



**Southeastern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

(507-280-9457)
semnsynod.org

Call Process Manual

Phase Three

Interviewing Candidates
Discerning the Candidate of Choice

Phase Three: Interviewing Candidates

Now the call committee turns its attention to developing an interview protocol and discussing potential interview questions.

How do we receive names of candidates?

- 1. Nominations from the Synod:** Office of the Bishop staff are diligent in their efforts to be aware of potential candidates who are open to a new call, including reviewing the Rostered Minister Profiles (RMPs) of candidates who have expressed interest in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod and profiles of candidates on the ELCA Database. Office of the Bishop staff meet every other week to review all congregations in the transition process and to discuss potential candidates. These conversations are guided by the concern that the skills and interests of the candidate match the needs of the congregation. Other considerations may include family considerations, geographical restrictions, financial considerations and readiness to move.
- 2. Nominations from the Congregation:** The call committee *may* solicit names of potential candidates from congregational members. It is important to designate a specific time-frame for these nominations (two weeks, including three Sundays is recommended.) A nomination form is included in the back of this packet. All nomination forms are returned to the call committee chairperson who then sends the nomination forms to the Synod Office: **Ms. Cheryse Brenno, Southeastern Minnesota Synod
1001 14th St NW, Suite 300 Rochester MN 55901-2551
brenno@semnsynod.org or fax to 507-280-8824.**
The Office of the Bishop will consider these candidates along with other potential candidates, taking into account factors such as the nominated candidate's openness to call, suitability of the match, etc.
- 3. Self-Nominations:** The Southeastern Minnesota Synod maintains a call process update list on its website. Rostered leaders themselves might express interest in one of the congregations on the call process list. When this occurs, the rostered leader's name is considered when the Office of the Bishop Staff is making candidate recommendations.

Receiving Rostered Minister Profiles (RMPs): The goal of the Office of the Bishop staff is to send, for the call committee's consideration, 3 to 5 names of leaders who are most qualified and whose RMPs fit with the needs identified in the MSP. In all cases, before an RMPs are sent to the call committee, the synod staff person will have spoken with the candidates, shared the congregation's MSP, and received feedback from the rostered minister that she/he is open to considering this call. The RMPs will be sent electronically to the call committee chair for distribution. Immediately following, the assistant to the bishop who is working with the congregation will have conversation with the call committee chairperson about each candidate and his/her gifts and skills in relation to the call.

Contacting Candidates: Prior to receiving RMPs, the call committee should identify several potential interview dates. As soon as the committee receives RMPs, the chair (or other designated person) makes contact with the candidates by phone and/or email, informing the candidates that their names and RMPs have been received. The chair will arrange a time for the first interview. Arrangements are confirmed through email.

Call committees are expected to give a first interview to all candidates for whom the office of the bishop has nominated. It is the call committee's discretion if they wish to interview congregational or self-nominated candidates.

The call committee chair or secretary must inform the assistant to the bishop of the scheduled interviews.

Phase Three: The First Interview

The encounter between the pastoral candidates and the call committee is the heart of the call process. Careful attention should be given to the preparation and the exchange of information ahead of time, wise use of time during the interview, and carefully considered decision-making following the visit. Throughout the planning and interviews, the overarching theme should be one of **invitation and hospitality**.

Interview Protocol: Most often, **two – three rounds** of interviews take place. The first interview may take place in person or electronically. The second interview is a more extensive visit to the congregation and in-person interview and is conducted with one or two final candidates.

BEFORE the Interview: Planning ahead will provide a more insightful experience for all involved.

Consider:

- **Location of the interview:** When deciding location and timing for the interviews, confidentiality and hospitality are primary concerns. The congregation's building may not offer a discreet meeting place. A call committee member's home may be used or a neighboring congregation may be asked to provide space for the interview.
- **Flow of the interview:** Generally, two hours is considered adequate for an in-person first interview with candidate. If the interview is conducted electronically, one hour is more advisable.
 - Example of a two-hour first interview
 - Introductions by the Call Committee
 - Devotions by a member of the call committee
 - One hour for pre-selected questions
 - A 10 minute restroom and refreshment break
 - The candidate's questions
 - Next Steps and Farewell
- **Communication before the interview:**
 - A packet of further information may be sent to each candidate including:
 - Copies of the last two or three annual reports
 - Recent newsletters, communications and brochures
 - Bulletins from recent worship services
 - Information about the surrounding community, such as schools, parks, local newspaper, cultural and recreational opportunities
 - A position description, if developed
 - A picture and description of each member of the call committee.
 - The call committee may request additional information from each candidate including:
 - Annual reports from their current congregation
 - Other Mobility or resume information not already shared.
 - Original material such as sermons (including videos), class outlines, continuing education projects and writing projects
 - Bulletins from recent worship services
 - Further references
- **The Candidate RMPs:**
 - It is important to read the RMP that each candidate has provided.
 - It is suggested that each RMP be read (at least) twice.
 - The first reading, read each candidate's RMP. This allows the call committee to experience each candidate in depth.

