

RECOMMENDING CANDIDATES

CALLING A NEW PASTOR

RECOMMENDATION TO CHURCH COUNCIL

Once the Call Committee has decided upon a candidate to recommend, a meeting of the Congregation Council should be called. The entire Call Committee may be present at this meeting to strengthen the recommendation.

Thorough information about the candidate and the Committee's process of discernment, with ample opportunity for dialogue between the Call Committee and the Council, will empower the Congregation Council to move the Call Committee's recommendation forward and share in the growing enthusiasm. The Council receives this recommendation and sets a time for a special congregational meeting, giving adequate time for notice and preparation.

The Call Committee will want to contact the candidate and give her/him the details of the next steps. The Council President will research and pursue conversation with the candidate concerning an initial compensation proposal.

PREPARING THE LETTER OF CALL

After you contact the synod office with the date of your special congregational meeting, an original *Letter of Call* document will be sent to the Council President with instructions. The Bishop will not sign a *Letter of Call* which does not meet the minimum standards offered in the current year's *Compensation Guidelines of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin*. The particular details should be written using a *Definition of Compensation* form, available from the synod office or on the ELCA website.

MEET AND GREET

A few days before the congregational vote, you may find it helpful to provide an opportunity for the congregation to meet the candidate. This is not a time for formal interviews and questions, nor a time for the whole congregation to hear the pastor preach. Rather it is a time to put a name and a face together as you begin to build a relationship with the pastoral candidate. The Call Committee or Council would commonly host this opportunity. You might design the event like an "open house," briefly convening for a time of public introduction and reflection on scripture.

COMPENSATION PLANNING CONVERSATION

Before the congregational meeting, the congregational president should be in touch with the candidate to have conversation about the compensation package (or delegate someone as appropriate). Since each *Letter of Call* signed by a bishop must be accompanied by an initial *Definition of Compensation*, it is wise to have arrived at a consensus about compensation prior to the special meeting. Sometimes this conversation takes place with a planning meeting of the Council with the candidate. Expenses for this meeting should be reimbursed.

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

The Congregation Council sets a date for a special congregational call meeting according to constitutional provisions and calendar considerations. Communications to notify members may include a brief statement from the Call Committee and information about the recommended candidate's experience and qualifications. While the name and information about your candidate is presumed to be public, please refrain from sharing any details via social media or on the congregation's website unless you have cleared this with your candidate. Generally a leader will not give an actual notice of a pending transition until *after* a vote issuing them a call has taken place and the leader has formally accepted the call.

In preparation for the congregational call meeting, the officers should review the 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. (Sections C10.04, *C8.02.c. and C9.04 in the *ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations*.) If the Interim Pastor is available to attend the meeting, they serve as a representative of the synod to advise and consult. The vote to call a pastor should be by written paper ballot (these may be preprinted, or the congregation may be instructed to simply write a "yes" or a "no" on a slip of paper). Per C9.01 a **two-thirds majority of members present and voting is necessary for election.**

Open the special meeting of the congregation with scripture and prayer. Because the vote on the question of "whether to issue a call to _____" needs to provide an official count (to insure the proper percentage), tellers should be appointed. The chair should establish that a quorum of members is present and invite the secretary to record this number in the minutes.

The Call Committee may then present information concerning the proposed candidate to the congregation. The congregation may then be invited to address questions about the proposed candidate to representatives of the Congregation Council and Call Committee. Then the question is placed before the body for a decision. The proposed compensation package may be discussed at this point as well, or it may be taken up as a second motion. It is appropriate to invite the Interim Pastor or Call Committee Chair to lead the congregation in prayer before the ballots are distributed.

Tellers may distribute, collect and count the ballots. After the tellers have left the room to count the ballots, a second motion from the Council may be introduced to address compensation as defined in C9.04. You might use a copy of the *Definition of Compensation* as one way to share this information for consideration, or another suitable form of presentation. The Council may entertain questions about the proposed figures and provisions (which have already been discussed with the candidate for call). Because this is a budget matter, the congregation may also choose to delegate the responsibility for finalizing the compensation package to the Council. A motion to do so must be adopted and noted in the minutes of the meeting.

- *C9.01.** *Authority to call a pastor shall be in this congregation by at least a two-thirds majority ballot vote of members present and voting at a meeting legally called for that purpose.*
- *C9.04.** *The specific duties of the pastor, compensation, and other matters pertaining to the service of the pastor shall be included in a letter of call, which shall be attested by the bishop of the synod.*

The chief teller reports the ballot count to the president who announces the results to the congregation. Minutes of this meeting should note the actual count. The congregation should be instructed that the candidate has 30 days to consider the call after it has been received and will normally notify the congregation of his/her decision within that time.

Before the congregational meeting, the congregational council should be in touch with the candidate to have conversation about the compensation package.

