# Chapter 6: Forming the Call Committee

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

Why do we need a Call Committee?

Calling a pastor to be in a mutual ministry with the lay members of a congregation is an important event. We believe it is our Lord Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Call Process. The calling of a pastor represents a valuable partnership between God, the calling congregation and the Greater Milwaukee Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. An ideal call process builds on trust, openness, and good communication. When the Call Process results in a good match between pastor and congregation, the total mission of the church is furthered.

In the Call Process the Bishop, the Congregation and the prospective Pastor work together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring about a new partnership that is faithful to the Gospel, empowers the local church in its ministry, and strengthens the whole Church as people of God.

The Right Question

It is not appropriate for the Call Committee to be guided chiefly by such questions as these: “Will the congregation like this pastor?” “Will it approve of the Call Committee’s choice of candidates?” “Will people feel good having this pastor around on Sunday morning?” “Will this person do until a better pastor comes along?”

The foremost question for the Call Committee always is whether this someone whom God might be calling to serve your congregation in this time. Human preferences and personalities never come before the mission to which God calls God’s Church. That is why every meeting of the Call Committee should include prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the work that is being done (pp. 5- 10).

The Significance of Service on a Call Committee

Many people report that serving on a Call Committee turned out to be one of the most important things they ever did as members of the Congregation. It allowed them to experience firsthand how the Holy Spirit works through committed Christians to help the Congregation be faithful to its calling. It gave them an opportunity to see how the local church is vitally connected to the whole Church. And it let them participate in opening a new chapter in the life and ministry of their church as part of the history-long, worldwide Church of Jesus Christ.

When Should the Call Committee be Formed?

There are differing opinions over when the Call Committee should be formed. One view is that the Call Committee should be formed shortly after the pastoral vacancy is announced. This early formation of the Committee allows Call Committee members to be part of all transition activities, including the development of the MET report and the Ministry Site Profile.

It is recommended, however, that the Council through its creation of the Mission Exploration Team, not the Call Committee, be responsible for guiding the congregation as it develops the MET and Ministry Site Profile. Consistent with this recommendation, the Call Committee would be formed after the congregation has defined its ministry, its mission, and its staffing needs. This way, the Congregation and the Council can be more focused in its charge to the Call Committee.

Who Should Be on the Call Committee?

The Constitution governing your congregation will prescribe appointment or election of a Call Committee. The composition of the Call Committee should intentionally reflect the makeup of the Congregation. There should be a diverse representation of gender, age, and ethnic/racial identity on the Committee. All segments of the ministry of the Congregation should be represented (Worship, Youth, Education, Evangelism, etc.). Beyond these, there should also be a balance of long-term and newer members, people from different elements of the Congregation, drawing upon a variety of contributing styles and gifts. An effective call committee is usually more than five people and fewer than nine. There should be representation from the Mission Exploration Team on the Call Committee, including one member (non-voting) from outside the congregation.

How is the Call Committee Organized?

After the Call Committee is selected, one of the members must be designated as the *Chairperson.* The Call Committee Chairperson can be appointed by the Council or can be elected by the Committee itself. The Chairperson convenes meetings, sets meeting agendas, and may be the primary contact with pastoral candidates. S/he should also be the primary contact person with the Synod. The Chairperson oversees the Call Process.

The Committee will also select a *Secretary* to keep the minutes of Call Committee meetings. While motions may not necessarily be made, Committee assignments need to be recorded for future reference. The Secretary may also be responsible for written communications between candidates and the committee, including letters informing candidates of the Committee's time line and the interview process to be used, confirming invitations, travel arrangements, thank you notes, and letters informing candidates of decisions reached. The Secretary may send/email copies of correspondence to the Synod office, and may write the newsletter articles, notes for Sunday bulletins, the website and other materials that keep the Congregation informed of the Committee's progress.

