



SAINT PAUL AREA SYNOD  
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

# CALL PROCESS MANUAL

## PHASE 4: BEGINNING NEW MINISTRY





# CHECKLIST

## PHASE 4 BEGINNING NEW MINISTRY

- ☐ Call committee presents recommended final candidate to congregation council.
- ☐ Congregation council sets the date for the congregational meeting in accordance with congregation constitution. Candidate's name continues to be held in confidence until a mutually agreed upon release date.
- ☐ Synod sends Letter of Call and "Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibility of the Pastor" to congregation president.
- ☐ Congregation president (along with other appropriate elected leaders) and candidate negotiate a proposed compensation package.
- ☐ Congregation president arranges for background check as outlined by congregation personnel policies.
- ☐ 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 at an appropriately called congregational meeting. Written ballots are to be used in accordance with voting eligibility outlined in the bylaws of the congregation.
- ☐ President informs candidate and synod staff of the vote results. The pastor may take up to 30 days to respond to the congregation's call, though they may respond immediately.
- ☐ Council president/secretary prepares and signs the Letter of Call including completed "Definition of Compensation, Benefits and Responsibilities of the Pastor" form.
- ☐ New pastor may be invited to write a letter or make a video introducing themselves to the congregation.
- ☐ A number of dates are determined:
  - Congregation president arranges for exit interview with outgoing interim pastor to hear what the pastor has learned during their time with the congregation and what ministry matters need to be tended to as the new pastor comes
  - Departure date and celebration for interim pastor
  - Start date of new pastor
  - Installation date for new pastor in consultation with synod staff who lead Rite of Installation
- ☐ Council forms mutual ministry team with the new pastor
- ☐ Welcome plans for new pastor
- ☐ After six months, check-in occurs with pastor, leadership and synod staff



## Preparing for the Congregational Vote

Once the call committee has decided on a final 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

- a. **MN 604.20A.** As the congregation prepares to vote on a Letter of Call, the synod office performs the background check required by Minnesota Statute §604.20A, contacting employers from the previous five years, inquiring regarding any accusations of misconduct. The bishop cannot sign the Letter of Call until that step has been completed.
- b. **Other Background Checks.** The congregation should also run a thorough background check on the final candidate in line with congregation's personnel policies and insurance coverage. The synod can give names of services that provide such background checks, if needed.

### Determining the Compensation Package

Congregations are asked to give careful consideration to the synod's compensation guidelines to determine the compensation package. See <https://spas-elca.org/resources/forms-reports/>. Moving expenses are the obligation of the calling congregation and should be worked out alongside the terms of the compensation package. 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. Compensation is worked out prior to the congregational vote to call the pastor to ensure that there is no misunderstanding about what compensation will be offered alongside the Letter of Call.

### Meet and Greet

The pastor should not be asked to preach within the congregation before the vote is taken. The congregation may invite 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

- The congregation council will set a date for a congregational 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.
- The mailing to notify members may include a brief statement from the call committee and information about the recommended candidate's experience and qualifications. Do not release the candidate's name without their permission. (When a pastor is serving a congregation, which may not be aware that the pastor is in a search process, the actual name of the candidate may not be revealed until the "meet and greet" visit and the vote. The synod staff can help the congregation navigate this timing.)



- In preparation for the congregation call meeting, the officers should review 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.
- The president will communicate the result of the vote to the candidate immediately after the meeting and will likewise inform the synod.
- 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 synod representative will meet with the council to discuss the vote results and to initiate a renewal of the search process.

### **Sample Agenda for Congregational Meeting**

Qualified voters sign in

Devotions and prayer

Quorum determined

Call committee presents information about the candidate

Vote taken by written ballot- 2/3 majority of voters signed in is necessary for call to be issued. Follow voting expectations found in congregation constitution. If more than one pastor or deacon is being called, then a separate written ballot is needed for each candidate.

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.

Congregation sings and waits for the votes to be counted.

Vote results announced.

President thanks call committee

Meeting adjourned



## 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. The synod office sends the signed forms to the pastor, with copies made and sent to the congregation for its records.

### Special Circumstances

- **When Calling an Associate Pastor or Deacon.** At the time a call is extended, a decision needs to be made whether that call is co-terminus with the call of the Lead Pastor. One of the following sample provisions should be considered and clearly stated in the Letter of Call:
  - “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.”
  - “This call terminates six months after the arrival of a new lead pastor.”
  - “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.”
- **First Call.** The ELCA requires all first call pastors and deacons to participate in a three-year program of First Call Theological 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 has 30 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 synod.

