

PROCEDURE AND PRACTICE FOR CONGREGATIONS IN PASTORAL TRANSITION

Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod - ELCA

When a pastoral transition occurs in a congregation, the resources of the bishop, staff, and mission district dean are available for the important task of securing new pastoral leadership. Some procedures are provided in the synod's constitution. Others have been developed from experience with many congregations. Congregation leaders will want to follow these procedures carefully so synod resources can be used efficiently and the best possible match of pastor and congregation can be made.

In union church or shared ministry settings, some special procedures must be followed. These will be explained as necessary.

1. Meet with the Mission District Dean

The first step in the pastoral vacancy process is for the president (or vice president, if the pastor is president) of the Congregation Council (or of a joint pastoral charge council) to contact the mission district dean. The dean and president will arrange for a meeting with the Congregation Council as soon as practical. The synod staff person assigned to that mission district may attend that meeting. This meeting may occur while the present pastor is still serving the congregation. The dean will review the procedures to assist the congregation during the period of transition. This includes:

- getting information necessary to arrange Sunday supply pastors
- introducing materials used in preparing a self-study report
- sharing information on pastors' salaries and benefits throughout the synod
- arranging for the possibility of an exit interview (or doing it right then)
- arranging for an interim pastor to provide pastoral care during the pastoral vacancy (see Form LT16, "Guidelines for the Interim Pastor and Congregation.")
- arranging an information-gathering meeting of the congregation's members

2. Appoint Call Committee

The Call Committee is a body of six voting members of the congregation (usually three men and three women, one under the age of eighteen) appointed by the Congregation Council, to represent the congregation in the process of search and selection of a candidate. They should be active members who represent a cross-section of the congregation, who can interview a candidate effectively, and who places a high value on confidentiality. No more than one member of the Call Committee should also be a member of the Congregation Council, and that one member should not be the president of the Council.

Although an organizing meeting of the committee may be held before the Congregation Council meets with the bishop, no action to select a candidate should occur until after that council meeting. At the organizing meeting the committee could also discuss and answer questions

raised in the "Call Committee and Council Report Form" in order to participate intelligently in the special council meeting when the congregational survey booklet is reviewed. Call Committee members should also attend the council meeting with the synod staff liaison.

3. Prepare a Congregational Study Booklet

Councils and congregations have found that the vacancy process you are now beginning is very helpful in securing a pastor. A study booklet will be prepared from the information you gather. A copy will be provided for each council member. This booklet will be very important when council and Call Committee meet with the bishop, and will assist in providing the pastoral leadership suitable to your congregation.

It is important to carry out the study as thoroughly and uniformly as possible. This will help the synod office prepare charts and analyses based on an accurate picture of your congregation.

Please follow these instructions carefully. Your efforts will largely determine the benefit of this study to you and the bishop in securing pastoral leadership.

- a. Three-week Survey Questionnaire (Form LT21) Mission District Dean will provide a sample form.

- i. Use the survey questionnaire during three consecutive worship services.

Introduce the survey questionnaire during the service, at whatever point you choose. Allow enough time for people to complete the form, and then have ushers collect forms. Do not encourage people to take the forms home for completion, and do not mail them to members. Doing either of these two will result in a lower rate of participation and lessen the value of the final results.

- ii. Distribute the forms to everybody in church on three consecutive Sundays.

On the first Sunday, hand out questionnaire to everyone and ask all confirmed members to complete it. Lead the members through the survey question by question.

On the second and third Sundays, distribute forms to everyone but ask that only confirmed members who have not yet done so fill them out.

Experience shows you will reach from 50% to 60% of your confirmed members by using this method. Giving forms out to everyone on each of three Sundays avoids embarrassing people to admit they were not in church the previous one or two Sundays.

- iii. Explain the survey to the congregation.

Explain the survey as thoroughly as possible when introducing it. Give some reasons for the study, and explain that it will help the Congregation Council and

the bishop find the kind of pastoral leadership most suitable to this congregation. Remind them that all forms are anonymous and should not be signed.

- iv. Start the survey as soon as you wish. The survey may be started while your present pastor is still serving. The congregation president (vice president, if the pastor is president) or a lay leader designated by the Congregation Council introduces the questionnaire to the congregation.
 - v. After the congregational questionnaires have been filled out during three consecutive worship services, collect and hold them.
- b. Congregational Information Meeting—synod staff person will provide the forms.
- i. The dean and the synod staff person relating to your congregation will arrange a date and time for this meeting. All members of the congregation are invited (sample invitation Form LT20) and asked to provide information, perceptions and ideas about the congregation.
 - ii. After this meeting, collect the small group summaries and newsprint of "Four Questions," and the Ministry Assessment instruments. Collect and hold the summaries, newsprint and instruments.
- c. Call Committee and Congregation Council Report (Form LT22)

The synod staff liaison will provide copies of a report Form LT22, which the Congregation Council and Call Committee complete. This form is completed after the meeting of the congregation (3.b.) to take advantage of the results of that meeting. The Congregation Council and Call Committee should then meet to discuss their responses and should combine them into one consensus report form.

