

BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A PASTOR AND A CONGREGATION

As the Call process unfolds, members experience a growing desire that the relationship about to be established between the congregation and the new pastor be as mutually beneficial and productive as possible. This desire is analogous to that experienced by a bride and groom as they enter into their new and unique relationship. Each recognizes and accepts that neither is perfect. There will be differences requiring understanding and adjustment by each. However, their hope is certain that, with God's help, they will overcome their differences through love and will work together toward common goals.

To make their hope a reality, the congregation must recognize that the covenant relationship established with their pastor through the Call process is in accord with God's plan. His plan is that each Christian serve God by serving one another and by communicating the love and forgiveness that is ours through Christ to the people in the world who do not yet have saving faith in Christ. The servant relationship makes it possible for the congregation and pastor to develop a level of trust and concern so that each desires to bear the other's burdens, to do good to one another as God instructs, and through such service to witness to their unity in Christ. Working early toward such a relationship means that there will be not only a good honeymoon, but a significant marriage between congregation and pastor.

In the Diploma of Vocation and in the self-study findings, the congregation identifies its corporate needs, priorities, and expectations. By his acceptance, the pastor vows that, with God's help, he will serve the congregation, give it pastoral leadership, and help the congregation achieve its mission and ministry objectives.

From the congregation's viewpoint, its needs, priorities, and expectations are likely to be of primary importance. However, by its Call, the congregation commits itself, with God's help, to make every effort to meet the pastor's needs and expectations and to support him and his family. This commitment by the congregation is of equal importance to the congregation as it is to the pastor. When the congregation fulfills its commitment, it cements a feeling of oneness in Christ that encourages and motivates both the congregation and the pastor to strive to give their best to one another. The result is that both congregation and pastor serve the Lord as He intends.

The attitudes communicated by the congregation and perceived by the pastor and his family can enhance the prospects that the relationship between congregation and pastor will be a good one. The following are examples of communicating good attitudes:

- *We are happy that God has sent you to us. We desire to serve the Lord with you.*
- *We feel good about our strengths and are ready to improve our areas of weakness.*
- *We recognize that we are all imperfect human instruments of God. Pastor, we do not expect you to be great in everything either.*
- *We desire to make the best use of your time and talents, Pastor. We desire to use our talents to complement yours to achieve the congregation's mission and ministry objectives.*
- *We value you and your family and desire to assist all of you to become an integral part of our congregation and community. We will do our best to provide adequate financial support to enable you to accomplish your ministry and to provide for your family's needs.*

CONGREGATION - PASTOR RELATIONSHIP

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to supplement the comments already made concerning the congregation/pastor relationship, particularly with respect to the attitudes the congregation communicates to the pastor and his family.

The Desire to Serve the Lord Together

It is a warm and joyous feeling to be welcome and needed. This is even more so when the message expressed is the feeling that the Lord has sent you. There are many opportunities to make clear the congregation's desire to serve the Lord under the special pastoral leadership of the pastor being called. The thought here is to express orally and in writing your happiness and thanks that God, through His Holy Spirit, has led you to the particular person you are calling. Expressions of the value you place on him and his family and your desire to serve the Lord with them are especially meaningful.

The first opportunity to communicate your feelings occurs following the congregation's decision reached in the Call Meeting or Call Service. Normally, a telephone call is made to the pastor the same day, or next day, as appropriate. The next opportunity occurs in the letter transmitting the Diploma of Vocation and related documents. Other opportunities arise should the pastor visit the congregation prior to or after acceptance. After installation, there is no end to the opportunities for sharing your feelings with the pastor and his family.

Willingness to Deal Honestly with Weakness

The areas in which the congregation needs strengthening are identified in the self-study. Often, they are humanly difficult to deal with but can be most productive with God's help. What is required is a willingness to accept their reality and to strive to find solutions. Emphasis should be given to what can be done to overcome a weakness rather than to excuse, defend or lay blame for it. The pastor is encouraged and inspired when the congregation communicates that it feels good about itself, the opportunities or challenges it recognizes, its strengths and the talents available, and that it is anxious to get on with its ministries.

The Pastor Is Human, Too

Do not expect the impossible! Avoid making the pastor feel guilty or defensive. The congregation has every right to expect the pastor to administer the Office of the Keys and carry out the pastoral duties enumerated in the Diploma of Vocation. At the same time, the pastor is human and is unlikely to have all the talents to the degree necessary to perform all of his assigned responsibilities equally well. Encourage and allow him to be himself and to call upon the lay talents available to complement his ministry in those areas in which others may be better qualified. In the most productive relationship, the congregation and pastor recognize and agree upon those talents best provided by the pastor and the laity.

