

# CALL PROCESS IN THE OREGON SYNOD

## PREAMBLE

We are all called to ministry in our Baptism; in the context of that universal call, some are called to specific ministries in the church.

The following call process grows out of a Lutheran understanding of and sensitivity to the call to specific ministries. For the purposes of this process, three elements of the call are necessary.

First, the call must be personal; that is, the person being called must have a sense of call to the ministry involved. The person accepting the call must believe that this is where God, through the Holy Spirit, wants her or him to serve.

Second, the call must come from the community where the ministry will take place. Usually, this is a congregation or congregations. In the case of special ministries, the call may come from synod through its council, boards, committees or other responsible bodies. They represent the community where the ministry will take place. While many aspects of "job interview" will be involved, the community does not simply hire. It determines the person whom, in its understanding, God wishes to be involved in the ministry at that time and place.

Third, the broader church must be involved in the call process. Ideally, that should be the church universal; existentially, it usually is the related church organization -- the synod, the region, the churchwide Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This is more than a practical situation to avoid irresponsible exercise of ministry. It stems from the understanding that the called individual is called to a ministry in the entire church of Christ. The assignment to a specific congregation, task or function does not negate that breadth of the call.

The call process outlined in the following pages maintains the integrity of these three elements. The individual is respected in the option to request consideration for a call, to accept or decline a mutual interview for the proposed ministry, to accept or decline a call. The community where ministry will take place has the right to suggest names for nomination, the option to engage in mutual interview for the ministry and the decision to call or not call individuals whose names have been submitted. The broader church, in this case the synod, usually acting through the bishop, has the responsibility to receive suggestions, submit names for consideration, be represented at the call meeting and attest the call. We believe that this process maintains a proper balance among the three elements outlined above.

## OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

The following steps are to be followed in the process of filling a ministry vacancy in a congregation or agency of the Oregon Synod:

### PREPARING THE BASIS:

Steps 1-6 guide the congregation or agency in closing out its former ministry, establishing contact with the bishop's office, identifying ministry needs and goals.

- Step 1. CONTACTING THE BISHOP
- Step 2. EXIT INTERVIEW & INTERIM ORIENTATION
- Step 3. REVIEW/CLARIFY STATUS OF OTHER STAFF (rostered & hired)
- Step 4. APPOINTMENT OF THE INTERIM PASTOR
- Step 5. SELECTION OF THE CALL COMMITTEE
- Step 6. MEETING WITH THE BISHOP TO REVIEW THE CALL PROCESS

### SEARCH PROCESS:

Steps 7-13 describe the process of moving to a final selection of a candidate.

- Step 7. DETERMINING MINISTRY NEEDS (Preparation of the Congregational Profile)
- Step 8. SUGGESTING NAMES TO THE BISHOP
- Step 9. RECEIVING NOMINATIONS FROM THE BISHOP
- Step 10. PREPARING FOR MUTUAL CONVERSATION
- Step 11. MUTUAL CONVERSATION WITH NOMINEE(S)
- Step 12. DECISION TO RECOMMEND ONE CANDIDATE
- Step 13. RELEASING OTHER NOMINEES

### CALLING THE CANDIDATE:

Steps 14-17 describe the process of completing the call process by congregational vote, issuing the call and dealing with the possibilities of a returned call.

- Step 14. PREPARING THE CALL/APPOINTMENT RESOLUTION
- Step 15. THE CALL/APPOINTMENT MEETING
- Step 16. ISSUING THE CALL/APPOINTMENT
- Step 17. COMPLETING THE PROCESS

### GLOSSARY OF TERMS

*BISHOP* indicates the bishop of the Oregon Synod, his/her designated representative(s) or office.

*CALL* refers to the call to an ordained pastor or an appointment to an associate in ministry.

*CONGREGATION* is used to include other agencies for which a call or appointment is required.

*MINISTRY* or *MINISTER* is used to designate functions which may or may not require ordained status.

