

THE STEPS OF CALLING A PASTOR

From time to time in the life of every congregation there arises the need to call a pastor, either as a sole pastor or as associate or assistant. Be comforted by the fact that yours is not the first to do so. The district president, circuit visitor, MMF and other district staff are here to help you through the calling process.

The following pages are not to be considered hard-and-fast rules. They are a "suggested call procedure," developed for the congregations of the Texas District through the district president's office. Over the years, the process has been revised and updated to serve the congregations better in this time of transition. Therefore, go thoughtfully, go carefully, go in prayer.

When Your Pastor Leaves: Some Feelings You May Have

When your pastor decides to accept another call, retires, dies, or leaves the ministry of the congregation in any other way, a congregation may be in a state of relief, surprise, shock, bewilderment, or sense of being lost. Some may anticipate being alone and without the help they had always counted on. Questions arise: *"Why did our pastor leave? Didn't he like us? Who will take care of my family if someone dies? Who will teach the confirmation class? Can our congregation continue as effectively as in the past? What about members who seemed deeply attached to their former pastor? Will they continue their association with the congregation now that he is gone? What will happen if our pastoral vacancy lasts a long time? Who will help us?"*

As these and many other questions arise, remember several great truths. You were all drawn into the relationship of faith by the only One who sows the seeds of faith, God Himself. He says He will never leave you nor forsake you. In addition, your fellow Lutherans in the Texas District will contribute their influence and effort to bolster you and supply your needs for pastoral service. You will not be abandoned.

Also keep in mind that the decision to accept the call to another congregation, retire, or resign, generates many feelings and memories for your pastor. Regardless of the circumstances of his leaving, a grieving process begins for everyone. To help make the departing transition as pleasant as possible, an exit interview with your pastor may be appropriate. This could be conducted by the Board of Elders or other group assigned to this responsibility. Such an interview can provide information valuable in future planning as well as helping to determine the gifts, abilities, and strengths of the pastor to be called to fill the pastoral office.

You probably have no real idea how strong you are as a congregation. Just because you have not done certain things does not mean that you cannot! Trust the One who has never failed you and begin the calling process confident that this process, surrounded by God's gracious care, will help you discover your next pastor.

The following guidelines are written with the understanding that most congregations are served by only one pastor. They may need to be modified to meet the needs of calling a pastor to a multi-staff position.

STEP 1: NOTIFY THE DISTRICT PRESIDENT, THE AREA VICE PRESIDENT, THE CIRCUIT VISITOR AND YOUR MISSION & MINISTRY FACILITATOR (MMF) AS SOON AS A PASTORAL VACANCY OCCURS

This should be done in writing as soon as you become aware that the office of the pastoral ministry in your congregation will be vacated. The chairman of the congregation, board of elders or lay ministry usually sends this letter.

If a pastor has received and accepted a call to another congregation, he should:

- a) Notify the president of the district he is in and the district to which he is going (if different) of his decision.
- b) Ask the congregation for a release of membership to the new congregation.

STEP 2: SELECT A VACANCY OR INTERIM PASTOR, DEFINE YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF HIS WORK AND NEGOTIATE HIS COMPENSATION PACKAGE

As soon as the district president and the circuit visitor receive notice that your parish will be needing a pastor, one of them will arrange for a meeting with your church council or whatever group is responsible for continuing administrative concerns in your congregation. Consult your congregation's constitution to see if it designates a group to handle this responsibility.

Contact your circuit visitor to set up an initial meeting with your MMF and call committee to outline procedures, fill in background information and discuss your concerns. Depending on the circumstance, this meeting may be held before your present pastor actually moves. At this initial meeting, a decision should be made concerning pastoral services during the pastoral vacancy. The role of "vacancy pastor" or "intentional interim pastor" will be discussed as well as compensation for any vacancy pastoral services.

