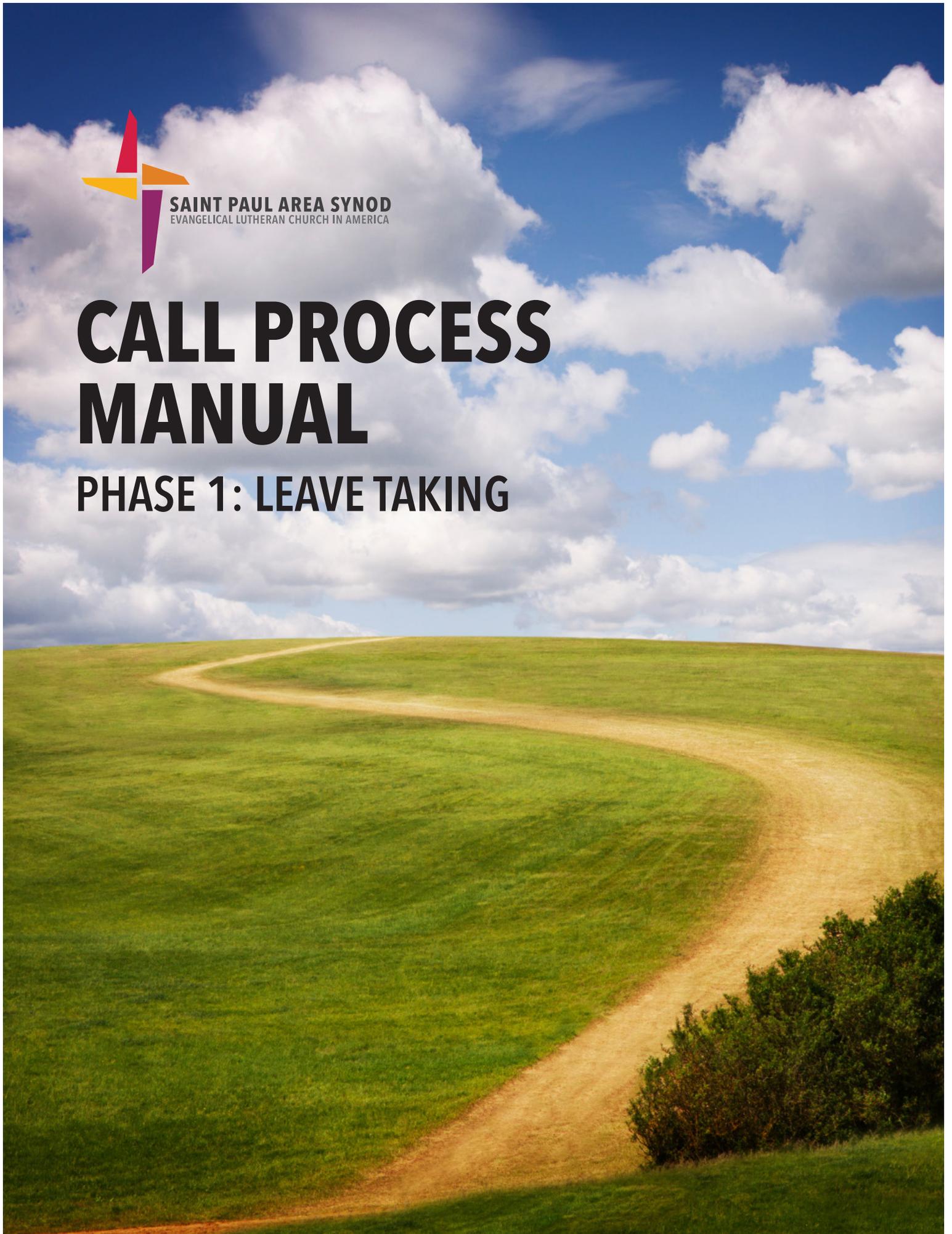




SAINT PAUL AREA SYNOD
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

CALL PROCESS MANUAL

PHASE 1: LEAVE TAKING





CHECKLIST

PHASE 1 LEAVE TAKING

This section of the Call Process Manual addresses the early stages of a transition and securing interim leadership. Begin or continue Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) work before initiating the call process. Check with synod staff for recommendations on how to do this and for other resources. Be sure to provide clear, accurate communications with all entities along the way!

