

Call Process Manual – Step 5 – Considering Candidates (Competency, Chemistry, Commitment)



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Means of Identifying Candidates

There are several possible sources for candidate names:

- Members and friends of the congregation (nomination form included in **Resources** below);
- Neighboring pastors or bishops of other synods;
- A pastor may approach the bishop with a request that his or her name be submitted.

A call committee should forward to the synod office any names received. The bishop or synod minister will review the entire list, determining that all pastors who are being considered are members “in good standing” on the clergy roster of the ELCA and, therefore, eligible for call. The synod staff person will also contact appropriate potential candidates for permission to present their names to the call committee of the congregation.

Based on the ministry site profile submitted by the congregation, the bishop or synod minister will submit to the call committee the names of pastors who seem to “match” this profile. These names may or may not include pastors who have been suggested to the congregation from other sources. The committee will officially be introduced to these candidates through their rostered leader profiles provided by the synod office.

Who does God have in mind for your congregation? Be prepared to be surprised! ALL candidates presented for consideration should be contacted (at least by phone). The candidates receive a copy of the ministry site profile and a cover letter indicating they will be contacted by the call committee. Do not eliminate a candidate without at least one conversation.

Some Reasons a Pastor Is Not Available to Interview

- The pastor has been in his/her current call a fairly short time. Across the ELCA, normally a pastor is not recommended for a new call if that pastor has served in their current setting for three years or less. (There are exceptions, but they are rare and usually include extenuating circumstances.)
- Family considerations can play a significant role for some pastors and their availability. The age and schooling of children, the spouse’s occupation, or care for parents or other family members are all examples.
- Sometimes a pastor is restricted to a particular area due to matters like custody of children or other obligations.
- Some pastors do not feel comfortable serving in certain settings. A person raised in a city may not be a good leader in a rural setting or vice versa, for example. This may also be an issue for other family members.
- The congregation where the pastor currently is serving may be in the midst of a major project or program, such as a new building program. This might cause a pastor to feel the need to remain in his or her congregation at the current time.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING!

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Recommended Interview Process

Before interviewing begins, the call committee needs to meet, perhaps several times, to study carefully the oral and written information about potential candidates given to it by the synod office. The call committee is encouraged to review its commitment to trust and confidentiality at this time. **Whenever the call committee is no longer considering a candidate, all materials related to that candidate shall be destroyed.**

Candidate meets with call committee members only.

- Information packets (Ex.: recent annual report, worship folder, newsletter, listing of staff, congregation council members, call committee members, congregation's constitution and mission statement, information about community) are prepared and sent to each candidate prior to interview;
- Set up appointments for interviews via telephone, followed up with a letter, including date, place, and anticipated length of interview;
- ALWAYS invite the spouse;
- Arrange for travel, housing, meals;
- Determine who will meet and welcome the candidate/spouse (recommendation: two people);
- Escort them around area – provide time to “freshen up”;
- Escort to meal (two to four others join the group);
- Escort to interview with call committee;
- Next day: two others take to breakfast;
- Option: provide auto to pastor and spouse to look around on own.

Important Elements

- ALL expenses are covered by the congregation;
- One or two meet with candidate to discuss financial package/benefits. (This may take place at a second interview.)
- Spouse may or may not choose to sit in to observe the interview (spouse should never be interviewed);
- Tell candidates anticipated timetable and who to expect as a contact person;
- Determine who will write a thank you note after the interview;
- Use of recordings;
- Determine if a phone interview is needed as the first step (face-to-face is recommended);
- Other.

When an interview has been scheduled with a candidate, please notify the synod office.

For more thoughts regarding the interview process, please see **Resources** below.

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Questions to Ask

As the call committee formulates its interview questions, it recalls the leadership needs identified in the ministry site profile to form an outline for the upcoming dialogue with the candidate. The committee selects 8-10 questions that will shape the primary part of the interview. The committee is flexible in realizing that a give-and-take conversation will not necessarily allow you to ask the questions in predictable order. (See **Resources** below for sample questions.)

Planning the Interview

A crucial aspect of interviewing is the art of listening. To be a good listener, several things are important:

- **Interest:** The person being interviewed has invested time and effort to be with you. Therefore, he/she is worthy of the committee's respect, interest, and undivided attention.
- **Patience:** The committee gives the person time to formulate thoughtful answers.
- **Linking:** Building on what the person has said, the interviewer asks questions that pick up on information already shared in the interview. This indicates that you are listening.
- **Alertness:** The committee listens for key words and phrases, making certain that they are understood by all.
- **Concentration:** The interviewers listen for main ideas, not just facts and figures. They should ask themselves, "What is this person telling us?"
- **Clarifying questions:** Interviewers ask clarifying questions to make certain they are really understanding what the person is saying. If a response is not clear, the committee should ask for it to be clarified. Doing so does not reflect ignorance but demonstrates that the committee is truly interested and trying to understand what the person is attempting to communicate.
- **Deliberation:** Committee members guard against coming to a hasty decision about a candidate. Thorough dialogue with other call committee members and listening to all candidates is essential before making a final decision.
- **Body language:** Committee members can set the candidate at ease by their own relaxed body language, which conveys openness and a welcoming and non-defensive atmosphere.

