor(s) responsibilities may change dramatically during the interim. In a case where there is an associate pastor or deacon, the matter of their continuation after the departure of a lead pastor is discussed in their call package. For example, an associate pastor's call may be co-terminus with a lead pastor's call, perhaps including some fixed period thereafter. If there are no termination provisions, it is still advisable for the associate pastor to prayerfully consider whether it is best for the congregation for the associate pastor to seek another call. Only in rare circumstances and in consultation with the synod staff should an associate pastor seek the senior position.

## **PHASE III: CALLING THE NEW PASTOR**

### ***Formation, Structure and Expectations of Call Committee***

**Importance of Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit guides the entire call process through open and honest prayer, study, and conversation. The goal is to discern the particular rostered minister whom the committee should recommend to the congregation for issuing a call. The council, congregation and call committee should all seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to help discern who God is calling to the work of the call committee as well as the call committee's discernment as to the pastor for the congregation at this time in the congregation's history. Serving on a call committee is a great opportunity to see how the local church is vitally connected to the whole church, and to 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.

**Timing of Formation of Call Committee.** In some smaller congregations, the call committee may be formed at the very beginning of the transition period and then given the task of overseeing the Mission Exploration Process. However, most congregations form the call committee toward the end of the Mission Exploration Process, after the congregation has defined its ministry, mission and staffing needs. The call committee should be formed before the town hall meeting is held to debrief the MSP, since this profile is an important basis for the call committee's work.

**Call Committee Membership.** The size, makeup and appointment of the call committee is usually provided for in the constitution of the congregation. If permitted by the constitution, it is valuable to have one or two members of the MET continue as members of the call committee, since they have extensive knowledge of the work behind the MSP.

**Council Representative.** Often one congregation council member sits on the call committee as a liaison. The council representative may or may not have a vote on the committee, depending on the constitution of the congregation. The representative will report back to the congregation council on the progress of the call committee, but he/she may not violate the confidence of the call committee.

**Size of Committee.** Typically the size of the committee is about six (6) with no more than nine (9) since it is difficult for larger committees to get the work done efficiently and to consistently hit 100% attendance for meetings. It is crucial that the call committee meet when all members can be present when interviewing or deliberating on candidates.

**Qualities of call committee members.** When identifying candidates for the call committee, it is important to seek persons who:

- will make this work a top priority
- can maintain confidentiality
- can both listen deeply and also speak up
- act in faith and prayerfulness

- enjoy the trust and respect of the whole membership of the congregation
- can think and decide for the good of the whole congregation rather than their own personal desires or that of any faction or subgroup
- can meet regularly and often
- do not have any personal agendas, grievances, or power issues within the congregation
- are not employed by the congregation or are past pastors of the congregation (or their spouses)
- are not currently serving on church council (except for the council representative)
- are not from the same family (i.e., spouse or parent/child) as others on the call committee.

**Composition of Call Committee.** The call committee as a whole should be as diverse in age, gender, ethnicity, and interests as the congregation is at-large, i.e., “look like the congregation in miniature.” It is far better to invite nominations for the call committee rather than to ask for volunteers. The leadership of the congregation should seek out and discern talented and diverse people to nominate and/or serve. After these persons accept the appointment or election, the leadership should demonstrate pride and confidence in them, pray for and support them.

**Commissioning/Blessings 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 congregation may use the “Commissioning of the Call Committee” liturgy in Appendix E as a way of gathering the whole congregation in blessing and supporting the members of the call committee and their work.

### **Call Committee Organization and roles.**

**a. Chairperson.** Unless otherwise designated or specified by the constitution, at its first meeting the committee should designate a *chairperson* to oversee the call process. The chairperson will convene meetings, set meeting agendas, and be the primary point of contact with pastoral candidates and the synod staff.