- Having coordinated with the synod, the pastor informs council president of intent to depart. Together, they make a plan for giving notice to congregation council, staff and congregation.
- In consultation with synod staff, the council president and/or entire congregation council 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 the pastor is excused.
- Expectations for future pastoral acts of former pastors (see page 7) and the [Leaving Well](#) document for retiring clergy are discussed with leadership.
- Synod staff identifies potential interim pastors and a council-designated team interviews and makes a selection.
- Council-designated team negotiates terms of covenant with the interim pastor, including starting date and seeks council approval. Congregation is informed that an interim has been chosen.
- Pastor certifies to synod bishop that congregational records are up to date.
- Pastor and council president/secretary certify to synod 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.



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 a rostered minister is ready to submit their resignation or announce their retirement, they 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 interview process shown below is 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 a small group of people who have 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 that can be shared with council, pastor, transition team and synod staff.
- 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.
- Allow flexibility with the structure of the meeting to allow for spontaneous discussion relevant to the specific context.
- End the interview with a closing prayer.



Sample Exit Interview Questions

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

To the Pastor:

- Describe the reasons that moved you to be open to another call (or to retire)?
- What would be one word or phrase you would use to describe this congregation?
- How would you describe your tenure here? (Hold space for deeper reflection.)
- 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?
- How would you describe their tenure? (Hold space for deeper reflection.)

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?



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, or online at sundaysandseasons.com. It is printed on page 9 of this manual but please note that your congregation must have its own liturgies license or direct permission from 1517 Media to use it in your setting.

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. These forms are available on the following page.

Certification of Completion of Congregational Records

Per Saint Paul Area Synod Constitution...

S14.15 *The parochial record of each congregation shall be kept in a separate book which shall remain its property. The secretary of the congregation shall attest to the bishop of this synod that such records have been placed in his/her hands in good order by a departing pastor before:*

- a. Installation in another field, or*
- b. The issuance of a certificate of dismissal or transfer*

Before a pastor leaves the present field of service, he/she must bring the records books to the secretary of the congregation for review. Upon finding them in good order, the secretary shall complete this form and forward it to the synod bishop.

This is to certify that I have examined the parochial records of:

Congregation _____

City, State _____

and find them to be in good order.

Secretary of Congregation Council _____ *Date*

Mail to:

Bishop Patricia Lull
Saint Paul Area Synod
105 University Avenue West
St. Paul, MN 55103

Certification of Completion of All Financial Obligations

Per Saint Paul Area Synod Constitution...

S14.16 *The pastor shall make satisfactory settlement of all financial obligations to former congregation before:*

- a. Installation in another field of labor, or*
- b. The issuance of a certificate of dismissal or transfer*

All financial obligations, salary, pension, health, death benefits and allowances, together with Continuing Education funds have been met and paid to the Rev. _____ up to the effective date of termination of services.

Also, satisfactory settlement of all financial obligations has been made by the Rev. _____ to _____

Congregation _____ Lutheran Church.

Treasurer _____ *Date*

Pastor _____ *Date*

Mail to:

Bishop Patricia Lull
Saint Paul Area Synod
105 University Avenue West
St. Paul, MN 55103



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:**

- **Officiate at funerals** for persons from the former congregation
- **Officiate at 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. Please reference the [Leaving Well](#) document if the pastor is retiring.

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) and candidly identifies and discusses known issues. They negotiate the financial terms and record 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:

- **Intentional Interim Pastors Under Call.** Intentional interim pastors work under an interim covenant 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 leaders of the congregation and interim pastor and then provided to the bishop for signature.
- **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.
- **Interim Under Term Call.** Under some unusual circumstances, a call may be extended for a specific term. The availability of the pastor for remaining 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 a congregation 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.



