

GUIDELINES
for
Assisting Congregations in Dealing with
Pre-Call Interviews

The following guidelines have been prepared and adopted by the Council of Presidents for use by the congregations of the Synod. They are intended for those instances when a congregation chooses to interview candidates for the office of pastor before extending him a solemn call.

PREAMBLE¹

Believing that servants in the office of the public ministry administer the means of grace through which God brings to individuals the benefits of Jesus' ministry, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod deems the personal suitability and preparedness of the person who bears that office and responsibility to be of high import. Heeding the Holy Scripture, the LCMS therefore declares that such a person must be a baptized Christian man who is exemplary in his faith in the forgiveness of sins and in a sanctified life that is “above reproach.” By natural endowment and from education, he must be “apt to teach,” having intellectual command of the doctrines of Scripture and the ability, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, to apply and communicate them. He must have his own household in order and demonstrate his aptitude to serve the church as a wise leader in worship, pastoral care, admonition, teaching, evangelization, and works of charity.

PRESUPPOSITIONS

- 1) The decision to call a pastor is among the most important that a congregation ever makes.
- 2) In recent years, congregations have sought more information about candidates on a call list. As a result, some congregations are conducting interviews before issuing a call.
- 3) Pre-call interviews are neither commanded nor forbidden by Holy Scripture or the Lutheran Confessions. However, if a congregation chooses to conduct pre-call interviews, great care should be exercised so that consciences are not offended.
- 4) The objective of conducting pre-call interviews should be to become more familiar with the candidate's theology, interests, experience, skills, and leadership style, so that the congregation can equip itself to make an informed decision at its call meeting.
- 5) Pre-call interviews can be a valuable component of the call process in special circumstances (e.g., team ministry situations).
- 6) Pre-call interviews also involve risks.
 - a. Answers to written or telephone interviews may give a misleading picture. The pastor and the congregation may not present themselves as they really are.
 - b. Personal interviews can place undue emphasis on the outward aspects of the call (e.g. appearance of the sanctuary, the condition of parsonage, the neighborhood, the community, the people, etc.) rather than on the challenges and opportunities for mission and ministry. Furthermore, personal interviews can be very expensive.
 - c. Not every LCMS pastor will submit to an interview. Some excellent candidates, who will not participate in an interview, may thereby be eliminated from consideration.

¹ The Preamble is based upon “Scriptural Standards and Ecclesiastical Expectations for Servants in the Office of the Public Ministry,” a document adopted by the Council of Presidents in 1989. (Note: The call committee is encouraged to obtain and use a copy of this longer document in its work. Copies are available from the district president.)

GUIDELINES

- 1) Congregations should wait to decide on whether or not to conduct pre-call interviews until after they have received their call list and have reviewed the information provided by the district president.
- 2) Pre-call interviews should only be conducted with those individuals who are named on the call list provided by the district president.
- 3) A pre-call interview may supplement the information/advice supplied by the district president and should only be done with his knowledge and approval.
- 4) A pre-call interview should not be conducted until after the congregation has completed a careful and thorough self-study.
- 5) Congregations choosing to conduct pre-call interviews will be careful to maintain the dignity and divine nature of the call. When calling a pastor, congregations are not hiring an employee, but asking God to send them a pastor.
- 6) Congregations will surround the entire call process with fervent prayer.
- 7) Pre-call interviews may be conducted by letter, by telephone, or through a face-to-face visit.
- 8) The actual interviewing will normally be done by members of the call committee. (The call committee and the interview committee may be the same group of individuals, or two different groups of individuals, or a sub-committee of the call committee as the congregation directs or as the call committee structures itself for its work. Throughout this document, it is understood that references to “the committee” speak of the group—whatever its title—that undertakes the interviewing task.)
 - a. If the congregation's constitution does not provide for a call committee, an enabling resolution should be adopted by the voters' assembly establishing both the make-up and the duties of the call committee.
 - b. The congregation should outline for the interview committee the kind of report or recommendation it expects from the call committee.
 - c. The candidates for interview will be taken from the call list as prepared by the district president.
- 9) The interview committee will be careful to conduct each candidate interview in the same way. The committee should limit the number of questions addressed to the candidates. The same person should ask the questions of each of the candidates.
- 10) A written summary of each interview should be made and distributed to each member of the call committee. It is from these summaries that a report can be made to the congregation.
- 11) As a matter of courtesy, congregations will communicate with each candidate who has been interviewed, expressing appreciation for his participation.
- 12) Congregations will work closely with the district president and the circuit visitor in carrying out the interview process.
 - a. If personal or telephone interviews are used, the district president or his representative should be invited to participate in the actual interviews.
 - b. If telephone or letter interviews are used, the district president or his representative should have opportunity to review the interview questions and make suggestions for change or improvement.