Take all of the collected materials, place them in a large envelope, and send to:

Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod - ELCA
Congregational Study Booklets
4865 Hamilton Blvd.
Wescosville PA 18106-9705

This information will be used to make a study booklet of the congregation, which will be reviewed when the bishop meets with the council and Call Committee.

PLEASE NOTE: This meeting with the bishop cannot be held until this information has been returned and compiled into a study booklet.

4. Meet with the Bishop

When the congregation study booklet is completed, the bishop and synod staff person will meet with the Congregation Council and Call Committee. The following will occur at this meeting:

- information in the booklet will be reviewed for accuracy and interpretation
- questions will be answered about the vacancy process
- the council and Call Committee will be briefed about next steps
- a decision will be made regarding whether this will be a single or multiple candidate process

5. Identify a Candidate or Candidates

The next step in the process involves the work of the bishop and staff in seeking potential candidates for the congregation. They will use information provided by the congregational booklet and information from the meeting with the Congregation Council in seeking candidates to recommend to the Call Committee.

It is important to allow sufficient time for the bishop and staff to complete this stage of the process. A number of things will be taken into consideration:

- the type of person the council feels is needed and desired
- the specific opportunities and problems of the parish
- the mission of the congregation in its community
- the financial provisions ready to be offered the next pastor

The bishop may have to contact a large number of persons before persons are identified who both match the situation and are willing to be candidates.

The Congregation Council or Call Committee may suggest specific names to the bishop for recommendation. Since many other factors are involved, the bishop will make the decision whether or not a specific name can be communicated to a Call Committee. Approximately six to eight weeks are required to submit a name (see Form LT28 "Guidelines for Pastoral Call Committee" for details). A name is not recommended to the Call Committee without the candidate's permission. The synod constitution (BL S14.11.c.) states: "Nominations for the filling of pastoral vacancies must be made to the Pastoral Call Committee of the pastoral charge through and with the approval of the Bishop and without that approval no nominee shall at any time be considered."

There are three ways in which the Call Committee may carry out its work: single candidate, multiple candidate or blind résumé. (If the candidate is a seminarian or a seminary graduate awaiting ordination, however, only the single candidate process may be used.)

6. The Call Committee (Option A: One candidate at a time)

- a. The bishop of the synod will recommend a candidate to the chairperson of the Pastoral Call Committee. It is essential that the committee keep the candidate's name in strict confidence. The chairperson of the committee will report regularly to the Congregation Council.

- b. The committee will meet and interview the candidate. This may require more than one meeting. Normally a spouse does not participate in the first interview. The congregation pays any travel expenses for the candidate.
- c. If there is a continuing interest on both sides, the committee will observe the candidate conducting worship and preaching. This may take place at the pastor's current congregation or at a neutral site, as determined by both the committee and the pastor. Any expenses the committee incurs in visiting and hearing the candidate preach should be paid by the congregation. If there is a continuing interest, a special meeting of the council and the call committee will be held to interview the candidate. (Prior to the meeting with the council the Call Committee chair and the council president should meet (or be in contact) with the candidate to complete compensation understandings.)
- d. If either party shows no further interest at any time in this process, the bishop of the synod must be notified. A new name is submitted and the interview process begins again.

6. The Call Committee (Option B: Multiple Candidates)

- a. The bishop will recommend two to five candidates (the norm to be three) to the chairperson of the Pastoral Call Committee. It is essential that the committee keep the candidates' names in strict confidence. The chairperson of the committee will report regularly to the Congregation Council.
- b. The committee will meet and interview each candidate. (More than one session may be needed.) Normally a spouse does not participate in the first interview. The congregation pays any travel expenses for the candidates.
- c. If there is a continuing interest on the part of the committee and the candidate, the committee will observe each candidate conducting worship and preaching. This may take place at the pastor's current congregation or at a neutral site, as determined by both the committee and the pastor. The congregation should pay any expenses the committee incurs in visiting and hearing the candidates preach. Unless the candidate withdraws following the interview, the committee should normally hear all the candidates preach before making a decision to discontinue with any of the candidates. (An exception may be allowed if, following the initial interview, the committee is altogether convinced that the candidate is not acceptable. If this be the case, the committee chairperson is requested to contact the bishop or the associate of the bishop right away.)
- d. After interviews and worship visits with all candidates (and possible follow-up interviews with one or more of them), the committee should decide (1) to recommend one of the candidates to the council; or (2) to notify the bishop that none of the candidates will be recommended.
- e. If there is a candidate to be recommended to the council, a special meeting of the Congregation Council and the Call Committee shall be called for a further interview with the candidate. (Prior to the meeting with the council, the Call Committee chair

and the council president should meet (or be in contact) with the candidate to complete compensation understandings.)