STEP 3: ESTABLISH A CONGREGATIONAL CALLING PROCESS UNLESS THIS IS ALREADY SPECIFIED IN YOUR CONSTITUTION

Some congregations have the calling procedure clearly outlined in their constitution. If so, follow it. If not, determine whether there should be a special call committee, or whether the board of elders or the church council will serve in this capacity. A [sample resolution](#) can help address this important matter. *(It is also important to clarify at this time the minimum number of nominees to be presented on the ballot for the call meeting.)*

Procedurally, from that time on, the congregation should be guided by whatever process its decision-making body has chosen. Spiritually, the congregation should be consistently and continually in prayer for God's divine guidance through the whole calling process. Calling a pastor is not to be taken lightly but be approached with the deepest level of spiritual conviction and fervor.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PASTORAL PROFILE

All people, including pastors have been uniquely created and gifted by God. Each congregation has unique needs for a pastor with specific gifts, talents, abilities, and specialized skills. In order to help congregations collectively determine their current needs in calling a new pastor, a [Pastoral Profile Survey](#) process has been developed. This process is done through a web based process through Survey Monkey. Your MMF will help you initiate and utilize this process so that all members or your congregation have the opportunity for input. Most members will utilize the online version. A printed version of the survey is included as for any members who do not wish to do the online version. Paper versions of the survey can be submitted to the Call Committee to be entered on the website prior to closing the survey period.

Following the survey process, your MMF will return and provide a "Pastoral Profile Survey Report" of the results for your Call Committee and congregation which will be utilized by the president of the Texas District in screening names of candidates. This report can also be utilized the Call Committee as they review candidate information.

STEP 5: DOING A SELF-STUDY OF YOUR CONGREGATION'S LIFE, MINISTRY & MISSION

Congregations normally desire to move toward calling a new pastor as quickly as possible. Indeed, there are evidences of undue haste in this regard. In striving for efficiency in the calling process, the congregation may overlook the particular potential of its situation and miss a time for renewal and redirection.

Some type of self-study process should be initiated at the beginning of the pastoral vacancy. Once again it is recommended that you utilize resources provided by your area MMF.

In addition, major questions should be addressed, including:

- *Has the community changed in culture and character?*
- *Has the congregation lived up to its full potential?*
- *Is it time to identify a list of expectations we have in a pastor for the sake of our ministry to one another and to the community?*
- *What are the core values that determine what the congregation does and why it does it?*

Your MMF and your circuit visitor are available to assist in the congregational self-study, which should be returned to the district president's office before the call list is compiled by the district president.

NOTE FOR DISTRICT SUBSIDIZED CONGREGATIONS

Congregations receiving financial assistance from the Texas District need to consult with their mission and ministry facilitator, who works with the Board of Mission Administration (BMA). BMA policy calls for a [review of mission and ministry during a pastoral vacancy](#) in a financially assisted congregation.

STEP 6: RECEIVE NOMINATIONS FOR THE OFFICE OF PASTOR

Unless otherwise stipulated in the constitution or bylaws of your congregation, all communicant members have the right to [nominate](#) any pastor in good standing on the Clergy Roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Other members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod may also submit nominations for your congregation to the district president.) It is to be noted that though a pastor may be "in good standing on the Clergy Roster of the LCMS," there may be circumstances known to the district president's office that would preclude a pastor's name from a call list. Generally, pastors who have served less than three years in their present parish are not considered as viable candidates.

Establish a deadline for the nomination process on the parish level. Additional nominations may be made at any time during the vacancy, but they will not necessarily be considered for the call list if they are received after a published deadline.

IMPORTANT - *Please be sure to instruct the members of your congregation to nominate only those pastors who possess the qualifications and experience necessary for the pastor of your congregation, as determined by the Pastoral Profile and the Congregational Self-Study. This means that nominations from the members of your congregation should be neither requested nor received until after Step 5 of this process has been completed and the results have been shared with the congregation.*

STEP 7: FORWARD ALL NAMES RECEIVED TO THE DISTRICT PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

Upon receipt of the list of nominees, the Pastoral Profile and the Congregation's Self-Study from the congregation, the district president will request a Pastor's Information Form (PIF) from each out-of-state nominee's district president. This form, completed by the nominee's district president, is returned to the Texas District President, and contains basic information about age, education, previous areas of service, family size and health. The Texas District President will also request a copy of the Self Evaluation Tool (SET) completed by each nominee. For nominees in the Texas District, the information described above will normally already be in the files of the Texas District President's office. The district president will normally add additional qualified candidates to the congregation's call list.