Congregations *SUGGEST* people for consideration, the bishop *NOMINATES* people for mutual interview, the Call Committee recommends a *CANDIDATE* to receive a call.

### **Step 1. CONTACTING THE BISHOP**

Upon the resignation of the minister, the bishop shall be informed. The bishop will make arrangements for step 2 with the leadership of the congregation.

### **Step 2. EXIT INTERVIEW & ORIENTATION TO INTERIM MINISTRY**

When a minister resigns, it is appropriate that the congregation, probably through the congregation's council, conduct an exit interview to bring closure to the ministry from which the minister has resigned. (Suggested questions for conversation are available from the synod office). This can benefit both the congregation and the departing minister to evaluate the nature of the relationship now ending.

In addition, a representative from the Synod will conduct an exit interview with the outgoing pastor. The results of that conversation are available only to the bishop and the incoming interim pastor. An Orientation to Interim Ministry for the congregation's leadership (and any other interested members) will be conducted by that same synod representative. The representative will outline the processes and approximate time-line of the interim period, including when the congregation can expect an interim pastor to begin his/her time of service in the congregation.

### **Step 3. REVIEW/CLARIFY THE STATUS OF OTHER STAFF (rostered and hired)**

The resignation of a pastor may or may not affect the tenure of other parish staff, depending in part on the terms of their calls/contracts. The congregational leadership will need to review those terms and assess whether or not there will be personnel issues to deal with during the interim process and/or into the tenure of the next installed pastor. The bishop needs to be consulted if there are other rostered persons affected by the resignation of a pastor.

### **Step 4. APPOINTMENT OF THE INTERIM PASTOR**

The bishop will notify the congregational leadership concerning the identity and availability of the interim pastor. The details of the interim "Letter of Agreement" will be negotiated between the congregation and the interim pastor; the bishop's signature is required on the interim "Letter of Agreement".

### **Step 5. SELECTING A CALL COMMITTEE**

The synod strongly recommends that the congregation wait until the interim pastor has had an opportunity to assess the congregational situation before forming a Call Committee (usually at least 30-60 days, although circumstances will vary). The congregation shall establish a Call Committee according to procedures, if any, outlined in the congregational constitution. It is important to represent different demographics and interests of the congregation on the Call Committee. Throughout the call process, the Call Committee shall report regularly to the congregation on its activity and shall encourage input, suggestions, and reactions.

## **Step 6. MEETING WITH THE BISHOP TO REVIEW THE CALL PROCESS**

The bishop will meet with the newly formed Call Committee (and Congregational Council). The agenda of that meeting shall include:

- 1) Acquaint the congregation with call procedures, including a brief study of the ELCA Letter of Call.
- 2) Review plans for carrying out the call process, delineating duties of various committees and the constitutional requirements of the congregation.
- 3) Explain the task of reviewing mission statements and defining needs and goals, according to the ELCA Congregational Profile.

## **Step 7. DETERMINING MINISTRY NEEDS**

The congregation's mission statement and a congregational profile (according to the ELCA Congregational Profile material) shall be developed (or reviewed and updated) by the Call Committee or other delegated committee. The interim pastor or another representative of the bishop shall serve as a consultant to the call process. The profile will provide a summary of the congregation's ministry, its goals and leadership needs. The completed profile shall be sent to the bishop.

## **Step 8. SUGGESTING NAMES TO THE BISHOP**

Members of the congregation may suggest names to the bishop for consideration as nominees for call. In addition, self-nominations and suggestions from deans, etc., may come to the bishop.

## **Step 9. RECEIVING NOMINATIONS FROM THE BISHOP**

The bishop will consider the information from the congregation and the names suggested, as well as others that come to his/her attention. The bishop will submit one, two, three, four or five names for consideration (Note: Persons under call are normally nominated for only one new call at a time; those without call may be nominated for two calls at a time). The bishop will give reasons for nominating certain people and, when appropriate, for not nominating some suggested nominees.