- The second reading, read across the RMPs of all the candidates (e.g., read the responses each candidate gives to the same question/section).
 - Identify any information in the candidates' RMPs that might need to be clarified by the candidate. Note any information the candidate offers that you may want to explore more deeply. Create questions that help you come to know the candidate as a spiritual leader.
- **Planning Formal Interview Questions:** The formal interview is a very important part of the call process. Concerns to be considered include:
 - ✓ What is the purpose of the interview?
 - ✓ What questions should we ask?
 - ✓ What questions are inappropriate?

While each committee can develop its own interview questions, the following are considerations:

- **Behavioral Focus:** Interview questions are more effective when they are focused on ministry behaviors. Rather than asking a question about a candidate's ideas about an aspect of congregation life, ask for examples of past behaviors that illustrate those qualities. These questions allow the candidate to share what he/she has done in particular ministry situations that demonstrate relevant knowledge or expertise. For example, you may be interested in how a candidate handles conflict in the congregation. Rather than asking for a generic response, ask for a specific example of a conflict situation the candidate experienced and how it was resolved.
 - **Open Questions:** It is important to keep in mind the distinction between closed and open-ended questions. Closed questions call for only a short, undeveloped response. (i.e., Can you run a stewardship program?) Open-ended questions allow for a more thorough response. (i.e., Tell us about a stewardship program that you created? How was it received by your congregation?)
 - **Composing Questions:** Prepare about 8-10 questions that you wish to ask each candidate. It is important to ask questions specific to each candidate's gifts and skills. It is also important to structure the interview process so as to maintain consistency across interviews.
 - **Sample Questions:** A variety of sample questions are provided at the back of this booklet.
- **Plan evaluation criteria/format:** You may plan or create your own evaluation criteria/format OR we offer an Interview Evaluation Form which can be found at the back of this booklet.
 - **Define Consensus:** Clarify the understanding of what it means to reach consensus
 - **Practice Interview:** Call Committees may find it helpful to conduct a practice interview with a pastor who is not a candidate for the call. The interim pastor or Office of the Bishop staff can assist in arranging for this interview.

DURING the Interview

- **Details about the interview**
 - Each member of the call committee has a copy of the questions being asked as well as a copy of the Interview Evaluation Form or other criteria form that you created.
 - A member of the call committee begins the formal interview with a devotion. Please don't ask the candidate to lead the prayer. Prayer is not an interview tool.
 - Start with introductions. This is your opportunity to get to know the candidate as a person. Inviting them to share about their family and their education and ministry experiences.
 - Selected questions: In this part of the interview, the call committee will ask their pre-selected questions of the candidates. It is appropriate after each question to clarify what has been heard by asking follow-up questions. After all the pre-selected questions have been asked, call

committee members have the opportunity to ask questions that move beyond (or deeper into) the information that has already been shared if desired. A list of suggested questions is included in the back of this packet. Call committee's may also formulate their own questions. This is discussed more below.

- The candidate's questions: It is important to provide time for the candidate to ask questions of the call committee as well. The call committee can gather information about the candidate's interests and concerns based on the questions the candidate asks.
- Conclude the interview by thanking the candidate for coming, making arrangements for the payment of expenses related to the interview (travel, meals, lodging), and letting the candidate know that you will keep him/her informed of your progress until a decision has been reached. Give the candidate an idea of when they might again hear from you.