It is advisable to have one Council member sit on the Call Committee as a liaison. The Council representative may or may not have a vote on the Call Committee, depending on the Constitution of the Congregation. The Council representative will report back to the Council on the progress of the Call Committee, but s/he may not violate the confidences of the Call Committee.

Recognition of The Ministry of The Call Committee

It is important that the ministry of those who have been selected to serve on the Call Committee be recognized in some formal way by the Congregation. The Call Committee members will spend many hours in meetings, expending significant energy over many months during the course of their service on the Call Committee. It is a ministry requiring dedication and commitment by persons who will provide leadership of the Call Process.

AN AFFIRMATION OF A CALL COMMITTEE

P=Pastor C=Congregation CC=Call Committee members

P: Let us pray. Gracious God, in times of change and transition you provide leaders to guide and direct us. Through them, you lead us over the rough places, and comfort us when we are afraid. We pray today that you will send your Spirit to be with these leaders and each one of us during this time of discernment. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN.

P: Do you, the people of *(church)* promise to hold this Call Committee in prayer?

C: WE DO.

P: Will you accept their leadership, support them in their work, and encourage them in their deliberation?

C: WE WILL.

P: *(To the Call Committee)* - You have prayerfully been selected to serve this Congregation in selecting a pastoral candidate. You have been asked to give generously of your time. You have been entrusted with this responsibility on behalf of the whole Congregation. Do you accept this responsibility and trust?

CC: WE DO.

P: Will you faithfully participate in the process, support one another in meetings, and call upon the Spirit for guidance and direction in all you do?

CC: WE WILL.

P: Let us pray - Lord, Bless this committee, its work and its decisions, that through them we might all be strengthened to serve you. Bless each member of the Committee, that he or she might have the compassion, wisdom and energy to fulfill this responsibility. Keep us strong in faith and resolute in proclaiming the gospel to all people. We pray in the name of Jesus, our Lord. AMEN.

Call Committee Basics

* **Prayer** is an important activity for the Call Committee and the entire congregation throughout the Call Process. Call Committee members are encouraged to commit themselves to pray for one another and for the work of the Holy Spirit among them as they seek to discern God’s will for their congregation. Special prayer at worship and during other meetings of the congregation is encouraged. When the Call Committee is selected, the names of the members are made public, with a request that special prayers be made on their behalf.
* **Confidentiality** cannot be overemphasized in the task of calling a pastor. Confidentiality boundaries for the Call Committee’s work should be clearly agreed upon at the first meeting. Issues that are discussed about candidates need to be open and forthright among the members of the Committee. **However, these discussions should be kept in confidence between the Call Committee members. Verbal and written information about prospective candidates must be kept within the confines of the Committee**. Committee members will need to establish ground rules and boundaries, not only with the congregation at large, but also with those in their household or place of work.

The names of candidates must be kept confidential. Mention of specific candidates outside the Call Committee is inappropriate until the Committee is ready with its recommendation to the Church Council. **Confidentiality is different than secrecy**. The Council and the Congregation should be kept abreast of the status of the Call Committee's progress, but no names or other identifying information about the candidate can be shared until a candidate is selected and ready for recommendation to the Council.

* **Communication** is very important to the Call Process. Every means ought to be utilized to keep the members of the congregation informed about the Call Committee’s work and progress, including
  1. Newsletter articles and updates on the Congregation’s website explaining the Call Process to the congregation, with follow up articles each time another stage in the process is reached.
  2. Notes in the Sunday morning bulletins.
  3. Temple talks by members of the Call Committee to update the Congregation.
  4. Question and Answer Forums during education hours. Members of the congregation can be invited to meet with the Call Committee to ask questions and find out about the progress of the Call Committee’s work.

With the exception of confidential information, there is no such thing as sharing too much information with the congregation.

A specific time line for the Call Committee should be proposed and announced to the Congregation. This time line may be modified as the Call Process unfolds, but any changes should be communicated to the Congregation.