**b. Secretary.** The committee should also select a *secretary* to keep the minutes of committee meetings, especially assignments and meeting times. The secretary may also be responsible for written communications between candidates and the committee, including letters informing candidates of the committee's timeline and the interview process, confirming invitations, travel arrangements, thank you notes, and letters informing candidates of decisions reached. The secretary should send copies of formal correspondence to the synod office, and may, unless otherwise delegated, write the newsletter articles, notes for Sunday bulletins, and other materials that keep the congregation informed of the committee's progress.

**c. Synod Staff role.** The calling of a pastor represents a valuable partnership between God, the calling congregation and the synod. A synod staff person will be assigned to work with the call committee as needed throughout the process to guide, coach and assist as requested. The

designated synod staff person will orient the call committee at the beginning of the process, describe and review the committee's purpose, goals, tasks and processes, clarify needs, vet and bring candidate names, pray, and advise.

**d. No interim pastor role.** The interim pastor is not involved in the call process and interim pastors are forbidden by synod constitution and interim covenant with the congregation from influencing the selection process.

**Role of MSP.** The call committee needs to understand fully the needs and desires of the congregation as expressed in the Mission Plan (which resulted from the MEP), the written MSP and job description, and carry out its search in a manner consistent with those needs and desires. This preparation helps the call committee interview candidates and fulfill their responsibilities.

### **Call Committee Expectations:**

- a. Prayer.** The call committee should pray often throughout the call process and encourage the congregation to also pray for the call committee members, the candidates, and the congregation, that all may sincerely seek to discern God's will for the congregation.
- b. Team-building.** It is important for the call committee to take time at the beginning of the process to work on team development. As a cohesive team, the work of the committee will be smoother, the understanding of the whole congregation will be better, and confidence in the committee will be greater. In addition, the committee will provide a better impression for the candidate and a better witness to the final decision for the congregation.
- c. Confidentiality.** It is vital that the committee maintain strict confidentiality as to any information regarding specific candidates, and boundaries of confidentiality should be clearly agreed upon at the first meeting. Verbal and written information about prospective candidates must be kept within the confines of the committee, except for the final candidate once selected and ready for recommendation to the congregation council.
- d. Communication.** The call process itself is not secret. In fact, communication with the congregation council and the congregation about the progress of the call process is vital. Frequent and consistent communication about the process builds trust in the call committee, and helps to gain the consent and commitment of the congregation to the recommendations ultimately produced. This communication may include:
  - Newsletter articles explaining the call process to the congregation, with follow up articles each time another stage in the process is reached
  - Notes in the Sunday morning bulletins
  - Temple Talks by members of the call committee to update the congregation
  - Q&A forums during education hours where members can be invited to ask questions

- of the call committee and learn about the progress of their work
- Maintenance of a chart/timeline describing the call process displayed in a public place. This timeline may be modified as the call process unfolds, and any changes should be communicated to the congregation.

### ***Special types of pastoral calls***

#### **Calling an Associate Pastor.**

- Job Description.** When an associate pastor is being called, the MSP should be prepared as usual, but tailored for the associate role. A thorough job description should be prepared with responsibilities, ministry skills and other qualifications.
- Lead Pastor Role.** The lead pastor plays an important role, speaking with candidates and providing feedback to the synod staff before synod staff presents names to the call committee; once the names are presented, the lead pastor is wise to leave deliberation and final recommendation to the call committee.
- Stipulations in call.** Prior to the call process for an associate pastor, the lead pastor and the council should consider stipulations to include in the Letter of Call, as described on page 37.