### Moving

The congregation is responsible for covering moving expenses. 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.

## Farewell to the Interim Pastor

Once the pastor-elect has accepted the call, the interim pastor begins to complete their service in the congregation. The congregation typically finds a way to celebrate and thank the interim pastor for their service. A Litany of Farewell to the Pastor for the Interim can be found on the next page. 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 through a bridge interim or a supply pastor.

## 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 of the congregation. (If a first call pastor has been called, the synod will arrange for the ordination, which needs to occur before the installation.)



## A Litany of Farewell for the Interim Pastor

**Leader:** A church community is constantly changing. Loved ones come to the end of their lives; new lives are born and baptized into the faith community. Individuals and families come and go throughout our life together. It is important for us to recognize and mark well these times of passage, these endings and beginnings. Today we bid farewell and Godspeed to \_\_\_\_\_ who has served us as interim pastor for the past \_\_\_\_\_ months, whose time with us has now drawn to a close.

**Pastor:** I thank you, the people of \_\_\_\_\_ Church, both members and friends, for the love, kindness, and support you have shown me these past months. I thank you for accepting my leadership and receiving me as a pastor in your midst for this time of transition. I recall with joy the many things we have been able to accomplish together, and with sadness the things we were not able to do. I ask your understanding and your forgiveness for the mistakes I have made and for the times I may have let you down.

**Congregation:** We receive with thankfulness the ministry you have offered us in the time we have shared. We accept that you now leave us to minister elsewhere, trusting that God goes with you on that journey. Your presence among us will not be forgotten. We are grateful for the time you have been with us and ask your forgiveness for our own shortcomings and our sometimes flagging faith.

**Pastor:** I forgive you your failures, as Christ has forgiven me, and graciously accept your gratitude, trusting that our time together and our parting are pleasing to the Christ we are called to serve.

**Leader:** Do you, the members and friends of \_\_\_\_\_ Church, now release Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ from the duties of interim pastor?

**Congregation:** We do, with the help of God.

**Leader:** Do you, Pastor \_\_\_\_\_, release \_\_\_\_\_ Church from turning to you and relying on you to serve them as pastor?

**Pastor:** I do, with the help of God.

**Leader:** Do you, Pastor \_\_\_\_\_, offer your encouragement for the continued ministry here at \_\_\_\_\_ Church?

**Pastor:** I do, with the help of God. **Leader:** Let us pray.

**Congregation:** O God of all creation, whose love for all is trustworthy and true, help each of us to trust the future which rests in your care. During our time together we have experienced laughter and tears, hopes and disappointments. Guide us as we carry these cherished memories with us in new directions until that time when we are completely one with you and with one another. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

**Leader:** Go now, Pastor \_\_\_\_\_, with our blessing, surrounded by our love and led by the promises of God, the presence of Christ Jesus, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

**Congregation:** Amen!

*"Litany of Farewell" adapted from that prepared by the Interim Ministry Network, Baltimore, Maryland, as printed on pages 183-184 in TEMPORARY SHEPHERDS (an Alban Institute publication)*



## 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 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. [Click here for ideas for welcoming your new pastor.](#)

## Mutual Ministry Team

The council may appoint a mutual ministry team to accompany and support the pastor's ministry in the congregation throughout their call. It often consists of a few people selected by the church council, and a few people from the call committee selected by the pastor.

The purpose of mutual ministry is to foster communication, support and mutuality between pastors and trusted members of the congregation. The purpose is not to evaluate staff, which is the responsibility of the council or a personnel committee, nor is it a liaison between church members and the pastor. Members of the mutual ministry team are asked to encourage congregation members to go directly to the pastor with any concerns that they might have. The team should be a space for the exchange of thoughts, understanding the culture of the congregation, exploration of new ideas, and mutual support and encouragement. Confidentiality is essential.

### The Mutual Ministry Team:

- Is mission-oriented.
- Builds on a broad vision of ministry and a healthy practice of mutuality. Makes use of a small group approach to develop mutuality.
- Carries out the ministry tasks of listening and response in support of mission.
- Prays for each other.
- Is led by the pastor... who determines the agenda. (a topic, a book or article)
- Has a convener, who helps the group come up with a meeting time/place/devotions/hospitality

## Six-Month Check-In

The synod staff person who worked with the congregation during the call process will contact the pastor in about six to nine months to schedule a check-in. The purpose of this check-in is to provide an opportunity to compare expectations with what is actually happening. The MSP 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.

## 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?



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