NOTE: At any time during this process (steps 6-8) it may be necessary to call a special congregational meeting to approve financial arrangements.

6. The Call Committee (Option C: Blind Résumés)

The bishop will recommend two to five candidates (the norm to be three) to the chairperson of the Pastoral Call Committee, providing material describing the experience and skills but not the identity of each candidate.

- a. The committee will review the descriptive material and choose one candidate to interview. Complete biographical information on that candidate will then be provided by the bishop's office. The committee will meet and interview the candidate. (More than one session may be needed.) Normally a spouse does not participate in the first interview. The congregation pays any travel expenses for the candidate.
- b. If there is a continuing interest on the part of the committee and the candidate, the committee will observe the candidate conducting worship and preaching. This may take place at the pastor's current congregation or at a neutral site, as determined by both the committee and the pastor. Any expenses the committee incurs in visiting and hearing the candidate preach should be paid by the congregation. If there is a continuing interest, a special meeting of the council and the call committee will be held to interview the candidate. (Prior to the meeting with the council the Call Committee chair and the council president should meet (or be in contact) with the candidate to complete compensation understandings.)
- c. If either party shows no further interest at any time in this process, the bishop of the synod must be notified. New résumés are submitted and the interview process begins again.

NOTE: At any time during this process (steps 6-8) it may be necessary to call a special congregational meeting to approve financial arrangements.

7. Special Meeting of the Congregation Council with Candidate and Spouse

The Call Committee chairperson and council lay president or vice president will call a special council meeting to which the candidate is invited. The candidate and spouse, if any, should be invited to visit the congregation on this day to tour the church, (parsonage), and community. The Congregation Council pays expenses for the trip. After dinner, the candidate's spouse may be entertained in a home of the congregation while the candidate attends the council meeting.

The council will discuss the possible future pastoral relationship. A formal vote should be taken recommending the candidate to a congregational meeting for election. When the council has

decided to recommend the candidate for election, a date should be agreed upon for the congregational meeting, and the president should immediately notify the bishop as to this date. The synod office should also be notified if this congregational meeting is to be held following a regular service, so the supply pastor for that Sunday might be cancelled.

8. Preparing the Congregation for the Candidate

It is helpful to arrange an informal reception for congregational members to meet the candidate (and family). Normally this should occur no earlier than the Saturday evening just prior to the congregational election meeting. Sunday morning, just prior to the worship service, is another possibility for this informal reception. An information sheet about the candidate may be distributed at this reception as well as along with the bulletin at the worship service.

9. The Congregational Meeting

The council should be careful to observe constitutional requirements in calling a special congregational meeting. Announcement of the meeting should say only that: "on (day and date) at (time) there will be a special congregational meeting to take action on a recommendation of the Congregation Council relative to calling a pastor."

The congregation may hold the election following a regular or special service, at which time the prospective pastor conducts worship and preaches the sermon. The candidate then is excused immediately following the service.

A representative appointed by the bishop conducts the special congregational meeting. The order for this special meeting includes:

- prayer
- presentation of the motion of the Congregation Council (the motion should read "that (name) be extended a call as pastor of (congregation or pastoral charge)."
- discussion of the motion, presentation of biographical information about the candidate, opportunity for members to ask questions
- vote by secret ballot of voting members present.

Ballots are provided by the council and should be blank pieces of paper on which the voters are instructed to write either "yes" or "no". A vote is taken on the recommendation of the Congregation Council, and only this single nomination of council may be voted upon.

In order for a call to be issued, the candidate must receive at least two-thirds affirmative votes of the total votes cast. In the case of a multiple congregation pastoral charge, at least a majority is required in each congregation and two-thirds of the total votes.

When the voting results in a call, the synod representative will report the exact number of affirmative and negative votes to the pastor-elect, bishop, and mission district dean. Call forms furnished by the synod will be completed and distributed by the Congregation Council president (return all copies to the synod office for the bishop's signature). The candidate will formally

accept the call by a written reply, indicating the effective date. Until this written reply is received, there should not be any newspaper publicity concerning the election. (A copy of the acceptance letter should be sent to the bishop.)

10. Pastor Moves to New Congregation - Installation

After moving to the new parish, the pastor will arrange with the dean of the mission district and bishop of synod for the installation.

Moving expenses for the pastor relocating in a new congregation are the responsibility of the congregation (or pastoral charge) that calls the pastor.

11. On-going Relationship - Mutual Ministry Committee

After a pastor is called, the council should establish an on going "Mutual Ministry Committee" to provide feedback and support. Guidelines for the establishment of such a committee will be provided when the bishop meets with the Congregation Council.

12. Pastor/Congregation - Six-Month Check-Up

Approximately six to eight months after a pastor begins his/her ministry in a new congregation, a check-up meeting should be held with the following people in attendance: Congregation Council, pastor(s), mission district dean, synod staff liaison. It would be helpful to set the date for this meeting at the time of the pastor's installation.