FORMULATING THE INTERVIEW

- 1) As part of the call process, whether interviews are used or not, the congregation needs to have a clear understanding of its mission and ministry and its current situation. Therefore, a careful and thorough congregational self-study is essential and should serve as the basis for developing the interview format.
- 2) In order for the congregation to have ownership in the results of the interview process, it should be given the opportunity to submit questions or subjects to the call committee to be touched upon in the interviews.
- 3) The call committee will be responsible for formulating the final list of areas/questions to be addressed in the interviews.
- 4) The approach needs to be framed carefully so that the ground to be covered can be accomplished in the allotted time.
- 5) Each interview statement should be written down and then evaluated in three ways:
 - a. What does it have to do with the position?
 - b. Why do we need to know?
 - c. Would we be willing to answer the same question about ourselves?
- 6) It is best to agree on a list of core questions, that is, questions to be addressed—in the same words and by the same person—to each of the candidates interviewed. These questions should be based on the congregational self-study and pastoral position description and should be the same for all interviews.
- 7) Trick questions should not be included. They have no place in clergy interviews.
- 8) In framing the interview, focus on how the pastor functions rather than on the ideas and concepts he expresses. Remember that the manner in which a person has handled a situation in the past may well indicate how he might act in the future given the same or similar circumstances. Note especially expressions of energy, conviction, enthusiasm, respect for acceptable differences and the way personal faith is shared.
- 9) Try to avoid “yes/no” or other short answer questions. Examples of good questions include:
 - a. Tell us about a time when...
 - b. What do you want us to know about...
 - c. Give us an example of...
 - d. You say. . . about yourself. How has this been demonstrated?
 - e. Describe an experience where...

Listen carefully in order to ascertain how the pastor draws naturally, winsomely, and confidently on the resources of his education, experience, and faith.

- 10) Some areas of concern and typical questions relating to them may be of benefit to you as you form your approach for your interview process (see attached Sample Interview Format). Your approach, of course, should be based upon your own congregational situation and upon the information about the candidates being interviewed.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 1) In carrying out its responsibilities, the interview committee will work closely with the district president or his representative.
- 2) The call committee will need to determine:
 - a. Who from the committee will participate in the interview;
 - b. The number of candidates to be interviewed (it may be appropriate for the voters' assembly to be involved in this decision);
 - c. How the candidates to be interviewed will be selected;
 - d. The type of interview to be used, e.g. telephone, letter, face-to-face, etc.;
 - e. If face-to-face or telephone, the time and place of the interview, together with its anticipated length;
 - f. If face-to-face, the arrangements for inviting the candidates (be very specific about arrangements for transportation, hospitality, lodging, expenses—with flexibility for the comfort and convenience of the pastor and his wife);
 - g. If telephone, the arrangements for the date and time of the call, together with clear information about who will be (or is) listening in for the congregation;
 - h. The person responsible for inviting the candidates, meeting them, arranging for lodging, seeing to it that expenses are promptly paid, etc. (it is better to have one person do this or one person for each candidate);
 - i. The person responsible for sharing information on the process with each candidate.
 - j. Those interviewed should be informed when a call is extended to another candidate.
 - k. The report that will be given to the congregation (how it will be presented, in what format, and by whom). Ordinarily, the committee will recommend at least three choices to the congregation.
- 3) The committee does not act on its own behalf, but as the representative and servant of the entire congregation. Its agenda should be that of the congregation and not some private or individual agenda.

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