

THE CALL PROCESS PRIMER

by: Rev. Joshua Scheer

Calling a new pastor is a great and glorious occasion. It can however be a hard time as well. Your congregation is going through a lot of things after losing its pastor. There is grief in many situations at his departure. There may be some who are glad. To make matters worse everyone seems to get an opinion on what should happen next.

The following are some general thoughts, opinions, suggestions, and clarifications about the Call Process.

First of all, you will want to be familiar with your congregation's constitution and bylaws to see the procedure that needs to be followed. It may be very specific, but could also be generic. Whichever it is, you will want to follow it to the letter.

Your District President will likely want to be involved in the process. The call process is your congregation's call process. It is not the District President's process. Follow your Constitution and Bylaws. The Call List normally involves the input/counsel of the District President (and normally it should), but it does not always have to. The next page has the exact section of the LCMS Bylaws which spells out the congregation's responsibility and also District's in regards to calls (District Bylaws cannot contradict these).

There are really two directions which a call can go out to – the field and the seminary. The process changes based upon which type of call you want to pursue. Calling from the seminary involves an application for a candidate (a man ready

to be ordained) and follows the bylaws involving the seminary and the Council of Presidents placement procedures.

Calling from the field will follow more of what I describe below with nominations, sorting through the mix, and finally calling. Calling from the field indicates that the man you want to call is already ordained and on the roster (Minister of Religion – Ordained [we use IRS language]) of the LCMS. This man could already serve a congregation or could be on what is called “candidate” status. Much has been written on Candidate (formerly CRM) status, but to put it simply – a “Candidate” who is already ordained is a man ready and willing to serve an LCMS congregation. The rhetoric used about “damaged goods” or whatever about a Candidate is a violation of the 8th Commandment and should be rebuked. There are many reasons men may end up as candidates, but their official LCMS status says they are ready, able, and willing to be actively serving congregations as pastors. If such a man was unfit for the ministry he would be removed from the roster (which is the job of the District Presidents).



The best pastor
is the one God has sent you.

2013 Constitution, Bylaws, and Articles of Incorporation OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD

Here is the exact section of the LCMS Bylaws which spells out the congregation's responsibility and also District's in regards to calls (District Bylaws cannot contradict these). Please note the only requirements are that you seek counsel of your District President (2.5.1) [the exact definition of "counsel" is not known] and that you call a man who is on the clergy roster of the LCMS (2.5.2) or follow the appropriate call process for calling from the seminaries. That is the congregation's responsibility to follow for its continued membership in the LCMS. Anything else is *recommendation* or *advice* only.

2.5 Calling Ministers of Religion by Congregations

2.5.1 Congregations shall seek the counsel of their respective district presidents when calling ordained or commissioned ministers.

2.5.2 Congregations that are members of the Synod shall call and be served only by (1) ordained ministers who have been admitted to their respective ministries in accordance with the rules and regulations set forth in these Bylaws and have thereby become members of the Synod; (2) candidates for the pastoral ministry who have satisfied the qualifications and requirements for assignment of first calls by the Council of Presidents acting as the Board of Assignments; or (3) ordained ministers who are members in good standing of church bodies that have been formally recognized to be in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod when agreements for such calls are in place.

2.5.3 Congregations that are members of the Synod shall call only (1) commissioned ministers who have been admitted to their ministries in accordance with the rules and regulations set forth in these Bylaws and have thereby become members of the Synod; (2) candidates of LCMS colleges and universities who have satisfied the qualifications and requirements for assignment of first calls by the Council of Presidents acting as the Board of Assignments; or (3) commissioned ministers (or those holding positions comparable to commissioned ministers) who are members in good standing of church bodies that have been formally recognized to be in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod when agreements for such calls are in place.

2.5.4 Congregations that violate these requirements and persist in such violation shall, after due admonition, forfeit their membership in the Synod.

The LCMS Handbook can be found at www.lcms.org/handbook.

There are different things which may be brought up in the way of counsel from District Presidents. These things are I believe brought up with the best of intentions, but may not serve the best interest of the congregation — getting a regular, faithful pastor sooner rather than later. Also, they tend to increase the length of pastoral vacancies (and in general the shorter the vacancy the better). Things like Intentional Interim Ministers might be brought up. In my opinion they are not a good option because of the temporary nature of their call, which is rather muddy when considered against the lifelong nature of a Divine Call (a good presentation paper on the topic of Interim Ministry can be found here: www.confessionallutherans.org/papers/goetz.html). If there is reason to try an interim, why not just call a pastor who can help and stay rather than a man who is there for a bit and then gone? Having a regular, faithful pastor is the best (and simplest) option for any congregational situation. Similarly there are numerous self-studies or inventories or surveys which can be done in the congregation. This may provide some information as to the condition of catechesis in the congregation, but not much more. In my opinion they delay the best thing for a congregation — a regular, faithful pastor serving among God's people.