* **Call Committee Authority and Charge.** The Congregation and the Council must give the Call Committee a very specific charge as to its duties. The Call Committee needs to understand fully the needs and desires of the Congregation so that the Call Process progresses in a manner consistent with those needs and desires. The Ministry Site Profile and the MET Report are meant to guide the Call Committee.

The Council needs to provide the Call Committee and Synod with information concerning salary and benefit possibilities that the Congregation can offer. **Salary and benefit considerations are not matters that are to be negotiated between the candidate and Call Committee**. The Call Committee, for example, does not have the authority to commit the Congregation to a dollar figure or an extra week of vacation or educational leave.

The Congregation or Council needs to authorize funding to the Call Committee for carrying out its responsibilities, such as cost of travel, meals and hotel expense for candidates invited to come to interview, or for travel by the committee to hear a candidate preach at some other location.

The Call Committee must be given the authority to develop a process that will allow it to meet with and interview candidates for the pastoral vacancy. At some point the Call Committee will select a candidate to recommend to the Council (or the Congregation depending on the constitution) for selection and call. Thereafter, in conjunction with the Call Committee, the Council (or the Congregation) will consider the candidate. Ultimately the Congregation, at a specially called meeting by the Council, votes to issue a Call to a candidate.

* The **Synod Staff** will serve as a valuable partner and resource during the Call Process. A Synod staff person will be assigned to work with the Call Committee. The staff person will work with the Call Committee in providing the names of candidates to be interviewed by the Committee. The Synod will provide the following support to the Call Committee:
  + Interpreting the Call Process to the Call Committee and Church Council, clarifying the steps and goals;
  + Interpreting to the Call Committee their own ***calling*** to lead and guide the process as a part of their spiritual journey within their congregation;
  + Clarifying issues when there are questions or times of confusion;
  + Attending, as a participant, the first meeting of the Call Committee to interpret and assist the Call Committee in their process. It is likely that the Synod staff's involvement will lessen as the Call Process moves forward. However, s/he is available to guide, coach and assist at the request of the Call Committee throughout the entire process;
  + Helping the Committee fulfill its responsibilities as they face moments or issues that are difficult and potentially derailing or conflicting;
  + Reminding the Committee about its goals and tasks and the process most helpful in fulfilling them (e.g. communication, scheduling, deadlines);
  + Attending the meeting in which names of candidates are presented.
  + Coaching the Committee as required to assist the Committee in fulfilling its calling, (e.g. interviews, presenting a candidate to the Congregation, the congregation meeting, etc.); and
  + Providing liaison between the Synod, the Bishop, the Call Committee and the Congregation

# Chapter 7: Identifying Candidates

Where they come from -- Candidates selected -- Three names -- Mobility Forms -- Making Contact

As the Ministry Site Profile and MET Report are completed and the results are reviewed with the whole Congregation and the Synod staff, the Process begins to focus on the identification of the pastor to be called. This chapter is provided not so much as direction for work you as a congregation are to do, but rather to make clear how the process will unfold.

#### Where Do the Names Come From?

There are several possible sources:

* Most possibilities surface through the ongoing work of the Synod Staff. Synod Staff spend a great deal of their time in conversations relating to pastoral mobility. There are on-going communications with pastors serving in this Synod, including assessments of a pastor's openness to considering a new call. In addition, pastors from outside the Synod are routinely in contact with other synods where they might be open to serving. The Synod Staff regularly interviews these pastors and talks to other synod offices about vacancies and pastoral mobility.
* Sometimes candidates surface through members of the Congregation. If this happens, the Call Committee should share those names with the Synod staff person working with you. The Synod Staff will look into the possibility - checking with that pastor's synod, determining his/her openness to call, considering the suitability of the match, etc. Regardless of whether the person is recommended for interview, a report will always be given to the Call Committee regarding these candidates.
* Occasionally a pastor might express interest in a specific vacancy. In such a case, the Synod Staff would consider the pastor, with the primary consideration being the suitability of the match of pastoral gifts and congregational needs.

