



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

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Call Process Manual

Phase Three

For Councils

Calling a Special Congregational Meeting

Thanking the Interim Pastor

Thanking the Call Committee

INFORMATION FOR THE COUNCIL: Regarding a Special Congregational Vote Meeting

○ **The Congregation Call Meeting:**

- The congregation council sets the date for a special congregational call meeting, taking into account the constitutional requirements for notice. Once the date has been established, the officers should follow the congregation constitution in notifying all eligible voting members about the special meeting.
- The mailing to notify members may include a brief statement from the call committee and information about the recommended candidate's experience and qualifications. **The candidate's name will not normally be included.**
- In preparation for the congregation call meeting, the congregational officers should review and have at hand portions of the congregation constitution relative to the calling of a pastor, including the number of voters required for a quorum and the definition of a voting member. The candidate is not present for this meeting.
- A brief biography and picture of the candidate and family should be printed and shared as people arrive for the congregational meeting. Comments from the call committee presenting rationale for the recommendation can also be included.
- Before the meeting begins, all qualified voters will be invited to "sign in." The special meeting of the congregation to consider calling a rostered leader should open with a devotional time.
- The council president then establishes that a quorum of members is present and asks that this be recorded in the minutes. The call committee should present information concerning the proposed candidate and why they have recommended this candidate. If the candidate has prepared a video greeting, it should be shown at this time.
- The congregation should then be invited to address questions about the propose candidate to representatives of the congregation call committee and council.
- The vote to call a rostered leader needs to be by written ballot. In all ELCA congregations, a two-thirds majority of those present and voting is necessary for a call to be issued. (There are no absentee ballots.) Tellers should be appointed by the council president to distribute, collect and count the ballots. The chief teller should then report the vote outcome to the council president who announces the results to the congregation. Detailed minutes must be taken.
- If the budget needs to be revised in order to accommodate the compensation package, a resolution may be presented from the council to revise the current budget. The vote on budget revision can be a voice vote and needs to be only by simple majority.
- At the conclusion of the meeting, the council president should express gratitude to the call committee for its work in this process. The congregation should be informed that the candidate has 30 days to consider the call. The president will communicate the result of the vote to the candidate immediately after the meeting and will likewise inform the synod, and follow up with a letter to the candidate, which includes an unofficial copy of the letter of call.
- In the rare circumstance that the required two-thirds majority vote to call is not met, the council president declares that the candidate has not been called. A representative of the Office of the Bishop will meet with the council and the call committee to discuss the vote results and to initiate a renewal of the call process.

○ **Preparing the Letter of Call:**

- Once the congregation votes affirmatively, the Letter of Call and "Definition of Compensation, Benefits and Responsibilities" are signed and forwarded to the bishop to be signed. The bishop signs the Letter of Call after the requirements of Minnesota Statute 604.20 are completed. The Synod office then sends the signed Letter of Call to the pastor, with copies made and sent to the congregation for its records.

- **First Call:** The ELCA requires all first call rostered leaders to participate in a three-year program of First Call Theological Education. The congregation's affirmation of such participation as well as the congregation's agreement to provide \$500 a year for this program is to be clearly outlined in the compensation package.
- **Rostered Leader's Response:**
 - The congregation president or call chair should notify the rostered leader of the call immediately following the meeting. The rostered leader has up to 30 days to consider the call and will normally notify the congregation during that time. The candidate's decision to accept or decline the call should be conveyed to the congregation president in writing, either by letter or email. The rostered leader should indicate a starting date, usually between one or two months. Any variance will need to be negotiated between the calling congregation and the candidate. Acceptance of the call should be promptly conveyed to the Office of the Bishop.
- **Farewell to the Interim Pastor:** Once the pastor-elect has accepted the call, the interim pastor begins to complete their service to the congregation. The assistant to the bishop and the congregation council conduct an exit interview with the interim pastor. An evaluation of the transition process is also prepared by the congregation council and sent to the Office of the Bishop. The congregation typically finds a way to celebrate and thank the interim pastor for his/her service. This can be done in worship: A Litany of Farewell for the Interim Pastor is found at the end of this booklet. The interim pastor usually leaves the congregation at least one to two Sundays before the newly called rostered leader arrives.
- **Thanksgiving for the work of the Call Committee:** Bringing closure to the work of the call committee and thanking the call committee is a wonderful opportunity for the whole congregation. A liturgy for that time is included in this booklet.