Usually there is a time when the congregation takes nominations from its own members. This can be a very good thing. Some members may ask other pastors for input or names. They may be familiar with pastors from their travels. They may be familiar with pastors from the internet. The #1 quality you want in any pastor is faithfulness to the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions. Sadly, in a Synodical situation such as ours, some research about candidates may be necessary. The internet can very helpful in seeing the kind of pastors that are faithful shepherd types. Do a search for each pastors name and read some of his writings (Google Tip — put quotes around his name to find the specific pastor if it is a common last name). These

names may be submitted to the counsel of the District President (remember it is still the congregation's call process) and often will make it onto the official Call List for the call committee and congregation to consider. If the District President removes names from the nominations it is permissible to ask why the names were removed (sometimes reasons may be that the pastor has just taken another call, sometimes it may be an arbitrary rule like a pastor has to serve 3 years in his first parish [an unwritten rule which by no means has to be followed if the congregation desires to call a rostered clergyman with less than 3 years parish experience]). If he adds names to the ones nominated it is permissible and a good suggestion to ask why the names were added (in my present parish situation, the District President added some excellent names that had not come up from the congregation). In the end, so long as the congregation follows their constitution and bylaws with regards to process, consults the District President and then calls a man who is on the clergy roster of the LCMS, they can call anyone. Remember, it is the congregation's call process.

Usually a formal Call List will be established with the help of the District President. When you start getting official information about pastors, each one will have two documents, one will be called a SET (Self-Evaluation Tool). This includes a number of questions and answers on hot topic issues in the LCMS (worship practices, closed communion stuff, women and men, etc.). These answers will vary greatly. Plain speech is good to read, but often answers are not so plain. Some pastors will fill every space with their beliefs/practices, some will be brief. Some specific, some generic. Some theological, some political. It can be a hard document to read, and even harder to read between the lines. An opinion on the SET – The SET is a sad piece of evidence to the diversity of beliefs and practices allowed in the LCMS. It should be unnecessary, but since there is such diversity, it is

necessary to be able to try to ascertain the beliefs and practices of the man you want to call.

See a copy of a blank SET form at www.steadfastlutherans.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/SET.pdf.

The second document is the PIF (Personal Information Form) which is usually completed by both the pastor and his own District President. This has more basic family and living situation information with some theological/practical commentary by the District President. The commentary (often in the form of rating) is usually on strengths and weaknesses of the pastor. There is also some commentary (rating) on worship and preaching. The commentary (rating) is very subjective to the individual District President's own views of things (or possibly another District President's view if it has not been updated), which can be helpful if you know that District President, less so if you don't. The PIF comes from the candidate pastor's District President, which of course may not be the same as your own. Some tips for dealing with the subjectivity of the ratings could include asking the District President how many times he has heard the pastor preach (sometimes they may not have heard a sermon but still have to give a rating), what his last sermon was like, what does he mean by rating him as "liturgically flexible", etc. Clarifying questions like those can help get a sense for what the District President really means (after all, that way of rating things isn't exactly fair to them either).

In more recent years, interviewing has become another way to sort through the candidates for a call. Interviewing in my opinion should be unnecessary, but in such an environment of the LCMS today it may indeed be necessary. This and the SET (and section of commentary on the PIF) are things that testify against us and we should grieve over their need to be used.

From these things and your requirements for the call process (from your congregation's constitution and bylaws)

A SELF-EVALUATION TOOL (SET) FOR PASTORS

(Adopted for use by the Council of Presidents of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod - Revised February 2013)

Name: Title First Middle Last Roster Status

In the Name of Jesus, Greetings!

The Lutheran Church trusts in Jesus Christ and His Gospel clearly before the world for the salvation of the lost. Therefore, the Lutheran pastor is always ready to state forthrightly what he believes, teaches, confesses and practices in the name of Christ. In the spirit, for the benefit of the wider Church, please answer all of the questions on this form on a clear and concise manner. This form will be included with your file and shared with those District Presidents who request information about you. It will also be shared by them with calling congregations as a helpful expression of your faith and practice. If you are not using the complete edition of this SET form, please type your responses. If you use a typewriter, please confine your answers to the space allotted for each question.