#### The Candidates Selected…

The primary criterion used by both the Synod Staff and by the Call Committee in discerning the pastor to be called is the Ministry Site Profile. The Committee's focus will be on the question: "Where is God leading us, and who will have the pastoral gifts we need to move in that direction?" The pastor is to be more than a chaplain to a membership list, and more than a caretaker of the status quo; the pastor is to be part of God's movement of your congregation into the future. As the Synod Staff considers specific pastoral candidates, the Congregation's mission needs are the primary focus, and the main question is always whether the skills and interests of the pastor will match the needs of the Congregation.

Of course, other considerations also come into play:

* **Readiness to move**. Neither a bishop nor a call committee can tell a pastor to move who is still feeling called to the present place of service. Timing is often a major factor.
* **Family considerations**. You want a pastor to value family life, and sometimes those considerations impact a pastor's openness to considering a call.
* **Financial considerations**. Most congregations and most pastors assume that salary will fall generally within Synod guidelines. The Synod Staff will not submit a candidate whose salary needs are above the congregation's reach; however, sometimes a question will be raised early on about a congregation's willingness to go higher, or a candidate's willingness to accept less. But financial negotiations should not be a major factor.
* **Housing**. In our Synod, over three-quarters of congregational pastor positions include a housing allowance rather than a provided parsonage. Again, the Synod Staff will assist in addressing any housing considerations.
* **Geographic restrictions**. Some pastors, for reasons of family or spousal vocation, may be restricted as to where they can serve. This must be weighed as a consideration, but should never be the primary reason for considering a candidate or extending a call.

#### PLEASE NOTE: IT IS EXPECTED BY SYNOD THAT THE CALL COMMITTEE, ONCE IT HAS ORGANIZED ITSELF, WILL FIRST CONDUCT A PRACTICE INTERVIEW WITH A LOCAL ROSTERED LEADER IN ORDER TO HELP THE CALL COMMITTEE BE MORE FULLY PREPARED TO HAVE SUCCESS IN THE INTERVIEW PROCESS.

**The Normal Pattern - Three Names Submitted.**

In most cases, the Synod will bring three names for interview by the Call Committee. In all cases, the Staff will have had conversation with the candidates, giving some description of the congregation and the position, and determining that the pastor is open to considering a call.

**The Congregation is expected to arrange for interviews with all three candidates**. The Synod's Constitution commits us to fair consideration of pastors regardless of age, race, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, or family status. **Our experience is that a process that involves an interview for all candidates nominated is an effective tool for insuring fair consideration**. (See Chapter 8, "The Pastoral Candidate Visit and Interview.") Of course, the decision to call is finally the Congregation's alone.

In most cases, the Call Committee will enthusiastically support one of these first three candidates. Occasionally this doesn't happen. When that is the case, the Synod Staff will have further conversation with the Committee, clarify what is being sought, and move on to other candidates. The Call Committee is sometimes tempted to "hold on to one," release the other two, and look for more candidates from the Synod. **Experience has shown a decision should be made before receiving more names - that "holding on" to the name of a candidate is unfair to both the candidate and congregation, and rarely results in a Call.** The Committee needs to decide.

There may also be exceptions to the "three names" pattern:

* **A congregation may choose to ask the Synod to recommend one name**. In this case, the Call Committee may feel it is able to consider this one possibility more thoroughly.
* **The Synod Staff may find themselves without three strong matches**, and may suggest to the Congregation that it proceed with fewer candidates.
* **In a few cases, the Synod staff may suggest to the Congregation that it consider more than three candidates**, particularly if there are some varying staffing patterns possible. But in most cases, your Committee will receive three names.

#### Reviewing the Mobility Forms

When names are presented, the Call Committee will be given a form filled out by the pastoral candidate(s) and signed by his/her bishop, commonly referred to as The Rostered Leader Profile (RLP). The Rostered Leader Profile is a good start in introducing you to the candidate, but it is not meant to be an exhaustive resource.