STEP 8: RECEIVING YOUR CALL PACKET FROM THE DISTRICT

After an evaluation of all the nominees with the assistance of the other district staff, the district president will prepare the call list. This process can take about 4 weeks. The length of time is determined by a number of factors, many over which the district president has little or no control, e.g., the length of time it takes to receive information about pastors from other districts or how long a pastor takes to update his PIF (Personal Information Form) if it is out of date.

After it has been reviewed by the district president, the call list, along with the PIF and SET of each nominee, will be sent to the congregation through the circuit visitor. In some cases, the circuit visitor may direct the call list to be sent directly to the congregation. *(The PIF and SET documents are for the call committee's use and are NOT to be duplicated for the whole congregation. The call committee may write and publish a summary in preparation for the call meeting.)*

As mentioned before, men who have served less than three years in their present parish are not considered as viable candidates. For any of a number of reasons, including personal problems, service in a critical ministry, personal desire, evaluated inability to serve the unique ministry of your area, and others, a nominee submitted as a candidate by your congregation may not be suitable for your needs. Please remember that there may be good and sufficient reasons for this reality, based on the needs of the parish, the man involved and the Church-at-large. The district president will be happy to communicate such matters to the call committee and will provide information on individual candidates, at the committee's request, as long as such information does not break confidence nor defame the man involved.

In most situations, it is not acceptable to place the name of the vacancy or interim pastor on the call list, although congregations sometimes feel the desire to nominate him. Some reasons for not calling the vacancy or interim pastor are these: 1) Being the pastor in that place at that time gives this pastor a distinct advantage over a pastor who is lesser known and/or who lives at a greater distance, even though he may be very suited for the call. 2) A vacancy pastor may treat the congregation differently if he thought he would be a candidate for their pastor than if he knew he would not be. By the same token, men currently serving in your circuit or in a neighboring circuit will ordinarily not be placed on your congregation's call list.

When the district president returns a list of candidates for the office of ministry to a congregation, the first reaction may be disappointment at the modest amount of information apparently available. Every parish hopes for, and wants, substantial facts to aid them in the consideration of candidates. Most of the information desired cannot be secured, as for instance, *"Can we be sure he will understand our needs?"* and *"Can we be sure our congregation will like his style of ministry and preaching?"* There is no way to secure that type of information and assurance. A pre-call interview might give you more of that type of insight or understanding.

Factors considered as a call list is prepared are listed below.

1. The candidate has met the standards of academic preparation, has faced, and successfully responded to the minimum emotional, psychological, and theological standards of his training, vicarage, and practice as a pastor prior to his ordination and initial placement.
2. The candidate's health, the number and ages of the members of his family, his length of service in a given congregation, how many congregations he has served and for how long, are part of the information you receive and may wish to evaluate.

Each pastor on your list has been evaluated by his current district president in a number of categories. It is assumed that most of our pastors have more than average capability in all categories. Significant strengths or weaknesses, whether in character, ability, or theology, will be included in his district president's report to your district president. This includes comments on family health, personal abilities, and potential for different kinds of ministry in different kinds of places. Your district president evaluates this and, where it is appropriate, sends it on to you through your circuit visitor. We are very careful that, at this level, the Spirit be not impeded or that information that might be injurious to the candidate's good name be not

broadcast about. However, sincere and honest attempts are made to ensure that all important information is always given to the congregation.