1. Describe your understanding of the church and its mission, especially regarding outreach to the lost.

2. Describe your understanding of the Office of the Public Ministry.

3. What is your understanding of the role of pastor as it relates to the role of the laity as members of the universal priesthood of all believers?

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the Call meetings should proceed. The best result for any Lutheran congregation is to extend a call to a faithful candidate and have him accept it and work to begin his new pastorate serving God's baptized people in your congregation. Some things along this:

After a congregation extends (or issues) a call after the appropriate procedure, that pastor will need to be notified and information will need to be sent (Call Paperwork, other information [the sky is the limit here, newspapers, school information, extra congregational information, Constitution and Bylaws, anything to help in the deliberation process]). The pastor will begin his deliberations of the call (using prayerful reason). If he serves a congregation already he will need to notify them (this can be a time of anxiety in his current congregation). It is also an anxious time in the pastor's family (if he has one). In the era of Facebook and so forth, it is best to keep the call private until it has been publicly announced to the congregation he currently serves. He may set a deadline to his deliberation, but he may not (there is no hard and fast rule). If he accepts the call, he will begin his transition to your congregation (wrapping up at his current congregation, moving, installation dates, etc.). If he doesn't accept it (returns the call), your congregation will have to have another Call meeting to extend the call to another pastor.

This process is one that is a great and glorious, although as you can tell it has any number of opportunities for sin and temptation as well. Work together as a congregation, knowing that the Lord God who sends out laborers into the harvest is going to send a man to serve Him in your congregation.

Here are some other tips while this process is ongoing:

Pray. Prayer is essential to the call process. God has commanded us to pray in all situations, and even better, He has promised to hear our prayers. We expect God to provide pastors for His flocks (having a pastor is a need of the baptized, God supplies our needs). We are tempted to become anxious or despair. Prayer teaches us who is in control. It is an exercise of faith and piety. It helps us guard against the evil one. Pray for your congregation, your future pastor, his family, his congregation (if he is currently serving), your District President and Circuit Visitor, your congregational leadership, your vacancy pastor and whoever else is involved in the process.

Love each other. The call process can quickly bring up divisions in congregations. Love covers a multitude of sins. Forgive one another as God in Christ has forgiven you (see the Lord's Prayer in the Small Catechism).

Study the Scriptures. The Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy; Titus) are a great resource when thinking about pastors. The texts about the pastoral office are also a great read. Here are just a "few" that you will likely hear at an ordination (a pastor's first call) or installation (at any pastor's subsequent call):

Matthew 5:13-16; Matthew 9:35-38; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 22:24-30; Luke 44:49; John 10:11-16; John 20:21-23; John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28; Romans 10:14-17; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; 1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Corinthians 3:4-9; 2 Corinthians 4:6-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; 2 Corinthians 10:17-18; Ephesians 4:11-12; Philippians 1:3-8; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Timothy 4:6-7; 1 Timothy 4:14-16; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2 Timothy 2:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:17; Hebrews 13:20-21; 1 Peter 5:2-4; Joshua 1:7-8; Psalm 20:1-2; Psalm 27:1, 14; Psalm 84:7-8; Isaiah 6:1-8; Isaiah 40:9-11; Isaiah 42:1-9; Isaiah 52:7-10; Jeremiah 1:4-9; Jeremiah 15:19-21; Ezekiel 33:7-9; Ezekiel 34:11-16; Daniel 12:3.

Study the Catechism. Here two parts are very important (study it all – its very short and even the most "mature" Christians ought to study it regularly). The Fifth Chief part on the Office of the Keys and Confession (absolution) and the Table of Duties on Preachers and Hearers.

Prepare yourselves to receive your new pastor. Yes, this means planning for helping with the move and settling in. Yes, this means congregational celebrations. Yes, this means being a big help to your pastor's family wherever you can (in the ways they would receive help also in mind). Yes, this means helping your pastor get settled and encouraging him as he settles in (he will be going through a strange "bitter sweet" time as he has left people dear to him and is glad to be now serving you). Perhaps you would want to help him by having some of the congregation's

current traditions and practices written down so he can know those things that are free (for an article on this click here). The absolute best way to receive your pastor is to attend Church (including his installation) and Bible studies.

Augsburg Confession, article V

1 So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. 2 Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given [John 20:22]. He works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake. 3 This happens not through our own merits, but for Christ's sake.

4 Our churches condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that through their own preparations and works the Holy Spirit comes to them without the external Word.

Concordia : The Lutheran Confessions, Edited by Paul Timothy McCain (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 33.

Augsburg Confession, article XIV

Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call.

Concordia : The Lutheran Confessions, Edited by Paul Timothy McCain (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 39.