**Calling a Co-Pastor.** Some congregations have called their pastors to serve as co-pastors. When one of the co-pastors leaves the congregation, the following process should be used:

- Mission Clarity.** The Ministry Exploration Team and/or congregation council should review the vision and mission of the congregation in its community seeking clarity about what God is calling the congregation to for the next 5-10 years, and make a list of skills and abilities needed in pastoral leadership to move into that mission.
- Job Description.** The congregation council should review the job description, ministry skills, and leadership qualities of the remaining co-pastor in light of the congregation's mission, and determine if the congregation's needs are a good match to the pastor's ministry skills and abilities.
- Validate Co-Pastor Arrangement.** The congregation council will determine whether to recommend continuing the co-pastor arrangement or move toward lead/senior pastor and associate roles. The council should vote to bring one of the following recommendations to the congregation:

- i. continue the co-pastor arrangement, reaffirming the remaining pastor as one of the co-pastors, and open the call process for a new co-pastor
  - ii. change the pastor model to lead/senior pastor with associate(s)
  - iii. consider calling the remaining co-pastor as lead/senior pastor
- d. **Change to Lead and Associate.** If the decision is made to issue a new call to the co-pastor as lead/senior pastor, then a call process for associate pastor(s) begins.

### **Calling an Associate to a Lead Pastor Position.**

- a. **First consideration.** The MSP should be prepared thoroughly, and the call committee formed and briefed as usual. The call committee should interview the associate *before* considering any other candidates. The interview and review should be thorough as would be the case with any other candidates, without any assumptions because of familiarity.
- b. **When associate is not recommended.** If the call committee's decision is not to recommend calling of the associate, or the associate withdraws from or otherwise is not available for consideration, then the normal call process with other candidates will commence.

### ***Getting To Know Your Candidates***

**Identifying Candidates.** Once the call committee is formed and oriented, the call committee should give attention to team building while also beginning to discuss potential interview questions and processes. The committee should be prepared to contact candidates and promptly schedule and complete interviews once names are received.

**Nominations from Congregation members.** The call committee may solicit names of potential pastoral candidates from congregation members defining a specified time (e.g., two weeks), using the form found in Appendix F. The call committee shares those names with the designated synod staff person. The synod staff will seriously consider the candidate in light of other potential candidates, taking into account factors such as the nominated candidate's openness to call, suitability of the match, etc.

**Nominations from the Synod.** Synod staff spend a great deal of their time and effort in being aware of potential candidates who are open to a new call, including review of the ELCA database of Rostered Minister Profiles (RMPs) and other means. Synod staff meet weekly to discuss "mobility" of potential candidates serving in the synod or elsewhere as to their suitability for specific congregations. These conversations are always guided by deep consideration of how the skills and interests of the pastor will match the needs of the congregation. Other considerations include:

- Readiness to move
- Family considerations
- Housing
- Other financial considerations
- Geographic restrictions.

**Presenting Rostered Minister Profiles (RMPs).** The goal of synod staff is to present for the call committee's consideration 3 to 5 names of leaders who are most qualified and whose RMPs fit with the needs identified in the MSP. In all cases, the synod staff will have spoken with the candidates, shared the MSP, and determined that the pastor is open to considering this call. The RMP introduces the candidate, but is not intended to be exhaustive. It includes information about the pastor's education and work experience, a self-description of his/her particular areas of interest and skill, and responses to a few questions about his/her style, convictions, preferences, etc. The RMP also includes the names of four references.

**Maintaining Confidentiality of RMPs.** The synod staff will meet in person with the call committee to present RMPs for each candidate. No additional copies of these documents are to be made and all content and deliberations about candidates are to be held in strictest confidence, and, if at all possible, with all call committee members present.

**Contacting candidates.** Prior to receiving names, the call committee should identify several potential interview/meeting dates. As soon as the committee receives names, the chair or other designated person makes contact with the candidates by phone and/or email informing them that their names have been received, and arranging a time for an initial interview. In this synod, call committees are expected to give at least a first interview to all candidates whose names are presented. Arrangements are generally confirmed by email.

**Communication with Candidates.** Candidates should be kept informed throughout the process.

### ***Interviews & Visits***

**The Pastoral Candidate Interview and Visit.** The encounter between the pastoral candidate(s) and the call committee is the heart of the call process. Careful attention should be given to thorough preparation and exchange of information ahead of time, wise use of time during the interview, and carefully considered decision-making following the visit. Throughout the planning and interviews the overarching tone should be one of invitation and hospitality rather than interrogation.