* The RLP will include information about a pastor's education and work experience, a self- description of his/her particular areas of interest and skill, and brief responses to a few questions about his/her style, convictions, situation preferences, etc.

\*The RLP Mobility will also include the names of four references. *Do not neglect to call them all!!* Often, Committees assume the references will simply give positive responses because they are, after all, provided by the pastor. But references will be honest, and good information will be forthcoming.

* Chapter 8 will more fully discuss preparation for interviews, which should include consideration of what additional information the Committee will want from the candidates. The Rostered Leader Profile and the insights of the Synod staff person presenting the names will serve to get you started.

#### Making Contact

Since the Synod Staff has discussed the Congregation's Call Process with the candidates, they are aware that their names are being recommended. As soon as the Committee receives these names, it should make contact with the candidates by phone. After arrangements are made by telephone, a follow-up letter needs to be sent. (Sample provided) If the Committee is prepared to schedule interviews, it can proceed to that directly. If the Committee needs further time for preparations, communicate that to the candidates. They will appreciate knowing that their name has been received, and having some idea of when the next steps of the process will unfold.

# Chapter 8: The Pastoral Candidate Visit and Interview

Preparation: information, format, plan, evaluation -- Conducting the interview -- Follow-up -- Discernment/Decision

For all parties, a great deal rides on the encounter between the pastoral candidate(s) and the Call Committee. Careful attention should be given to thorough preparation and exchange of information ahead of time, wise use of time during the visit, and carefully considered decision- making following the visit. This chapter is divided into those three periods –(1) preparation;

* + 1. the visit; and (3) the decision.

#### PREPARATION FOR THE VISIT

* 1. **Exchange of information**. Determine what information you want from the pastoral candidates, and what information you want to send to them. Some things others have found helpful are:

From you to the pastor:

* + - The Ministry Site Profile and MET Report;
    - Copies of the Congregation's last several annual reports;
    - Several newsletters, publicity brochures, etc., describing the Congregation;
    - Information about the community - Chamber of Commerce info, etc.;
    - Topics/questions to be explored in the interview/visit; and
    - Sample bulletins from recent Sunday services
    - Website address

From the pastor:

* + - Annual reports from his/her current congregation;
    - Any other resume or mobility information not already shared;
    - Original material – sermons (on the website? Or a blog?), newsletter articles, class outlines, continuing education projects, etc;
    - A few bulletins from recent Sunday services;
    - A visit to the website of the church the pastor is serving; and
    - A visit to the elca.org website--identify pastor’s congregation then click on Trend Report for demographic information
  1. **Determine the Format of the Visit**. Before contacting the candidates, the Committee should plan for the visit. It is important to be open to the candidate's interests as well, but some elements of the visit format might be:
     + Time for the candidate to experience the parish community;
     + A walking or driving tour;
     + A meal in a local place;
     + A look at housing, educational facilities, library, and other places that may be of interest as reflected in your reports and/or the Pastor’s personal situation; An overview of where the current parishioners are living with the use of a map of the area
* Informal time for the Call Committee to experience an unstructured conversation with the candidate… and for the candidate to experience an unstructured conversation with Committee members. This often takes place around a meal.
* A formal conversation—the interview. (See the "Conducting the Interview.")

The following tasks will need to be covered by Call Committee members in structuring an effective candidate visit. Be clear about who will handle which responsibilities.

1. Set up appointments with candidates.
2. Determine what congregational materials will be given to the candidate and send before the actual visit.
3. Arrange for travel, housing, meals.
4. Determine who will meet and welcome the candidate.
5. Escort the candidate around the facility and allow time to “freshen up.”
6. Escort to Interview with Call Committee.
7. Escort to meal.
8. Provide opportunity to look around the community.