AFTER the Interview

- Once the candidate has left, the call committee can spend a few minutes together to debrief the interview.
 - Each call committee member completes the Interview Evaluation Form about the candidate.
 - Each person can share their initial impressions of the candidate and some of their responses to the Interview Evaluation Form. However, it is advisable to delay making a decision about whether to continue in conversation with this candidate until all candidates have been interviewed and members of the call committee have had opportunity to reflect on the interviews.
 - The call committee chair or secretary completes the Report of the Interview form found at the back of this packet (1 form per candidate) with input from the committee and returns it to the synod office within a week of the interview.
- **Reference Checks:** Immediately after the first interview and before making a final determination, members of the call committee should contact the candidate's references. While some call committees seek to do this before the first interview, that is not recommended. It is best for committee members to form their own impressions of the candidate(s) before contacting references. It also allows for committee members to discuss questions with the references that might have come up in the interviews. It also saves the committee members time because they don't have to check references for candidates whom they have eliminated from consideration.
- **Under no circumstances is the call committee to check the congregational reference listed in the candidates' RMPs until after a candidate has been invited back for a second interview.**

AFTER FIRST ROUND of interviews

- **Moving Forward with Candidates:**
 - Call Committee Meets Again: Once all the initial interviews have been conducted, the call committee should convene to determine who will be invited to continue the conversation with the call committee.
 - Ask again for the guidance of the Holy Spirit
 - Review and clarify the understanding of what it means to reach consensus
 - Share the results of each member's evaluation grid
 - Allow ample time for each call committee member to speak and be heard.
 - Come to a decision based on the leadership needs of the congregation.
 - Choose the most suitable candidates, not just the ones most likely to accept the call.
 - Seek to ask "Which candidate will best lead us into God's mission?"

- **Contact all Candidates:** Once a decision has been made, contact all candidates either inviting them for a second interview or releasing them from further consideration.
- **Contact Synod Staff:** Contact the synod staff person working with the call committee to update them on the decisions of the committee. It is also helpful to give the synod staff person feedback on the candidates. Often candidates will ask Synod Staff how they can improve their interview abilities.

Phase Three: The Second Interview

BEFORE the Interview

- **Compensation Package:** The call committee and congregational council prepare a proposed compensation package for each candidate receiving a second interview. The synod's call process administrator is available to assist with this step if desired.
- **Preparing Interview Questions:** The questions for the second interview allow for more in-depth conversation and are often based on follow up conversations from the first interview. The call committee may also wish to share some of the issues facing the congregation and dialog with the candidate(s) about how the candidate(s) might work with the issue.
- **Preaching Opportunity:** The call committee might also ask the candidate(s) to prepare a short sermon that they can deliver to the call committee. This allows the whole call committee to see the pastor present a sermon. **It is NOT advisable to ask the rostered leader to deliver a sermon to the entire congregation.** The need for confidentiality still exists.
- **Planning a Tour:** A tour of the congregation and the community should be planned.
- **Inviting Spouse/Significant Other:** It is appropriate to invite the candidate's spouse/significant other to accompany them for this visit but not be present for the formal interview time. It is helpful to coordinate to provide hospitality for the person accompanying the candidate while the candidate is interviewing.
- **Planning a Meet and Greet with Staff/Council:** This is also an appropriate time for the candidate to meet with other staff. It is also appropriate to introduce council members or other key volunteers to meet with the candidate if the candidate and the call committee so desire. **Confidentiality is still important.** Any additional people meeting this candidate should understand that they are not to discuss the candidate by name or share their observations with others outside of the call committee.

DURING the Interview: The second interview will take significantly more time than the first. This may be a half day or full day depending on the opportunities the call committee schedules.

- During the formal interview, the compensation package is shared with the candidate. Negotiation of the compensation package, if needed, may occur if the candidate is offered the call.

AFTER the Interview

- **Site Visits:** If at all possible, it is advisable to see the candidates preach and lead worship in their current context (with the candidate's permission). It is recommended that only 1-3 members of the call committee do this.

Phase 3: Discerning the Candidate of Choice

Once interviews are completed and references are checked, the call committee convenes again and seeks to reach consensus on a final recommendation. Consensus does not mean unanimity as to each person's preferred candidate, but rather agreement that the final candidate meets the needs of the congregation as expressed in the MSP and no one objects to the decision to move forward with the identified candidate.

- **Processing**

- This meeting begins and is surrounded in prayer.
- It is important to keep God's leading and mission central. And so, it is best to ask questions such as:
 - Is this who the Holy Spirit is leading us to call for this next chapter in ministry?
 - What gift does each candidate bring to ministry?
 - What areas of ministry are not this candidate's strengths?
 - Which candidate best fits out congregation's needs?
- If you feel further input is needed, you may ask to talk with the candidate(s) again or ask for more references.