**Preparation for the Interviews.** Planning ahead will provide a more helpful and insightful experience for all involved. In advance of interviews, the call committee should consider the following:

a. **Further Exchange of Information.**

- 1) You may wish to share more about the congregation, such as:

- Copies of your last several annual reports
  - Recent newsletters, communications, brochures
  - Information about the surrounding community
  - Topics/questions you plan to explore in the interview and visit
  - Bulletins from recent worship services
  - A position description
  - A picture of each member of the call committee.
- 2) or you may want to know more from a candidate, such as:
- Annual reports from their current congregation
  - Any other resume or mobility information not already shared
  - Original material such as sermons (including video), class outlines, continuing education projects
  - Bulletins from recent worship services
  - Further references.
- b. **Determine the Format of the Interview(s).** Generally, two rounds of interviews take place. The first interview is a conversation with each candidate whose name the synod staff provides. This initial interview may take place in person, via skype or over the telephone. The second, more extensive visit and in-person interview is conducted with one or two final candidates.
- c. **Location of Interview.** When deciding location and timing for these interviews, confidentiality and hospitality are primary concerns along with being open to the candidate's interests and questions. The congregation's building may not offer a discreet meeting place. A call committee member's home may be used or the synod staff will assist in finding space in other church buildings for the call committee to meet.
- d. **Planning Formal Interview Questions.** The formal interview is a very important part of the call process, and some members of call committees may approach the interview with a degree of anxiety. Common concerns include: What is the purpose of the interview? What questions should we ask? What questions shouldn't we ask? How will we know if an answer is a "good" one? There is a list of possible interview questions in Appendix G. While each committee will develop its own interview process and questions, consider the following points when developing an approach:
- 1) **Role of the RMP.** Read the RMP and other references (if applicable) the synod has provided about the candidate. Identify any information that may need to be clarified by the candidate. Create questions that help you come to know the candidate as a spiritual person/leader.

- 2) **Format.** Develop a format to ask a predetermined list of questions of each candidate using your MSP as a guide to the specific needs of your congregation and the pastoral opening to be filled. While you want to ask questions specific to each candidate's gifts and skills, a structured interview process is important to maintain consistency across interviews.
  - 3) **Behavioral focus.** Create interview questions focused on the ministry behaviors necessary for success in your context. Rather than asking about a candidate's *ideas* about certain aspects of congregational life, ask for examples of past *behaviors* which illustrate those qualities. These kinds of questions allow the candidate to share what he/she has done in particular ministry situations which demonstrate specific relevant knowledge or expertise. For example, perhaps one of the factors identified as important to success in your context is working effectively with lay leadership. A sample behavioral interview question addressing this factor might be, "Tell about a time when your views or preferences were at odds with key members of the congregation's leadership. What did you do and how was the situation resolved?"
  - 4) **Questioners.** Once you have decided the questions to be asked, assign questions to each member of the committee so that all members are involved in the conversation. Discuss briefly the issues to be aware of in the interview itself (see next section), including the extent of follow-up and spontaneous questions.
- e. **Plan evaluation criteria/format.** Using the areas of pastoral gifts and skills identified in the MSP and the interview questions, you may develop a ranking system for the candidates. This may be as simple as a grid on which each committee member gives each candidate a ranking in each identified category. For example, if the category is "pastoral care" each person would rank their impression of this area from the conversation 1 -5, with the 1 as lowest and 5 as highest. This process reduces the subjectivity of the interview by helping Committee members listen for responses which correspond with the specific ministry areas identified as important. An example of this grid (which can be updated with your specific criteria) is in Appendix H.
  - f. **Practice Interview.** You may find it helpful to conduct a practice interview with a pastor who is not a candidate for the call. If this is desired, synod staff will help you set up such an interview.
  - g. **Contacting Candidates.** As soon as you receive names from the synod staff, you should contact the candidates to begin the process of securing interview dates, times, and location.