## **Step 10. PREPARATION FOR MUTUAL INTERVIEW**

Before engaging in mutual conversation with nominees, the Call Committee shall prepare appropriate questions. It may be helpful if a (non-nominee) pastor is invited to respond to such questions in a practice session, giving feedback on questions and procedure.

## **Step 11. MUTUAL CONVERSATION WITH NOMINEES**

It is the expectation that the Call Committee shall bring in the nominee(s) for a mutual face-to-face conversation about the nominee's ministry and the mission and ministry of the congregation.

It is important to establish uniformity in the process so that all members of the Call Committee and the nominees are involved in mutual discussion. In cases where there is other called/appointed staff, such staff shall be given time to have conversation with the nominees. It is recommended that the congregation be given an opportunity to meet the nominee(s). Nominees have the option to withdraw their names from consideration.

#### **Step 12. DECISION TO RECOMMEND ONE CANDIDATE**

The Call Committee determines the name of one nominee to recommend for the call/appointment.

#### **Step 13. RELEASING NOMINEES**

When the Call Committee has decided upon a candidate, other nominees who have come for mutual conversation shall immediately be informed of this decision and thanked for their participation. They may then be released for nomination elsewhere. The bishop shall also be informed of these decisions. All the documentation relative to the released nominees, which had been provided by the synod office, shall be returned to the bishop's office. This is normally the duty of the chairperson of the Call Committee. If all nominees are released, go back to Step 9.

#### **Step 14. PREPARING THE CALL/APPOINTMENT RESOLUTION**

When the Call Committee has decided on one candidate, they shall forward their recommendation to the Church Council, who has the responsibility of ratifying the recommendation. The Church Council shall inform the congregation of its decision and call a special congregational meeting (according to the procedures for such a meeting outlined in the congregational constitution). The Church Council shall prepare two resolutions for congregational action: one, to call/appoint the candidate; two, to specify salary and benefits.

The Letter of Call document shall be prepared carefully, describing the nature of responsibilities to be assumed by the candidate. Salary and benefits (sections 4-7 of the Letter of Call) should be determined by making reference to synod guidelines. The bishop shall be in contact with the congregation and the candidate regarding salary and benefits. In situations where there are more than one rostered staff persons, relationship to all other staff should be made clear.

#### **Step 15. THE CALL/APPOINTMENT MEETING**

At a special meeting of the congregation, called in accordance with the congregational constitution, at which a representative of the bishop is present, the Call Committee shall place one name in nomination. A written ballot shall be taken and requires a two-thirds majority of those present and voting for passage. Upon passing this resolution, a second resolution outlining the financial considerations shall require a simple majority for passage. This may be by voice vote. The results of the votes should be communicated verbally to both the nominee and the bishop as soon as possible.

If the vote to call falls short of the two-thirds majority, return to Step 9. The bishop may

submit new nominee(s) or resubmit previous nominee(s).

#### **Step 16. ISSUING THE CALL/APPOINTMENT**

The Letter of Call shall be filled out by a designated member of the congregation and forwarded to the bishop's office for attestation. The bishop forwards the attested call to the candidate; in the event of irregularity, the Letter of Call is returned to the congregation for adjustment.

#### **Step 17. COMPLETING THE PROCESS**

The candidate has thirty days from date of receipt of the Letter of Call to respond. A follow-up meeting between the congregational leadership and the called person may be helpful to negotiate terms of the call or compensation package, relative to specific needs, e.g., housing, details of salary and compensation.

If the call is accepted, the Call Committee is dismissed. It is recommended that the service of the Call Committee be recognized in some way in the congregation's worship ritual.

If the call is declined, the Call Committee shall consult with the bishop and return to Step 9. The bishop may submit new nominee(s) or recall previous nominee(s).

The congregation, nominees and candidates are encouraged to inform the bishop concerning evaluation of the call process.