- **The Decision**

- **Consensus**

- When a consensus is reached, each member of the call committee should specifically state their support for the decision regarding a recommended candidate.
- The candidate is then notified and informed that the call committee would like to present him/her as the final candidate.
- If the candidate agrees, that candidate will withdraw from any other call process.
- The call committee should promptly release any other candidates.
- The call committee chair informs the synod staff of the decision regarding a final candidate. It is essential that you notify the Office of the Bishop as soon as the final candidate is identified for the call. The call process administrator will begin the **Minnesota Statute 604.20 Background Check** process. **The Bishop cannot sign the letter of call until this process is completed.**
 - ❖ **Other Background Checks.** It is advisable for the congregation to run a thorough background check on the final candidate. Pertinent screens would be local, state and federal criminal reports; credit (including bankruptcy); and any other background matters that could impact the effectiveness of the pastoral leadership. Two companies that provide background checks are: Oxford Document Management company: www.oxforddoc.com and Instant Checkmate LLC: www.instantcheckmate.com
- The call committee chair should inform the congregation council president that the call committee has agreed upon a recommended candidate and a congregation council meeting should be arranged to present the candidate's name to the council.
- Once the Office of the Bishop is notified that the congregation has identified a final candidate and set a congregational meeting date, the Letter of Call will be prepared and the forms and instructions will be mailed to the attention of the Congregational President at the congregation's address.

IF...

- **No Consensus**

- If no consensus is reached, then the call committee chair arranges for a meeting with the Office of the Bishop Staff to debrief the experience. During this conversation, the candidates are reviewed for their gifts and for what "didn't fit."
- The committee's expectations are clarified, process questions are addressed and a determination is made about how to proceed.
- The Synod Staff person will then work to generate a list of new names for consideration. The call committee is not allowed to "hold on" to a candidate while asking for more names as this is unfair to both the candidate and congregation and rarely results in a call.

PASTORAL CANDIDATE NOMINATION FORM
SOUTHEASTERN MINNESOTA SYNOD

Your name (person who is bringing this candidate forward):

Your phone number: _____

Name of pastor to consider: _____

Name of church & city where pastor currently serves:

Additional information:

Signed by Call Committee Chair: _____

Congregation name and city: _____

Please complete and return to:

Call Committee Chairperson

Sample Interview Questions

The list of possible questions is not comprehensive. The list to suggest issue you might want to raise with candidates in areas connected with congregational and community life. **Select 8-10 questions** that will shape the primary part of the interview.

Professional Questions:

1. Tell us about your theology and how that gives direction to your ministry.
2. Tell us about your call to be a pastor.
3. What does it mean to be a good pastor in our world today?
4. In what ways has your call to ministry changed over the years?
5. Describe some of your most important accomplishments and how you went about reaching your goals.
6. Briefly describe the ways in which you care for yourself physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.

Preaching/Worship Leadership:

1. Describe how you go about preparing for a Sunday morning worship service.
2. What was the most difficult sermon you ever preached?
3. Share some of your thoughts about the importance of worship in the life of a congregation.
4. Describe your skills as a teacher and preacher.
5. What resources do you use to remain theologically and Biblically fresh and current?

Administration:

1. Describe the steps you take normally when working with groups to achieve consensus or cohesiveness.
2. How would you describe your style of leadership in overseeing the work of the congregation?
3. Tell us about a time in your life when you had to manage multiple demands in your work and how you determined priorities.

Teaching:

1. How do you evaluate the faith development of others?
2. Describe your approach to helping adults to grow in their faith.
3. Describe your approach to teaching children and youth about the Christian faith.

Stewardship:

1. Describe the ways you have helped others to grow in their personal stewardship.
2. In what ways have you helped members understand the management of their money and responsibilities as Christian stewards?
3. Describe the development of your personal stewardship.

Evangelism/Mission:

1. Describe ways in which you typically become acquainted and associate with unchurched people in your community.
2. Describe how you have achieved a multicultural approach to your ministry.

Social Ministry:

1. Tell us about how you evaluate community needs and community strengths.
2. How have you contributed to the quality of life in your community?
3. Describe how you go about motivating members of your congregation to respond to community needs.
4. How have you been involved in the life of the community in which you minister?