When the plan is to interview more than one candidate, an attempt is made to conduct each interview in the same setting and manner. The call committee should be consistent in having the same person lead the interview each time and plan for committee members to ask the same basic questions of each candidate. This will assure that all the bases are covered in each instance once the interview process begins. If the call committee eats in a restaurant with one candidate, the same pattern should be followed with any subsequent candidates.

If a call committee member has a conflict and will be unable to attend an interview, the interview should be rescheduled. It is extremely important, in fairness to all candidates and for effective functioning of the committee, that all call committee members are present.

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Interviewing

Much of our communications happens on a non-verbal level; therefore, it is usually best to conduct all interviews in person. Because of certain circumstances (extremely high travel expenses, inability of the candidate to travel at a particular time, etc.), a phone interview may be the only possibility. If one candidate is to be initially interviewed by telephone, it is recommended that all the candidates be initially interviewed by telephone.

The telephone interview should occur over a speaker or conference phone so that several members of the call committee can participate. It should follow (as much as possible) the same procedure as is outlined in these pages. If you wish to conduct a subsequent face-to-face interview with a candidate, a letter of invitation for a personal interview (sample letter under **Resources** below) should follow.

For more helpful suggestions for conducting an interview, see **Resources** below.

Please note: No candidate should be released unless he or she has had an initial interview, either by phone or in person. Some congregations' best candidates were ones that did not look the best on paper!

After an interview has been completed, both the call committee and the candidate are asked to submit corresponding reports of interview (see **Resources** below) to the synod office. The responses will be helpful in the synod's work with pastors and congregations in the call process, particularly as experiences and suggestions are shared.

Deciding on a Candidate

A process for recommending a pastor to the council and congregation:

- The “matching” of strengths from profiles
- A ranking format – more objective process
- Sensing the connection – intuitive – a subjective process
- **PRAY, PRAY, PRAY!**
- “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us...”

Using a ranking format: Each call committee member receives a piece of paper with a grid on it. After the interview is completed, each member “grades” the categories with a predetermined value-system. (Ex.: Category is “strength as a pastoral care person.” Each ranks their impression from the conversation with a 1-5, with 1 as lowest and 5 as highest.)

Tabulate the whole group's rankings by category to get an impression on how the call committee generally feels about each person and each category. This should not be a predominant determining factor in deciding to recommend a pastor, but can help the call committee discover its own sensing and impressions.

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If you determine that none of these candidates can be recommended, then usually a meeting with the call committee is held to “debrief” your learning from the experience. This may help clarify the committee's expectations and also answer questions which may have arisen about how to proceed. Discussion with the synod office will determine the next steps and possible candidates.

As your committee engages in the process of selecting one candidate whose name will be recommended to the congregation council, it will be important to do several things:

- Ask again for the guidance of the Holy Spirit;
- Review and clarify understandings of what it means for the committee to reach a consensus;
- Allow ample time for each call committee member to speak and be heard;
- Come to a decision measured against the top leadership needs of the congregation;
- Choose the most suitable candidate, not necessarily the one you think is most likely to accept the call.

While listening to your own heart and impressions, go beyond asking, “Which candidate do I favor?” to ask, “Which pastor can best serve our congregation?”

Follow Up

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 any additional questions or concerns to the call committee. Any expense reimbursement not made at the time of the interview 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 notifies the candidate when he/she is no longer being considered. This decision should also be submitted immediately to the synod office. Since it is the practice of many bishops to invite a pastor to interview exclusively for one call at a time, this notification will allow the bishop or bishop’s representative, in consultation with the candidate, to submit the pastor’s name to another congregation currently in the call process. (See **Resources** below for a sample letter.)

Recommendation to the Council

Once the call committee has decided upon a candidate to recommend, a meeting of the congregation 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 congregation council to come to a decision regarding concurrence with the call committee’s recommendation.

The congregation 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.

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If the recommended candidate lives nearby, the congregation council might consider asking him/her (and spouse) to meet for informal conversation. If this occurs, there may be discussion about salary, housing, benefits, and possible timetable. If there is a spouse, he/she may be encouraged to be fully involved in the occasion, with warmth and hospitality as benchmarks of planning.

Resources

- +5A – Pastoral Candidate Nomination Form
- +5B – More Thoughts Regarding the Interview Process
- +5C – Sample Interview Questions
- +5D – Sample Letter – Invitation for Personal Interview Following Initial Phone Interview
- +5E – Conducting the Interview
- +5F – Report of Interview – Call Committee
- +5G – Report of Interview – Candidate
- +5H – Sample Letter – Release of Candidate Following Interview

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