4. The president's office has made an attempt to contact the non-Texas candidates of your call list by phone to determine whether there is anything going on in his life or ministry that would make it very difficult for him to seriously consider saying 'yes' to your call if the Lord leads you to extend it to him. The circuit visitor may wish to phone the Texas candidates to ask the same question.
5. All candidates on the call list have had an opportunity to complete the Self Evaluation Tool (SET), a comprehensive questionnaire enabling the communication of a man's pastoral and theological beliefs and practices. Your congregation will receive and should thoroughly study the SET of each candidate for whom it is available, understanding that some men, for a variety of reasons, elect not to complete the SET. Likewise, when asked, some pastors may or may not agree to complete readily available personality evaluation instruments. A decision not to participate should not be used to prejudice a candidate.

STEP 9: KEEP YOUR CONGREGATION INFORMED

When the call packet is received from the district office ask the congregation to pray for the committee as they narrow the list to three or four candidates. When the list has been narrowed the call committee may share those three or four names and their biographical data with the congregation in preparation for candidate interviews or congregational voting. PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THE PROCEDURES OUTLINED IN YOUR CONSTITUTION TAKE PRECEDENCE for assembling your list to bring before the voters at the call meeting.

STEP 10: PRE-CALL INTERVIEWS

The [GUIDELINES FOR ASSISTING CONGREGATIONS IN DEALING WITH PRE-CALL INTERVIEWS](#) may give you guidance in conducting pre-call interviews if your congregation so desires. Your circuit visitor will be available to advise you in this matter also.

Your district president strongly encourages pre-call interviews, phone and face-to-face visits, on the basis of the account of the filling of an apostolic vacancy by the first group of Christian believers as described in Acts 1:15-26 and on the basis of the successful experience of many congregations who have chosen to follow this suggestion.

Though pre-call interviews may be desired by a congregation, all pastors do not desire to participate in them. Seek that understanding before boldly moving forward with questions. Remember that the historic position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod on the question of calling pastors is a theological position. We believe God has a pastor for our congregations and that, through the Holy Spirit, He will guide you to find this person for your congregation. For this reason, we always extend calls in the context of prayer for God's guidance. People of God have constantly recognized the limitations of their own human abilities to choose ministerial candidates correctly and have joyfully lived within the boundaries of that limitation, expecting God to act and speak through the minds of His people. Place no artificial barriers in the way of a Spirit-led process! Place no limitations on God's power to act!

Use every means available to develop as clear an understanding as possible of each candidate's unique qualifications. But remember that even with computerized facts, psychological tests, in-depth personal interviews and the like, apparent failures may occur. This at least suggests that these methods are not infallible.

Even a study of past performance leaves much to be desired, for there is no assurance that the same conditions exist that will permit a repetition of that past performance. Nor will you always know the reason why, at another time and place, a man did very well, or failed rather miserably. The facts of the past and face-to-face interviews are extremely important, when approached with the prayer that God will speak to and through the congregation in the calling process.

STEP 11: ESTABLISHMENT OF COMPENSATION AND A MINISTRY DESCRIPTION

Prior to the call meeting, the appropriate board or committee should establish the salary and other fiscal compensation, vacation, education benefits, specialized needs and expectations, and a ministry description. There may be a need to make some individual adjustments, but the basic parameters should have been laid out. Appropriate allowances and provisions may be needed for specific areas of tenure and experience, e.g., Pastoral Leadership Institute (PLI), sabbatical or Post Seminary Applied Learning and Support (PALS). The [District Salary Guidelines](#) will assist in determining appropriate compensation for church workers.

STEP 12: ESTABLISH THE DATE AND PROCEDURE FOR THE CALL MEETING

Once the call list is received, the process for evaluating each pastor's qualifications is completed, establish a date for a call meeting and make this date known, along with the call list, to the congregation.

The call meeting may be a [Call Service](#). In the context of worship, the process of calling is very meaningful and uplifting. This service should be developed in consultation with the circuit visitor.

Whether you call in the context of a worship service or a meeting, normally a written ballot should be used in the selection with the names of those being considered as clarified by your Constitution or agreed upon in Step 3. Voting by proxy is strongly discouraged. Absentee ballots should not be permitted. The basic intent is that the activity of balloting should reflect the latest and best information disclosed at the meeting. In addition, balloting takes place within the context of Scripture readings and prayers.