Ministry in Crisis:

1. Describe your style of ministry to persons in crisis.
2. How have you used the establishment of boundaries to strengthen your ministry?
3. How do you assess your own professional limitations when ministering to persons in crisis?

Interpersonal Climate:

1. Describe an experience where conflict arose between you and another person in the congregation and how resolution was achieved.
2. Describe a conflict situation in the congregation (not directly involving you) and how you managed the conflict.
3. When pressure mounts, how do you maintain your cool in ministry?

Innovation/Creativity:

1. Tell us about a time when you introduced a new idea in the congregation. How did you go about that? How did the congregation respond?
2. Share your current vision for ministry and how you would help others in the congregation to capture that vision.
3. Can you describe a situation in your ministry where a program (or staff member) was stagnating or failing and how you stepped in to revitalize that?

Participant in the Larger Church:

1. Describe how you have guided your congregation into understanding their relationship to the greater church.
2. Describe your participating in the work of the church beyond the congregation.
3. How have you engaged your congregation in local and global mission outreach?

Questions Candidates May Ask

An effective interview is a two-way street, with the candidate also bringing questions and concerns. Allow time and opportunity for the candidate to ask questions and be prepared to address them.

Questions that may be asked of you as a committee:

1. What is the focus and mission of your congregation?
2. What is the role of staff and what is the role of the lay leaders and lay members of the congregation?
3. How many people are involved in leadership roles? How are lay people involved in worship?
4. How are decisions made in your congregation? Name a significant decision and the process used.
5. What long and short-term goals have the congregation adopted? What process did you use to complete the Ministry Site Profile?
6. What is the congregation's commitment to and support of the synod and the ELCA?
7. How does the congregation respond to change and how are changes made?
8. Are there skeletons in the closet that I should know as I consider this call?
9. What would you display on a highway billboard regarding your congregation?

It is always important to ask these two questions at the end:

1. What else would you like us to know about you?
2. What else would you like to know about us?

Interview Evaluation Form

Each call committee member should complete this form for each candidate interviewed.
This form will be a helpful reflection tool as you consider each candidate.

Name of Pastoral Candidate: _____ Date: _____

What are the positive qualities?

What are the candidate's significant weaknesses or reasons for concern?

What are your unanswered questions, doubts or concerns about this candidate?

What are the candidate's areas of interest?

What questions did the candidate ask?

Did the candidate:

Yes/No	Make good eye contact?
Yes/No	Seem comfortable with the group?
Yes/No	Answer the questions concisely?
Yes/No	Seem engaged throughout the interview?

Evaluate our needs in relation to the candidate: 1 (low) 10 (high)

Worship leadership/preaching	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Transformational/spiritual growth	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Youth/ young family connection	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Visitation/pastoral care	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Administration	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Outreach ministry	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Stewardship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Personality style	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Crisis Management	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Shared leadership	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Your overall rating of the candidate 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

CALL COMMITTEE REPORT OF INTERVIEW FOR THE SYNOD

Your response to this questionnaire will be helpful to us as we work with pastors and congregations in the call process. As a group, you should complete a report for each candidate interviewed. You can type right into this form so that you can email this form right to me as an attachment as soon as possible after your interview for your Call Process file.

Your comments will be shared with the candidate unless you request us not to-See Below.

Pastor interviewed:

Your congregation:

City:

Date of Interview:

List some of the positive qualities you discovered in this pastor:

Did you note any significant weaknesses?

Will this pastor, in your opinion, meet the needs and provide the pastoral leadership for which you are looking at this time?

Where was the interview held?

Have you reimbursed the pastor for travel, meal and lodging expenses?

If the candidate was not interviewed, please tell us the reason(s):

Have you notified the candidate that he/she will not be interviewed?

Check if you **DO NOT** want your comments shared with the interviewed candidate.

Please complete and fax, email, or mail to:

Ms. Cheryse Brenno, Call Process Administrator
Southeastern Minnesota Synod
1001 14th St NW, Suite 300
Rochester MN 55901-2551
brenno@semnsynod.org or fax to 507-280-8824.