**Conducting the Interviews.** Once you have prepared for your interviews, conducting them in a professional and gracious manner is important.

**a. Interview Tips:**

- 1) Seek to set a tone where the conversation goes **two ways**, so that both the candidate and committee can ask questions and get a sense of one another
- 2) Be **patient**, allowing the candidate time to formulate responses
- 3) **Listen actively**, showing **interest** and **respect** for their answers; practice “**linking**” or building upon what the candidate has said.
- 4) Be **alert**, listening for key words or phrases
- 5) **Concentrate**, listening for main ideas, not just facts and figures
- 6) Be **deliberate**. Avoid hasty decisions based on an answer to one question
- 7) Be aware of your **body language**; convey openness and non-defensiveness.

**b. First Round Interviews** (30 minutes-1 hour). The first round interview can be by skype, conference call, or in person. The limited time frame may mean you need to be selective with the questions that are most important to you. Each interview should begin with a prayer or a devotion, which the candidate may be asked to lead. You should also keep the following matters in mind:

- 1) **Parity.** Take into account the relative disadvantage of meeting electronically and determine whether all candidates will be interviewed in the same medium.
- 2) **Principal contact.** Designate a committee member to welcome the candidate to the interview site and accompany them to the interview room.
- 3) **Welcome.** Welcome the candidate and introduce each committee member and his/her role(s) in the congregation.
- 4) **Process.** Outline the anticipated process for the interview.
- 5) **Introductions.** Begin with questions which allow the candidate to introduce themselves (e.g. “Share with us briefly about your background and your call to ministry”).
- 6) **Predetermined Questions.** Continue with the predetermined list of questions asked by more than one member of the committee. If the response received from the candidate is unclear or incomplete, a follow-up question may be posed.
- 7) **Candidate questions.** Allow time for specific questions posed by the candidate.
- 8) **Wrap up.** Thank the candidate for talking with you and designate the method and contact person for any follow up questions the candidate might have. Outline future steps, including the anticipated timeline for hearing from the call committee.

**c. Deciding on Second Interview candidates.** While the interview is still fresh in the minds of committee members, each person should write down initial impressions of strengths of candidates and any further questions on their mind. Convene as a committee after all first

interviews are complete to determine who will be invited for a second interview and visit.

- 1) Ask again for the guidance of the Holy Spirit
  - 2) Review and clarify the understanding of what it means to reach consensus
  - 3) Allow ample time for each committee member to speak and be heard
  - 4) Come to a decision measured against the leadership needs of the congregation
  - 5) Choose the most suitable candidate(s), not necessarily the one most likely to accept the call
  - 6) While listening to your own heart and impressions, go beyond asking, “Which candidate do I favor?” to “Which pastor will best lead us into God’s mission?”
- d. **Contact all candidates.** Once a decision is made, contact all candidates either inviting them for a second interview or releasing them from further consideration by the committee. See Appendix I for a sample letter for an in-person interview, and Appendix J for a sample letter for releasing a candidate.
- e. **Contact synod staff.** Contact the synod staff person working with you to update them on the decisions of the committee.
- f. **Preparation for the candidate second visit:**
- Arrange for travel, housing at a local hotel, and meals (covering any expenses)
  - Determine who will meet and welcome the candidate and/or spouse
  - Determine visit schedule and location(s)
  - Invite candidate to prepare devotion or bible study or other ministry-related task to share with the call committee in the interview
  - If a candidate’s spouse accompanies them for the visit, coordinate with the couple to provide hospitality for the spouse, if desired, while the candidate is in the interview and meetings with staff
  - Allow for downtime for the candidate away from the call committee and the parish.
- g. **Possible elements of the second candidate visit:**
- A tour of the church at a time when staff and members are not present
  - Informal time for the committee and candidate to experience unstructured conversation over a meal at a restaurant or home of call committee member
  - A walking or driving tour of the neighborhood around the church including a look at housing, educational facilities, library, and other places of interest
  - The formal **second interview** follows the same pattern as the first interview, but with additional time for a more in-depth conversation (2-3 hours), allowing the call committee more time for questions or follow-up you may not have had time for in the first interview.