Interim Pastor Litany of Farewell

Congregational Leader: Dear Christian Friends; A church family is constantly changing. It is right and important that we recognize these times of passage...of endings and beginnings. Today we share the time of farewell with Pastor _____ whose term as our Interim Pastor is coming to an end.

All: Gracious God, You have blessed and sustained us for many years and have given us life together in the Christian community of this congregation. Be with us now, we pray, as we enter this in-between time. Comfort us as we grieve the past and look anxiously to the future. Bless us and guide us as we reflect upon our history and dream dreams about our future, so that we might prepare for the next stage in this congregation's life. Give us courage, patience and vision; and strengthen us in our Christian vocation of witness to the world and service to others, through Jesus the Christ. Amen

Interim Pastor: Today I thank _____ Lutheran Church, its members and friends for the love and kindness and the support shown to me (and my family) these past _____ months. I ask for your understanding and forgiveness for any mistakes I may have made and for expectations unmet.

Congregation: We receive your thankfulness, and we offer our genuine forgiveness for any failures and our heartfelt thanks for all accomplishments in our renewed mission and ministry. We now acknowledge your departure from this congregational ministry and we accept that you now leave us as our interim pastor. We express our gratitude for your time among us and ask for your forgiveness for our shortcomings...and sometimes out flagging faith. Your influence in our lives will not leave us, even though you depart from us as our interim pastor.

Interim Pastor: I forgive you for your failures and accept your gratitude, trusting that our time together, and our parting, are pleasing to our forgiving God and to the Christ we are called to serve.

Congregational Leader: Do you, the members and friends of _____ Church, now release Pastor _____ as interim minister? Do you offer your encouragement and support to Pastor _____ In the next step in his/her journey?

Congregation: We do, and we ask God to help us.

Congregational Leader: Do you Pastor _____, release _____ church from turning to you and depending on you.

Interim Pastor: I do, and I ask God to help me.

Congregational Leader: Let us pray.

All: O God, whose everlasting love for us all is trustworthy, help each of us to trust the future which rest in your care. The time when we were together here in your name saw our laughter, our tears, our hopes and disappointments. Guide us as we hold close these cherished memories, but now move in new directions, until that time to come when we are completely on with you, and with each other. In the name of Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen.

A Liturgy of Thanks for the Work of the Call Committee

Congregational Council President or other council representative may lead this liturgy

To the Congregation:

The following people, at the (request of the council, or elected by congregation) have served on the call committee of this congregation: (Add names of call committee members). I ask them to come forward at this time.

To the Call Committee:

You were called to serve as members of the call committee of this congregation. You have a variety of gifts, by the grace of God. You used these gifts in speaking and serving to help the congregation discern the will of God. You listened to the voices of the Holy Spirit to discern which pastor God has set apart to serve this congregation.

You accepted your commission in the confidence that it came from God. You promised to be diligent in your study of the Holy Scriptures and faithful in your use of the means of grace and in prayer. You put your trust in God's care, seeking to grow in love for the whole church, striving for wisdom and understanding. And you were diligent in carrying out your task. Now your task is complete. You discerned that God was calling Pastor (Name) to serve this congregation. Now that Pastor (Name) has come to serve our congregation, the responsibility you have had in the call process is over, trusting in the congregational council and the congregation as a whole to accept responsibility for developing the ministry partnership with Pastor (Name).

To the Congregation:

People of God: Will you accept the responsibility for your partnership in ministry with Pastor (Name)? Will you pray for him / her, welcome him / her and (family) and help him / her / them to become a part of this congregation? If so, answer: "Yes, by the help of God."

St. Paul writes: "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from this day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ".

To the Call Committee:

On behalf of your brothers and sisters in Christ, I give thanks to God for your sharing in the Gospel and your faithful service on the call committee.

To the congregation: Please feel free to express your appreciation.

To the Call Committee:

May Almighty God, who has guided you on this task, continue to bless you and guide you in all that you do. Amen.