Five Brief Devotions for Call Committees

By the Rev. Ronald Olson, Director of Admissions, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota †††††

I. In Calling a Pastor, We Consider Our Own Calling

Writing to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul encouraged believers there to consider their own call. As we begin our work as a congregation in the call process, we may consider the call we all have from God by exploring a few of the following scriptures: Acts 2:39, Ephesians 4:4-6, Colossians 3:15, 1 Timothy 6:12, 1 Peter 39, and 1 John 3:1

What a calling – to hope, peace, eternal life! In these verses, all of us are called children of God. Clearly, this is on account of God's power and wisdom, not our own.

This powerful call is the one that comes to all believers through God's Word in Holy Baptism. That is why Martin Luther was bold to insist that "the ministry of the Word belongs to all." And again, "There is no other Word of God than that which is given all Christians to proclaim." (from Luther's *Concerning the Ministry*, 1523) Just as all Christians share the promise, so too do we share the task of proclamation. Most of us take up the task in the ministry of daily life. Others we ask to do so publicly for the community so faith can be created and sustained in us. So we see that in the economy of God's grace the ministry of those called and ordained follows from the call which has come to all who believe.

How do we sense God's call most clearly? In which aspect of life do we find God's Word (the promise, the hope, the peace) being "proclaimed" in the strongest way? The Bible even speaks of us as "holy partners in a heavenly calling." (Hebrews 3:1) What do you think that might mean for daily living?

Gracious calling God, call on us with your grace again and again. Renew us daily in the peace, hope, and eternal life we have been promised and which we have been called to proclaim. As we work to call a pastor to our congregation, may we count on the prayers of all members of this community of faith to uphold us, just as we trust your Spirit to guide us. We remember, God, you are the One who called us first. Amen.

†††††

II. In Calling a Pastor, We Consider God's Gifts

God's gracious giving extends to the church, too. God has not been content to let the church fend for itself since Pentecost. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit still enlivens the community of faith. As Bishop April Ulring Larson has said, "What God is interested in is empowering the body of Christ." God has raised up leaders, gifted ministers and pastors for the church in all times and places. When the church has prayed, "Save and defend your whole Church, purchased with the precious blood of Christ. Give it pastors and ministers filled with your Spirit, and strengthen it through the Word and the holy sacraments," God has answered.

Listen to this wonderful scripture: II Peter 1:3-11. Would any of us, either as individual believers or as members together of a congregation, have any reason to question the truth of those verses? In

fact, how have the promises offered there been answered and proved true in your experiences of the life of faith? In the life of our congregation?

We overhear the prayer that scripture offers up for us in Ephesians 3:14-21. The One who has called us is also at work in us doing far more than we can ask or imagine. That's an amazing thought!

As we join in singing or saying LBW 543, "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," focus on verse two and ask, "What does that verse mean, promise, and say to us about God's watch over us?" Can we claim this hymn's great promise even in calling a new pastor?

Luther's Small Catechism offers his explanation of the third and fourth petitions of the Lord's Prayer saying: "God's will is done when he strengthens our faith and keeps us firm in his Word as long as we live."

And, "Daily bread includes everything needed for this life, such as food and clothing, home and property, work and income, a devoted family, an orderly community, good government, favorable weather, peace and health, a good name, and true friends and neighbors."

We daily trust God's good gifts for our faith and life. Such confidence also belongs to the faith and life of the whole church.

Gracious giving God, give us your help again, just as you have always done. Remind us of your care. Let there be gratitude in our congregation, for all that is needful has been sent and ordained for us already. As we work to call a new pastor to our congregation, may we be strengthened for this task with the thought that your providing reaches to every need of your church. This call committee and community of believers are your church, too. Amen.



III. In Calling a Pastor, We Consider Congregation and Community Needs

*The Apostle Paul provides a wonderful "snapshot" of life in a Christian community in his first letter to the Thessalonian church: **I Thessalonians 5:12-24***

This letter of Paul, one of the earliest Christian writings, already shows Paul's love of lists. Here he checks off some of the characteristics of faithful community life –

- respect for those who labor among us; • peace among ourselves;
- help for the weak;
- patience with all;

- always seeking to do good to one another and to all; • prayer without ceasing;
- no quenching of the Spirit;
- holding fast to what is good.

That is a lot to be and do in the freedom of the gospel. That is a tall order for a mission congregation. Could this be the first "Congregational Profile"? Our congregation today is also the location of

worship, care and mission, and full of needs in order to give ourselves faithfully to this gospel work. Let's name some of these community needs.