Following the meeting, the Council President or Call Committee Chair should contact the candidate. They will be eager to hear the outcome of your discernment process.

After the congregation has approved the call and compensation at the meeting, the council president and council secretary finalize the *Letter of Call* and the *Definition of Compensation* documents and send them to the synod office for the bishop's review and signature. If a congregation does not endorse the

recommendation of the Call Committee and Council through a positive vote, the documents will not be necessary. A phone call to both the disappointed candidate and the synod office is necessary. The Congregation Council President and chair of the Call Committee will want to discuss the failure to elect and to initiate a renewal of the search process.

When the bishop receives a signed *Letter of Call* and the *Definition of Compensation*, these are sent on to the candidate with the bishop's signature. Once received by the candidate, they have up to thirty (30) days to respond in writing to the congregation's call. Often a candidate, who has allowed his/her name to be presented to a congregation, is prepared to accept the call immediately and will give verbal confirmation.

When a candidate accepts a call, she/he communicates acceptance of the call to the congregation in writing (copy to the bishop's office).

Sample Letter

Following Successful Vote of the Congregation

Date

The Rev. John H. Doe
Address
City, State Zip

Dear Pastor Doe:

I wish to confirm, following our telephone conversation of (indicate when), that the members of the congregation at a specially called congregational meeting on (indicate date) have voted to extend to you a Letter of Call to become Pastor of _____ Lutheran Church.

The Letter of Call, along with the "Definition of Compensation, Benefits and Responsibilities of the Pastor" has been delivered to our Bishop's office for signature. Once you have received these documents we understand, according to the constitution of the ELCA, you have thirty days to consider your decision. We will pray for the guidance of God's Spirit through your deliberation and place our hope in God's hands that you will be led to consider a favorable response to our invitation to become our pastor.

We await your answer with excitement and enthusiasm at the prospects of you joining us as our spiritual leader in service to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through the ministry of _____ Lutheran Church.

Sincerely yours,

Name

Cc: The Synod Office
South-Central Synod of Wisconsin

ACKNOWLEDGE TRANSITIONAL MINISTRY

It is recommended that the council lead the congregation in planning a closure service and other appropriate acknowledgement and thank you to those who have offered ministry support during the pastoral transition. Such acknowledgement should be complete before the new pastor arrives to begin ministry.

SAMPLE SERVICE

Liturgy for Departure of an Interim Pastor from a Congregation

The Pastor (P), a Representative of the synod designated by the Bishop (B), and a Representative of the Congregation (R) come forward.

R: Pastor _____, on _____, you were appointed as our Interim Pastor: to prepare us for our next called pastor, to proclaim God's Word, to baptize new members into the Church of Jesus Christ, to announce God's forgiveness to us, and to preside at our celebration of the Lord's Supper. 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 and in our service to this community.

You have served our congregation faithfully these ____ months/years. You are now leaving our midst. As members of this congregation we wish to honor your ministry among us and bid you farewell and Godspeed in your next endeavor, bringing closure to your ministry at _____.

P: I thank the members of _____ Lutheran Church for the love, the kindness and support shown to me [and my family] during interim ministry among you. I ask forgiveness for the ways I have sinned against you. I am grateful for the ways my ministry has been accepted. As I leave, I carry with me all that I have learned here.

C: **We receive your thankfulness. We offer you our forgiveness and accept that you now must us. We express our gratitude for your time among us. We ask forgiveness for the ways we have sinned against you. Your influence on our faith and faithfulness will not leave us at your departure.**

P: I forgive you and accept your gratitude, trusting that our time together and our parting are pleasing to God.

B: Do you, members of ____ Lutheran Church, release him/her from the duties of Interim pastor?

C: **We do, with God's help.**

B: Do you offer encouragement for his/her ministry as it unfolds in his/her future?

C: We do, with God's help.

B: Do you, Pastor ____, release this congregation from turning to you and depending on you?

P: I do, with God's help.

B: Do you offer your encouragement for the continued ministry here?

P: I do, with God's help.

B: On behalf of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin I witness to the words spoken here: words of thankfulness, forgiveness, and release. We will hold you in our prayers as you begin what God has next for you. We pledge our support and love to you and wish you God's blessing.

R: Let us pray: God, whose everlasting love for all is trustworthy, help each of us to trust the future which rests in your care. The time we were together in your name saw our laughter and tears, our hopes and disappointments. We give you thanks for the countless ways our lives have been woven together in the tapestry of your church. Guide us as we hold these cherished memories, but move us in new directions, until that time to come when we are completely one with you and with each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen.

R: We send you forth with a going away blessing.

(Congregation lift arms raised upward toward Interim Pastor to signify the bestowal of a blessing)

The Lord bless you and keep you

The Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Sending Song