Important things to keep in mind regarding the interview stage of the Call Process include:

#### ALL expenses should be covered by the Congregation.

1. A spouse may attend but should not participate in the formal interview. (You may ask someone to host the spouse during this time)
2. Tell candidates the anticipated time line - when other interviews will be completed, decisions made, and candidates notified.
3. Determine who will write thank you notes.
4. The Committee may want to consider a video conference call for the first interview if the candidate is from another synod.
5. **Plan the Formal Interview.** The interview remains a frequently used technique by most congregations. Congregations rarely call a pastor without first having had the opportunity to get

to know them through the interview process. However, many members of Call Committees approach the interview with varying degrees 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? While each Committee will develop its own interview process and questions, the Committee should consider the following points when developing its approach:

**Planning the questions**: First of all, make sure you have read the information the Synod has provided about the candidate. Identify any information that may need to be clarified by the candidate. **The best way to develop call-related interview questions is by referring to the Ministry Site Profile, and the Candidate’s Rostered Leader Profile.**

Second, develop a format in which a pre-determined list of questions is asked of each candidate. Suggestions may include:

* 1. Tell us how your spiritual journey has brought you here to consider the possibility of this Call?

\* (2) Your forms say your first Call was at . Tell us about that ministry. What were your major accomplishments in that Call.

1. What were some of the things you did less well?
2. What did you learn about yourself in that Call?
3. What aspects of the Call were most challenging?

(If there have been several calls, you may want to combine questions about major accomplishments, areas of weakness, learnings, challenges, etc.)

1. What sort of ministry would you like to be doing five years from now?
2. How have you found your ministry being shaped by specific context--congregation, community, events, etc.?
3. How does your/our ministry relate to the ministry of the whole Church?
4. In your forms, you describe your leadership style as . Help us think about how our congregational leadership would best work with you.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, spend time exploring the pastor's Rostered Leader Profile and find questions that help you come to know him/her as a spiritual person and leader.

Situation-specific questions. Beyond this general level, the specific content of the interview should reflect the pastoral opening which is being filled. The majority of the interview, therefore, has the potential to vary from parish to parish and from call to call.

An emerging trend in interviewing is the use of so-called **“Situational Interviews**”. Situational interviews focus heavily on the behaviors necessary for success in a given setting. These kinds of interview questions ask the candidate what he/she would do in a particular situation, what he/she has done in situations in the past, and for specific demonstrations of relevant knowledge

or expertise. For example, let’s say that based on your analysis one of the factors you identify as important to success is working effectively with lay leadership. A sample situational interview question addressing this factor might be, “Suppose you and the worship committee disagree on whether Christmas carols may be sung before December 24th… or… Suppose your liturgical preferences are at odds with key members of the worship committee." What would you do?

By focusing on the most important (or critical) call-related factors, you will be focusing your interview on “what really matters.”

Once the Committee has decided upon the questions to be asked, assign questions to members of the Call Committee so the candidates feel all members are involved in the conversation. Discuss briefly the issues to be aware of in the interview itself (next section), including the extent of follow-up and spontaneous questions.

#### Discuss and agree upon evaluation criteria/form.

If you have planned well, you should also have agreed upon how you will evaluate what you hear. Using the areas of greatest concern as they've emerged in the Congregational Mission Profile/Ministry Site Profile and the interview questions, develop a ranking system for the candidates. This may be as simple as a grid on which each Committee member gives each candidate a 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5, with 5 being the best.

Just a word about using a “ranking format.” Each Call Committee member would receive a piece of paper with a grid format. Establish criteria based on your Mission Profile. This will reduce the subjectivity of the interview by helping Committee members listen for responses which correspond with better performance, insight, knowledge, etc. As the interview is held, each Committee member will grade the categories using a predetermined value system. For example, if the category is “strength as a pastoral care person” each person would rank their impression from the conversation 1 -5, with the 1 as lowest and 5 as highest. The ranking should focus on the areas deemed to be most important by the Call Committee. **This ranking should be done after the interview is completed, not during.**

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1. **Ongoing Evaluation**. To be completed after the Call Committee has mapped out its interview process, but prior to implementing it.
2. Is the Call Process well designed?
3. Does the content of the Process address our defined needs?
4. Does the Process match the capabilities of the Call Committee?
5. Was the “best practices” model helpful? Why or why not?
6. What challenges/obstacles remain? How will we overcome them?
7. Are we confident that our process will allow us to select the best candidate?