Is calling a new pastor more a matter of finding someone to meet those needs (do all those things), or of calling one to lead the congregation to do what needs to be done? Are we, as members of our congregation, only objects of ministry, or are we also subjects/agents of ministry? When we consider congregational "needs," scripture points us right away to the Christian mission that needs doing in God's world, and the gospel work in

which we share responsibility. Fortunately, in our need, there are leaders to help us. And we are in the process of calling one of them into our midst.

***Gracious sanctifying God,** thank you for drawing us ever anew into the ministry of the Word. In the community of faith, we are empowered for witness and service even as we are ministered to with forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing. As we work to call a new pastor to our congregation, show us our neediness – what we need and what needs doing for our life together in Christ. Amen.*



IV. In Calling a Pastor, We Consider Ministry Gifts

If the Bible is to be believed, then God has only “gifted” children. We have this declaration from Ephesians 4:7, 11-16. Gifts galore!

God has given ministry gifts to the people of God, to the church, for the benefit of all. We know, of course, that we do not all have all the gifts. And, some having just the gifts they have been given are also called into the church's public ministry, into the ministry of Word and Sacrament. The Apostle Paul liked the image of the body, one body with many parts all working together –

I Corinthians 12:27-30.

We may all sense that we possess certain “gifts for ministry.” It is no accident that some members end up teaching Sunday School year after year – we are not all up to that important work. Some are very comfortable in front of others, leading worship, teaching Bible studies and the like – others are not. We may also sense that our whole congregation, the community taken as one, is gifted, too, in a special position or especially equipped for a particular ministry or mission.

Think of some of the special gifts our former pastors had. Which ones did they have in common? What were their unique gifts for ministry, for leadership in the church? What gifts are going to be most important to our congregation in the years ahead? Most likely, there is no single gift that will identify our new pastor to us. Nor is there only one who possesses the gifts we seek.

There are many gifted leaders in the church, thank God. So the difficulty of the task at hand is not so much that there are no good candidates or that there is only one pastor who could lead us in mission. Oftentimes, part of the hard work of a call committee is leaving room for the Holy Spirit in the discernment of the many gifts in the candidates God may send. Our task is never simply a matter of “hiring” someone, even the “best” someone we can find, but of allowing God's Spirit to work in and through us to build up the church in calling a new pastor. And that can happen, indeed, because God is at work with us in all of this.

***Gracious gifting God,** we are reminded of your gifts in and for all the children of the church. Call on our gifts now, use us, in service of your whole church. As we work to call a new pastor to our congregation, may your Holy Spirit lead us to discern the gifts we seek and see those gifts clearly in the candidates you are sending to us. In our communications, interviews and meetings with them, may we find ourselves once again who we surely are in Christ Jesus, stewards of your many gifts. Amen.*



V. In Calling a Pastor, We Consider the Changing Context/New Opportunities and Challenges

Listen to Colossians 3:12-17. We are being changed. That is what the Spirit of Christ is doing with us.

There is a marvelous new-life prayer in the “Evening Prayer/Vespers” of the LBW:

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We are not the same congregation we were last year, or ten years ago. Times have changed, things have changed, we have changed since last calling a pastor. What do those changes mean for the calling of a new one? What is different now? How has our community felt the changes? Changing demographics, aging populations, new immigrants, all these factors make for renewal in mission and ministry, too, in service and witness for the community of faith. Let's take some time to reflect yet again on these new opportunities and challenges as a committee.

Are we more open as a congregation to see the gifts of a candidate we may not have considered so seriously before? Many congregations have found that to be true, for example, in looking at single candidates, female and older candidates. Pastor Eleanor Hunsberger states the matter

boldly, “When God calls you to ministry as a person of color, a person who is physically challenged, a person who is different, who does not fit the Lutheran mold of this is what a pastor looks like...somehow the Holy Spirit removes the barriers and people are able to open up to receive such people.” She goes on to say, “We’re helping God, we’re working with the Holy Spirit in this process.” We refresh ourselves in these words from scripture about our life in the Spirit: Romans 8:26-30. We are so called according to God's purpose. The times may be changing, but we are standing on that solid promise.

Gracious accompanying God, the One in whom we live and move and have our being, give us a vision of the times of our lives, the new situations in which we live out our faith in Jesus. May we ask anew what it means to be the Church in our time, our place. And as we work to call a new pastor to our congregation, may we welcome according to your Spirit the one you are sending to us to lead us into the new days ahead. Amen.