When one candidate has a majority, unless otherwise stipulated by the constitution of the congregation, the balloting is complete. If this is not achieved on the first ballot, the candidate with the least number of votes should be dropped and a second ballot taken. If a third ballot is required to achieve a majority, the congregation may follow the same procedure and continue until the necessary majority is achieved.

At the conclusion of the balloting, a resolution may be requested to make the selection unanimous. The President may say (while not required by our Constitution or Bylaws), *"I would be very happy to receive a motion to make the ballot unanimous."* The failure of such a resolution, by the way, would not invalidate the election. It is intended only as a sign of unity and commitment to a common cause.

STEP 13: IMMEDIATELY NOTIFY THE PASTOR-ELECT OF HIS SELECTION AND SEND THE PROPER CALL DOCUMENTS

The president of the congregation or the circuit visitor should attempt to notify the pastor-elect of his election immediately by phone while the meeting is still in session. If some unforeseen circumstance indicates that the pastor-elect cannot give serious consideration to the call, there would still be time to elect another.

Where others must participate in the call, as in the instance of financially assisted parishes, secure the proper congregational signatures on the documents and forward them to the other participants as quickly as possible. Normally the pastor-elect should be sent the Call Document and other supporting materials, documents, and information within a day or two.

*The call committee can download [call documents](https://www.holybytes.com/cop/call_docs) at: https://www.holybytes.com/cop/call_docs The **CASE SENSITIVE** username is "LCMS67" and the password is "kofjo59."*

*Print the first page, The "Diploma of Vocation" on **parchment paper**. Once the original Call Documents have been completed, printed, and signed, **make 2 copies of all pages**. Keep one copy for your records and send the other copy to the [district president](#). Mail the original call documents by certified mail to the pastor elect.*

The calling congregation should also send a letter to the called pastor's present congregation asking for their prayers and cooperation in this process. As a matter of courtesy on the part of the circuit

visitor or the congregation, also to notify the individuals who were under consideration, but not called. Send a very simple note to thank them for their patience and openness.

STEP 14: NOTIFY THE DISTRICT PRESIDENT THAT THE CALL HAS BEEN SENT

Even though a copy of the call documents has been sent to the office of the district president, it is also important to phone or email the news to the president's office. Keep your pastor-elect in your prayers and be prepared to do all within your power to aid him in his decision. Your district president, area vice president and circuit visitor will do the same.

STEP 15a: IN CASE THE FIRST PASTOR YOU CALL DECLINES

It is entirely possible, as you might realize, that the first pastor you Call may, after due consideration, decline to accept the Call. It is important to keep the circuit visitor, area vice president, district president and mission and ministry facilitator informed of this development. The call committee normally consults with the circuit visitor and district president to form a recommendation about continuing with the current list of candidates or whether to pause in the process to add names to the list. It is also important for the individual members of your congregation to know that names may be offered to the call committee for consideration and reviewed by the district president up to a stated deadline.

STEP 15b: THE CALL IS ACCEPTED

Be in contact with your new pastor. Begin a process of transition by being flexible and supportive. There are many matters to address in his present ministry. This takes time. Do not wait for them (him, his wife & family) to ask for assistance, **offer it**. Issues like schools, finances, banking, grocery stores, doctors, immediate housing, etc., are all needs to be addressed. Show them the Christian love and support that led you to call him to be your pastor.

STEP 16: EXPRESSING THANKS AND APPRECIATION

Once your elected candidate has accepted the call to become your new pastor and been installed, one person you may wish to remember is the circuit visitor. He does not receive a stipend for his work as circuit visitor, unless he also serves as vacancy pastor, which involves separate responsibilities and appropriate compensation. Rather, he usually takes time away from his own work or from his family time to do the extra work of a circuit visitor guiding a congregation through the phases of the calling process. It is appropriate to plan some way of saying thanks to him for his ministry in your midst during the time of your pastoral vacancy.