



Call Process Manual – Step 4 – Forming the Call Committee

Forming a Call Committee

The congregation's constitution will prescribe appointment or election of a call committee. It is likely that most of the members of the call committee will be persons not currently serving on the congregation council. The committee should intentionally reflect the makeup of the congregation regarding gender, age, and ethnic/racial identity, as well as various segments of the ministry of the congregation – worship, youth, Women of the ELCA, Lutheran Men in Mission, education, evangelism, etc. You may find it helpful to use a questionnaire when selecting possible call committee members (see **Resources** below).

Because of additional demands on the lay president of the congregation council during a pastoral transition, it is recommended that the lay president **not** be the chair of the call committee.

The congregation council needs to give the call committee salary and benefit possibilities that the congregation can offer (see **Resources** below for guidelines). Salary and benefit considerations are not matters to be negotiated between the candidate and call committee. The congregation council also needs to authorize funding to the call committee for its use in carrying out its responsibilities. This is discussed under “Call Committee Budget” below.

Prayer is an important activity for the call committee and the entire congregation throughout this 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 request that special prayers be made on their behalf.

Committee Structure

The call committee chair can be appointed by the congregation council or be elected by the committee itself. It is advisable to have one congregation council member as a liaison on the call committee. Committee leaders include: **Chair** - convenes meetings, sets meeting agendas, primary contact with candidates, contact person with the synod office, oversees the call process; **Recording Secretary** - keeps minutes of call committee meetings for future reference, may be responsible for final preparation of the MSP; **Correspondent** - responsible for written communication between candidates and committee, sends copies of correspondence to the synod office, may write newsletter articles, notes for bulletins, etc., to keep the congregation informed of the committee's progress.

Confidentiality in the call committee discussions 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 among the call committee members.



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Call Committee Budget

One of the first tasks of the call committee is to establish a budget with the congregation council. Although some of these expenses are difficult to accurately determine ahead of time, every effort should be made to set aside the needed finances for the call process.

Items to include in the budget:

- Travel expenses for committee members
- Travel/meal expenses for candidate(s)
- Office expenses (i.e., photocopying, data entry, postage, etc.)
- Miscellaneous expenses

Note: Although the moving expenses for your newly called pastor will not be the responsibility of the call committee, it should be noted to the congregation council and your congregation's finance committee that the congregation is responsible for the moving expenses of your new pastor.

Recognition of the Ministry of the Call Committee

It is important that the ministry of those selected to serve on the call committee be recognized in some formal way by the congregation. They will spend numerous 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 for the process which will bring about the selection and eventual call of the new pastor. There is an order of service appropriate for this occasion (see **Resources** below).

The Call Process – Partnership and Interdependence

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** among God, the calling congregation, and the synod of the ELCA. 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.

The Call Process Is Unique

On the basis of our Lutheran theology, a pastor is *called* to serve a congregation, *not hired*. Any pattern that includes head hunting, resumé shuffling, or high anxiety interviews is highly inappropriate in the calling of a pastor. The call process is not a beauty contest in which hosts of candidates present themselves to their best advantage so the call committee can select one as the winner.



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The Lutheran call process is unique because it is an effort to discern what God wants for this local church and for the whole church, in order that the Gospel may be proclaimed and the sacraments administered in accordance with the Gospel.

The Right Question

It is not appropriate for a 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 for now until a better pastor comes along?

The foremost question for the call committee always is whether this is the person God desires this congregation to have as its pastor. Human preferences and personalities never come before the mission to which God calls his church. That is why every meeting of the call committee will include prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the work that is being done.

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 church. It allowed them to experience firsthand how the Holy Spirit works through committed Christians to help the church be faithful to its calling. It gave them an opportunity to see how the local church is vitally connected to the whole church. 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.

Openness vs. Holding Confidence

Reporting regularly (weekly) to council and congregation helps keep everyone on the same level of understanding about the process. The call committee must keep all verbal and written information about each and every candidate strictly confidential.

Confidentiality cannot be overemphasized in the task of calling a pastor. Mention of specific candidates outside the call committee is inappropriate until the committee is ready with its recommendation to the congregation council. It is important to keep all names and both verbal and written information about prospective candidates within the confines of the committee. This means 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.

A decision about the process of introducing candidates to the whole congregation must be made by the call committee during one of its earliest meetings.



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Communication

Communication is very important! With the exception of confidential materials, there is no such thing as too much information. Options to be utilized to keep the members of the congregation informed about the call committee's work and progress include:

- **Newsletter articles** explaining the call process to the congregation, with follow-up articles each time another stage in the process is reached.
- Notes in the **Sunday bulletin** announcing that the call committee is meeting.
- **Temple talks** by a member of the call committee on a weekly basis, even if the report is, “Nothing has changed from last week.” (From one week to the next, you will not be reporting to exactly the same audience.)
- **Adult class** may be used to reemphasize the progress, invite interaction and feedback.

Points to Include

- Description of process
- Summary of specific presentations, including meetings with the synod minister
- Outline of progress, including past, present, and future
- List of actions taken
- The preferred process for communicating with the members of the call committee

What You Can Accomplish

- The congregation will clearly understand the process, including the roles of the synod office, congregation council, call committee, and congregation
- Clear identification of the members of the call committee
- Congregation members will have a clear understanding of the proper process for communicating with the members of the call committee

Ready to Begin the Work of the Call Committee

Remember that God is with you as you represent the congregation in the search for a pastor who can lead you into the future God has in mind. It will be helpful to begin each meeting with a brief time of devotions (see **Resources** below) to invite the Holy Spirit's leading in your discernment.

Resources

- +4A – Call Committee Questionnaire
- +4B – Compensation Guidelines and Worksheets (link) – under Compensation Guidelines at www.swmnelca.org
- +4C – Service of Recognition of the Ministry of the Call Committee
- +4D – Five Brief Devotions for Congregations in Call Process

Note: All resources will be provided by the synod office and are available under Call Process Manual at www.swmnelca.org.