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#### CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

Tips on Conducting the Interview:

1. The Call Committee should designate a Committee member to host the candidate. This person, frequently the Chair of the Committee, serves as the candidate’s contact person and should be on hand well before the candidate’s anticipated arrival at the interview location.
2. Following brief, formal introductions of each Call Committee member and his/her role in the congregation, a member of the Call Committee may conduct an opening devotion.
3. Following the devotion, the Committee member chosen to direct the interview should outline the anticipated procedure for the interview.
4. Listening, A Crucial Act
5. As noted above, the early questions should be foundational in order to allow the candidate to “settle in.” Questions which allow the candidate to introduce themselves (e.g., “Tell us about yourself” are appropriate here). Allow ten to fifteen minutes for this portion.
6. The formal questioning, with structured questions, should begin. Questions should be situational (i.e., call-specific) and may be asked by more than one member of the Committee.
7. If the response received from the candidate is unclear or incomplete, a follow-up question may be posed.
8. A Committee member(s) may be designated to record candidate responses using various means (e.g.written notes, audio,video) for further scrutiny by the Committee. **Audio and video recording should, however, be undertaken only with the consent of the candidate.**
9. Committees will vary in the length of time devoted to the structured portion of the interview. One hour may be typical, with two hours considered a desirable upper limit.
10. Allow time at the conclusion of the interview to answer specific questions posed by the candidate. After answering the candidate’s questions, a “wrap up” phase should be led by a member of the Call Committee in which the candidate should be thanked for coming and encouraged to be in phone contact with a designated member

of the Committee, should additional questions arise as a result of the interview. Future steps should be outlined, including the anticipated time line.

#### While the interview is still fresh in the minds of committee members, a time should be set to reconvene the Call Committee in order to share initial impressions. Impressions should be recorded for use at a later date.

1. **INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP AND DECISION**
   1. **Following up on the Interviews**

The Call Committee should send a letter of appreciation to each candidate for his/her willingness to be interviewed. This letter may encourage the candidate to address additional comments and/or questions to the Committee. Any expense reimbursement should be made now. Again, a promise of keeping the candidate current regarding the Call Process is essential.

**It is crucial that the Call Committee immediately notify the candidate when s/he is no longer being considered**. (Sample letter at end of this Chapter.) The decision not to consider a candidate further should be submitted immediately to the Synod staff person who is assisting in the Call Process. Because it is the practice of some bishops to invite a pastor to interview exclusively for one call at a time, this notification will allow the Synod Staff, in consultation with the candidate, to submit a pastor’s name to another congregation currently in the Call Process.

#### Discernment/Decision

At a meeting following all interviews the Committee will begin a selection process. Suggested format might be as follows:

1. Begin with Prayer and Devotion

*Lord we come before you asking for the guidance of your Spirit. As we seek a new pastor keep us mindful of all that we have learned, all that we have heard and guide us. Grant us wisdom and understanding through this time. Amen*

1. Select a recorder for gathering information. (It is often helpful to have a sheet of newsprint for each candidate.) If a grid has been developed, these rankings can be compiled.

Each member of the Committee then, responds to three questions about the candidate.

* 1. Where did the candidate fit best with our congregational needs?
  2. a. What gifts does this candidate bring to ministry?