Best Use of the Pastor's Time

Demands on a pastor's time frequently exceed the amount of time available. Needs by individual members for pastoral assistance due to personal crisis, death of a family member, illness, surgery, accident, etc., often arise unexpectedly. Events such as meetings of the Council, Voters and Elders often require the pastor's presence. Also, the pastor must have time for planning worship services, sermon preparation, counseling of members, confirmation and new member instruction, weddings, and travel to and from the activities cited.

However, there are other activities and meetings where only his occasional presence is essential. Good stewardship requires that there be determination and agreement as to the best use of the pastor's time and talents. Many ministry needs can be met by the laity under

the pastor's direction. Such complementary ministry strengthens the body of Christ and, in the process, God is glorified.

Assisting the Pastor and His Family

The Call documents sent to the pastor normally include materials to help orient him to the congregation and community. Examples are:

- A brief history of the congregation
- A congregational directory and pictorial directory if available
- A copy of the congregational newsletter or similar periodic communication sent to the members
- A copy of the Constitution and Bylaws
- A copy of the current budget
- A description of current congregational objectives, policies and decisions or plans that the pastor would be expected to support or carry out
- Self-study findings
- A current, detailed map of the area the congregation serves indicating the location of hospitals members generally use; area in which most members reside; and schools most members' children attend
- A brief explanation of the type of community served, types of housing available and current price ranges

It is also helpful to make clear what expenses the congregation will pay (transportation, lodging, meals, etc.) and if his wife's expenses will be included, should the pastor decide to visit prior to acceptance of the Call or to locate housing.

It may be very helpful if the congregation designates a competent member who offers his/her services to assist the pastor with relocation. Referral of the pastor to a local realtor is usually most helpful. The realtor will be familiar with local mortgage companies, rates, and other valuable information. The congregation will already have decided what commitment it is prepared to make regarding the pastor's housing allowances.

The pastor should be offered the opportunity to meet with the Council and Call Committee. The purpose of this meeting is to answer questions either the congregation or pastor might wish to raise, and to acquaint him with local customs and informal processes of decision-making and communication normally followed in the congregation.

After installation, the Council should have ready for the pastor a briefing that includes written summaries of the plans of the congregation and boards, and a talent inventory of members. The briefing should include any special ministries, such as a list of members who are shut-in and background data on each.

Recognize that it will take the pastor several months or more, depending on the size of the congregation, to get to know each member as an individual and to gain an understanding of the skills each has to offer. About six months after the pastor's installation might be an appropriate time to review with him the Diploma of Vocation and the congregation's self-study findings, existing plans, and objectives.

Throughout the orientation process, the pastor's wife and family should be remembered and included, when appropriate, in orientation events and invited to join or participate in congregational activities and organizations.

Providing the pastor and his family the kinds of assistance described is one of the ways the congregation communicates its love for them and its thanks to God for having sent them. It helps them to become productive members of the congregation more quickly. It also helps to establish a level of trust and open communication.

Support for the Pastor's Work and His Family

One of the ingredients of the Call is the remuneration and related benefits offered the pastor for support of his work and his family. Financial items related to the pastoral office in a congregation usually include:

- Concordia Plan Services (Concordia Health and Retirement Plans)
- Automobile allowance
- Housing allowance or provision of a parsonage
- Utility allowance
- Salary
- Social Security (FICA)/403 (B)
- Continuing education allowance
- Library allowance
- Pulpit substitute allowance (Sickness and/or vacation)
- Sabbatical (three months encouraged after seven years of service)
- PLI (Pastoral Leadership Institute)
- PALS (Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support) - for all new seminary grads

The Pastor's Family Time

The pastor has the same God-given responsibilities toward his wife and family as does every Christian. It is essential that there be regularly scheduled time set aside each week for this purpose.

There should also be a definite amount of annual vacation time authorized that the pastor and his family can count on and plan to use as they wish.

Evaluation of the Pastor's Needs

An important ingredient in the congregation/pastor relationship is to fix responsibility for an annual evaluation of the pastor's needs and that of his family. The evaluation should include recommendations to the Budget Committee for appropriate revisions in each of the elements that relate to the financial support provided the pastor. He should participate in the evaluation and furnish data regarding expenses. Responsibility for initiating the evaluation and preparing recommendations could be placed with the Board of Elders since this board has a close and continuing working relationship with the pastor.

References

There are a number of helpful references to serve as a guide to the Call Committee and congregation in preparing the information referred to in this Section. The references below are limited to those that must normally be secured from the Synod, the Texas District, or the Federal Internal Revenue Service.

- LCMS Concordia Plan Services (1/888-927-7526)
- LCMS Tax and General Information Bulletin
- Texas District Salary & Allowance Guideline (TX District Treasurer 1/800-951-3478)
- Church and Clergy Finance Newsletter
- IRS Publication -- Your Federal Income Tax
- IRS Publication -- Social Security for Members of the Clergy Religious Workers