**Other Committee tasks.** Either before or after the second interview, and before making a final determination, the committee should do the following:

- Contact references for final candidates
- Arrange to see the pastoral candidates preach and lead worship. This can be done: a) via video; b) in the pastor's current context (with their permission); or c) at a local congregation, which synod staff can help you to arrange..

**Discernment of Final Candidate.** Once interviews are complete and references are checked, you should convene and seek to reach consensus on a final recommendation. As in each step in this process, this conversation begins and is surrounded with prayer. Consensus does not mean unanimity as to each person's preferred candidate, but rather agreement that the final candidate meets the needs of the congregation as expressed in the MSP and no one objects to the decision to move forward with that candidate.

a. **Questions.** It is important to keep God's leading and mission central, rather than personality or expected popularity. Therefore, it is best to keep asking questions like:

- Is this who the Holy Spirit is leading us to call to this place at this time?"
- What gifts does each candidate bring to ministry?
- What areas of ministry are not strengths for each candidate?
- Which candidate fits best with our congregational needs?

**Avoid** questions like:

- How does this candidate compare to others?
- Who will feel good (or bad) about this choice?
- Will this person do until someone better comes along?

b. **Further conversation.** If you feel further input is needed, you may ask to talk with the candidates again or ask for more references.

c. **Decision process.**

- **If a consensus is reached.**
  - Each member of the call committee should specifically state their support for the decision regarding a recommended candidate.
  - The call committee chair should inform the congregation council president of that recommendation
  - The call committee should also promptly inform all candidates and the synod staff of the decision regarding a final candidate.
  - Ask permission of the candidate to go forward as the final candidate. If the candidate agrees, that candidate will withdraw from any other call process until this process is finished.

- **If no consensus is reached.** If the committee determines that no candidate can be recommended, then a meeting with the synod staff is held to debrief the experience. This conversation serves to clarify the committee's expectations, answer process questions, and determine how to proceed. The synod staff will then work to generate a list of new names for consideration. The call committee is not allowed to "hold on" to a candidate while asking for more names, as this is unfair to both the candidate and congregation, and rarely results in a call.

**Council Involvement.** Once the call committee has decided on a single candidate to recommend, a meeting of the congregation council is called. The call committee informs the council of the candidate and reasons for the candidate's selection by the call committee. Thorough information about the candidate, with ample opportunity for dialogue between the call committee and the council, will enable the council to actively support the call committee's recommendation at the congregational meeting. The council may choose to meet the candidate the committee recommends, or may decide to forward the recommendation directly to the congregation. If they meet, the council speaks with the candidate only to lay groundwork for a strong working partnership, not to redo the interview process.

### **Background Checks**

- MN 604.20A.** When the call committee has made its decision about the recommended candidate, the synod office is informed. At that point, as the congregation prepares to vote on a Letter of Call, the synod office performs the background check required by Minnesota Statue §604.20A, contacting employers from the previous 5 years, inquiring regarding any accusations of sexual misconduct. The bishop cannot sign the Letter of Call until that step has been completed.
- Other Background Checks.** The congregation should also run a thorough background check on the final candidate. Pertinent screens would be local, state and federal criminal records; credit (including bankruptcy); and any other background matters that could impact the effectiveness of the pastoral leadership. The synod can give names of services that provide such background checks.

### ***Issuing a Call***

**Determining the Compensation Package.** Congregations are asked to give careful consideration to the synod's compensation guidelines to determine the compensation package. See [www.spas-elca.org](http://www.spas-elca.org) (click on *Resources*, then *Forms and Reports*). Moving expenses are the obligation of the calling congregation. These should be worked out alongside the terms of the compensation package. The congregation may agree to pay a set amount or to pay the full cost of a professional mover.