1. What areas of ministry are not strengths for this candidate?
   1. Could this person serve this parish well? (Could s/he serve as my pastor?)
2. Data or input from the Interim Pastor or other Staff may be heard at this time.
3. Review information gained from contact with references.
4. After data is collected on all candidates the Chairperson asks for comments/reflections or observations on the data.
5. Review

* Ask again for the guidance of the Holy Spirit
* Review and clarify the understanding of what it means to reach consensus
* Allow ample time for each Call Committee member to speak and be heard
* Come to a decision measured against the leadership needs of the Congregation
* Choose the most suitable candidate, not necessarily the one most likely to accept the Call
* While listening to your own heart and impressions, go beyond asking, “ Which candidate do I favor?” to “Which pastor can best serve our congregation?”

1. Each Committee member shares a statement or word reflecting their response and their choice.
2. Make a choice, especially if the selection is obvious based on comments from the Committee. The ranking should be used to guide Call Committee decision-making, but should not be the overriding factor.
3. If the Committee is inclined toward one or more of the candidates, and feels further in-put is needed, a second interview may be scheduled with one or more of the candidates.
4. If the Committee determines that no candidate can be recommended, then usually a meeting with the Synod Staff and the Call Committee is held to “debrief” the experience. This process may help to clarify the Committee’s expectations and also answer questions which may have arisen about how to proceed. Discussion with Synod Staff will determine the next step.
5. As a decision is made a prayer is offered. Each member of the Call Committee then states s/he will support the decision.
6. The Council President is informed of the recommendation of the Call Committee. The Call Committee prepares to present the candidate to the Council and the Congregation.
7. All candidates are promptly informed of decision. (Synod Staff is also informed of decision.)

Sample Letter - Release of Candidate following the Interview

Date

The Rev. John H. Doe Address

City, State, Zip Dear Pastor Doe:

On behalf of the Call Committee at Lutheran Church, I want to express our sincere appreciation for the opportunity to visit with you on . I thought it was a very helpful and informative interview. It certainly allowed us to gain a clearer perspective regarding your many gifts as a Lutheran pastor and we thank you for that. *(make reference to some of those gifts)*

However, after careful and prayerful discernment, it is our conclusion to release you from further consideration. I hope you will not interpret this decision as a personal reflection on your skills as a pastor. It is intended to be a reflection of our assessment of the current leadership needs of this congregation and our effort to find the person who best meets those criteria.

If you have questions or concerns about the interview, I would be happy to discuss them with you. You may contact me at

I wish God’s richest blessings on your continued ministry. Sincerely yours,

Your Name

Cc: The Rev. Jeff Barrow, Bishop Greater Milwaukee Synod, ELCA

# Chapter 9: Calling Your Pastor

Council Recommendation -- Compensation Package -- Meeting the congregation -- Call meeting -- Call Letter

#### Step 1 - Recommendation to the Council

In most congregations, the expectation is that once the Call Committee has decided upon a candidate to recommend, a meeting of the Council will be called. The entire Call Committee or only the Chair of the Committee may be present at this meeting. Careful preparation by the Call Committee member who is chosen to present the candidate is important. Thorough information about the candidate, with ample opportunity for dialogue between the Call Committee and the Council, will enable the Council to come to a decision regarding concurrence with the Call Committee’s recommendation.

The Council may choose to meet the candidate the Call Committee recommends, or the Council may decide to accept the recommendation and forward it directly to the Congregation. **The Council should not assume the position of a further interviewing body, making its own independent judgment.** The Council meets the candidate only to lay groundwork for a strong working partnership.

#### Step 2 - Meeting the Congregation

In most instances, the Congregation will invite the recommended candidate to come, along with spouse/family, to be introduced to the Congregation prior to the congregational vote. This visit may entail:

1. Conversation with the Church Council (if it did not happen previously);
2. A congregational gathering, primarily social in nature, with time for a whole-group session of questions as well as informal mixing time. The pastor might be invited to open the group time by leading a devotional reflection;
3. An opportunity for the candidate and family to more fully explore the community - housing, schools, spouse job possibilities, etc.

**Step 3 – Congregational Vote**

*(This is the responsibility of the church council to organize and facilitate)*