Work During the Transition Period

Once on board, the interim pastor and congregational leadership work together to address the pressing issues and relationships which were identified during the exit interview and/or transition 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, music, 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.
- Serve as a resource for the next called pastor and assist the new pastor in the continuation of immediate and special pastoral 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 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.



Thanksgiving at the Conclusion of a Call

This order is appropriately set within the service of Holy Communion on the final Sunday of a minister's service under call in a congregation. The order follows the prayer after communion. This order may be led by a pastor of the congregation (unless the pastor's call is the one concluding), another rostered leader, a representative of the congregation, or a representative of the synod.

Address

The person whose call is concluding and representative/s of the congregation come before the assembly.

For a pastor

A representative of the congregation addresses the pastor whose call is concluding with these or similar words.

Name, on date of call, we of name of congregation called you to be pastor in this place: to proclaim God's word, to baptize and teach, to announce God's forgiveness, and to preside at the Lord's table. With the gospel you have comforted us in times of sickness and trouble, and at the death of our loved ones. Sharing our joys and sorrows, you [and your family] have been important to our life together in the church of Jesus Christ, in our service to this community, and in God's mission to the whole world. [As you leave this community of faith, we say farewell, and we pray for God's blessing.]

For a deaconess, diaconal minister, or associate in ministry

A representative of the congregation addresses the person whose call is concluding with these or similar words.

Name, on date of call, we of name of congregation called you to serve among us as a deaconess / diaconal minister / associate in ministry. Here a description of the particular ministry may be included. Sharing our joys and sorrows, you [and your family] have been important to our life together in the church of Jesus Christ, in our service to this community, and in God's mission to the whole world. [As you leave this community of faith, we say farewell, and we pray for God's blessing.]

The leader addresses the assembly with these or similar words.

People of God, members of name of congregation, do you release name from service as your pastor / deaconess / diaconal minister / associate in ministry?

We do, and we give thanks to God for our ministry together.

The leader addresses the person whose call is concluding.

name, do you recognize and accept the completion of your ministry with name of congregation?

Response: I do, and I give thanks to God for our ministry together.

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Thanksgiving and Sending

The presiding minister leads the assembly in prayer.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, through your Son Jesus Christ you gave the holy apostles many gifts and commanded them to feed your flock. You equip your people with abilities that differ according to the grace given to them, and you call them to various avenues of service.

We give you thanks for the ministry of name among the people of God in this place. You watch over our going out and our coming in: bless this time of ending and beginning. You surround your people in every time and place: keep us close in your love. You accompany your people in times of joy and times of trial: prosper all that has been done to your glory in this time together; heal and forgive all that has fallen short of your will for us. Help name [and her/his family] and all of us to live with courage and gladness in the future you give to us. As they have been a blessing to us, so now send them/us forth to be a blessing to others; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Blessing

The presiding minister, or the pastor whose call has concluded, proclaims God's blessing in these or similar words.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ☩ give you peace.

Amen.

A sending song may be sung.

Dismissal

The assisting minister may send the assembly into mission.

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

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NOTES ON THE SERVICE

This order may be adapted for use in settings other than ministry in a congregation. At the conclusion of a call to a rostered leader other than an ordained pastor, Farewell and Godspeed may be used instead of this order. Farewell and Godspeed may also be used at the conclusion of a lay professional worker's time of service.

The bracketed words at the end of the initial address may be omitted when the person is continuing in the membership of the congregation. The address may be adapted as appropriate when this order is used on the occasion of the retirement of a rostered leader.

When a representative of the synod leads this order, the representative may address the person whose call is concluding and the assembly with these or similar words. This address may precede the blessing.

Your sisters and brothers in the Saint Paul Area Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America give thanks to God for the ministry you have shared. We promise you our continued support and prayer. Rejoicing in the blessings of God in this congregation and in the ministry of name, with hope in God's abundant grace in years to come, I announce that name's service as position in this congregation is now concluded.

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