Ordinarily, two members of the council, often the council president and a member familiar with the financial resources of the congregation, meet with the candidate to discuss details of compensation. The synod staff is able to serve an advisory role if needed. Compensation is worked out prior to the congregational vote to call the pastor to insure that there is no misunderstanding about what compensation will be offered alongside the Letter of Call.

**Meet and Greet.** The pastor is not to be asked to preach within the congregation before the vote is taken. The congregation invites the recommended candidate to come to a “meet and greet” event prior to the congregational vote. Spouse and family may be included in this informal introduction to the congregation. This “meet and greet” visit may entail:

- Conversation with the congregation council and staff (if it did not happen previously);
- A congregational gathering, primarily social in nature, with time for a whole group session of questions as well as informal mixing time;
- Opportunity for the pastor to open the group time by leading a devotional reflection;
- Opportunity for the candidate and family to more fully explore the community: housing, schools, spouse job possibilities, etc.

### **The Congregation Call Meeting.**

- a. The congregation council will set a date for a special congregational call meeting, taking into account the constitutional requirements for notice. Once the date has been established, the officers should follow the congregation constitution in notifying all eligible voting members of the special meeting.
- b. The mailing to notify members may include a brief statement from the call committee and information about the recommended candidate’s experience and qualifications.
- c. Unless there are pressing reasons not to do so, the name of the pastor to be called will also be included in the letter. (When a pastor is serving a congregation, which may not be aware that the pastor is in a search process, and the calling congregation needs to give several weeks’ notice for a congregational meeting, the actual name of the candidate may be revealed closer to the day of the “meet and greet” visit and the vote. The synod staff can help the congregation navigate this timing.)
- d. Throughout this time the council president will want to communicate well with the candidate about the plan for sharing their name.
- e. In preparation for the congregation call meeting, the officers should review and have at hand portions of the congregation constitution relative to the calling of a pastor, including the number of voters required for a quorum and the definition of a voting member. The candidate is not present for the meeting.
- f. Before the meeting begins, all qualified voters may be invited to “sign in.” The special meeting of the congregation to consider the calling of a pastor should open with a devotional time.

The council president may then establish that a quorum of members is present and ask that this number be recorded in the minutes. The call committee should present information concerning the proposed candidate. The congregation should then be invited to address questions about the proposed candidate to representatives of the congregation council and call committee.

- g. The vote to call a pastor needs to be by written ballot. In all ELCA congregations, a two-thirds majority of those present and voting is necessary for a call to be issued. Tellers should be appointed by the council president to distribute, collect and count the ballots. The chief teller should then report the vote outcome to the council president who announces the results to the congregation. Detailed minutes must be taken.
- h. If the budget needs to be revised to accommodate the compensation package, a resolution may be presented from the council to revise the current budget. In this case, the vote need only be a simple majority.
- i. At the conclusion of the meeting, the president should express gratitude to the call committee for its work and assistance in the process. The congregation should be informed that the candidate has 10 days to consider the call and will normally notify the congregation of his/her decision within that time. The president will communicate the result of the vote to the candidate immediately after the meeting and will likewise inform the synod, and follow up with a letter to the candidate. A template for this letter can be found in Appendix K.
- j. In the rare circumstance that the required two-thirds majority vote to call is not met, the council president declares that the candidate has not been called. The bishop will meet with the council to discuss the vote results and to initiate a renewal of the search process. Call committee members may be included in this meeting, if desired.

**Preparing the Formal Letter of Call.** Once the congregation votes affirmatively, the Letter of Call and "Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibility of the Pastor" are signed and forwarded for the bishop for signing (see Appendix L). The bishop signs the Letter of Call after the requirements of Minnesota Statute §604.20 are completed. The Synod office sends the signed forms to the pastor, with copies made and sent to the congregation for its records.

### **Special Circumstances.**

- a. **When Calling an Associate Pastor.** At the time a call is extended to an Associate Pastor, a decision needs to be made whether that call is co-terminus with the call of the Senior or Lead Pastor. One of the following provisions should be considered and clearly stated in the Letter of Call:
  - 1) "In the event of a vacancy in the position of lead pastor, the pastor here called shall under no circumstances be considered for the position of lead pastor."
  - 2) "This call terminates six months after the arrival of a new lead pastor."
  - 3) "In the event of a vacancy in the position of lead pastor, the pastor here called may

be considered for the position of lead pastor or may be given the opportunity to remain in the associate role.”

- b. First Call.** The ELCA requires all first call pastors and deacons to participate in a three year program of First Call Theological Education. The structure of that program in the Saint Paul Area Synod is outlined at [www.spas-elca.org](http://www.spas-elca.org) (select *Resources, For Leaders, Continuing Education*). The congregation’s affirmation of such participation as well as the congregation’s agreement to provide \$500 a year for this program needs to be clearly outlined in the compensation package.

**Pastor's Response.** The congregation president should notify the pastor of the call immediately following the meeting. The pastor normally has 10 days to respond beginning from the time of this notification. The candidate’s decision to accept or decline the call should be conveyed to the council president in writing, either by letter or email. The pastor should indicate a starting date, usually within one or two months. Any variance will need to be negotiated between the congregation and the candidate. Acceptance of the call should be conveyed promptly to the bishop.

**Farewell to the Interim Pastor.** Once the pastor-elect has accepted the call, the interim pastor begins to complete his/her service in the congregation. The congregation typically finds a way to celebrate and thank the interim pastor for his/her service. This can be done in worship; *A Litany of Farewell to the Pastor for the Interim* can be found in Appendix M. It is also appropriate to recognize the interim pastor at a special coffee hour (or other timely celebration). The interim pastor may leave a congregation with a break before the newly called pastor arrives. The congregation should work with the synod to insure there is adequate pastoral care and worship coverage with through a bridge interim or a supply pastor.

## **PHASE IV: Welcome & Installation**

Issuing and accepting a call is not the end of the transition process, and careful attention should also be given to the pastoral arrival and settling in.

**Moving.** Offering assistance with unloading a U-Haul (both at the pastor's home and church office) and/or providing food on moving day is a welcome sign of hospitality.

**Installation.** The Congregation President and the pastor-elect confer with the synod staff to set the date for the installation service, which is led by a member of the synod staff and set inside a worship service (or services) of the congregation. The Service of Installation liturgies are printed in the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship Occasional Services* and in *Sundays and Seasons*. (If a first call pastor has been called the synod will arrange for the ordination, which needs to occur before the installation.) Often the day involves a special reception or luncheon to which the congregation and neighboring congregation and church leaders are invited.

**Welcome & Getting Acquainted.** Members of the Congregation Council (and the Call Committee, if desired) are encouraged to stay in contact with the newly-arrived pastor in the first weeks. Close communication for both professional and personal matters is appreciated by the pastor and family, and establishes a good practice of mutual support. Planned events to welcome the new pastor and to help her or him get to know the congregation also set a tone for strong working relationships.

**Six-month review.** The synod staff person who worked with the congregation during the call process will contact the pastor in about 6-9 months to schedule "check in." The purpose of this "six-month review" is to provide an opportunity to compare expectations with what is actually happening. The Ministry Site Profile is reviewed to see how well that portrait described the congregation and context the new pastor is experiencing. The review is intended to be a non-threatening, supportive conversation for raising any concerns or issues from the perspective of the newly called pastor or deacon and that of the lay leadership.

- a. Sample questions.** Usually the review begins with a one-on-one conversation with the pastor, followed by a conversation with the congregation council and the pastor together. The questions addressed may include: *What were you expecting as you entered into this call (as pastor/as congregation)? How has the reality compared? What are the pleasant surprises? What may some unexpected findings be? What has been the focus of these first months? What impact has the pastor made since she has started? What progress has the congregation made toward fulfilling its missional objectives?*