

2024 Transition and Call Manual
Southwestern Washington
Synod- ELCA

www.swwasynod.org

253-535-8300

God's Beloved People:

Those of you who find this call manual in your hands are, most likely, about to begin the process of discerning new pastoral or diaconal leadership in your congregation.

Many thoughts might occupy your minds:

- How, when the grieving is still so real, can we even think of calling a new Minister?
- How, given the variety of folk in our parish, can we ever find a leader for all of us?
- How will God's Holy Spirit work among us?
- How will we stay vital and mission-minded during the interim?

Those of us who will be working with you in your call process know your questions are many and your expectations high.

We would have you think of this process as one in which your community draws together--aided by the larger church--to fulfill one of its essential functions. The church has been doing this for centuries. The advisor and helper is God's Spirit, promised to the gathered church (Matthew 18:20) and now ready to empower you for your task.

Elsewhere in this manual you will find some resources available for your use. They are provided because your church thinks they are helpful. We hope you will take advantage of them.

Although we cannot tell you how long your process will take, (probably somewhere between 6 and 12 months), we can promise to aid you in the timeliest way possible. The process you are entering is broad and deep, something more than hiring staff. During the process you will have ministerial care and worship leadership. True ministry will be done among you during this process. We invite you to take advantage of this interim ministry and relax into the process of calling, letting your best thoughts and prayers of your common future dominate. "And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:7)

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rev. Richard Jaech".

Bishop Richard Jaech, SWWA Synod jaechre@plu.edu

Introduction

The primary work of a congregation or organization seeking to call a pastor or deacon is the work of discernment.

For Christians, the practice of discernment has roots in the stories of scripture. When God's people were in need of a faithful leader, they often gathered to worship and pray, to seek the Spirit's wisdom in choosing someone who had the gifts for the mission at hand.

Discerning has some things in common with *Deciding* but is distinct in many ways. It is helpful for a congregation to understand these distinctions as they set out on the path of transition. The work of Susan Beaumont and Associates is helpful. (*How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You are Going: Leading in a Liminal Season*, Roman and Littlefield, 2019 All Rights Reserved)

A Deciding Mindset focuses on defining the problem to be solved, looking for root causes, gathering and interpreting data, brainstorming alternatives, assessing risk and return and deciding on an optimal solution.

A Discerning Mindset grows out the assumption that God is not neutral about our mission or our choices. The Holy Spirit is our indwelling and ongoing guide as we seek what God is disclosing about our future mission.

God's will is best discerned within the community. . . this is not a solo journey or one in which the loudest voice "wins".

A process of discernment is grounded in guiding principles and shedding ego and biases. It involves listening together for the prompting of the Spirit and using our imagination. We take time to weigh options and pause along the way to process the steps we are taking together.

Rather than the tools of decision trees, majority rule, strategy maps or radar charts, a process of discernment utilizes the tools of consensus, prayer, silence, scripture, listening circles, storytelling and other spiritual practices.

In a process of deciding, authorized leaders are in charge of the decision.

In a process of discernment, all invested parties are included and have an important voice.

The Synod Staff are here to accompany and support you throughout this process of discernment and transition. Bishop's Associate Pastor Rebecca Shjerven serves as point-person for Transition and Call. She can be reached at shjervrl@plu.edu or 253-961-2412.

Synod Administrator Stefanie DeZarn is available to assist you with questions that arise during the process. She can be reached at swwasynod@plu.edu or 253-535-8300 (Tuesday-Friday).

Spiritual Practices to Support Discernment

The following passages and practices open us to God's presence and holy work among us. Each time we gather, we ground ourselves in God's living word.

Practice: Lectio Divina

Listen to the passage read slowly and deliberately several times.

- First hearing—Listen for a word or a phrase that stands out to you.
- Second hearing—Meditate silently on the gift of this word or phrase; what is God saying through this word?
- Third hearing—Turn to prayer in response to this word that has settled in your heart. Prayer may be silent, or each person may share a petition.
- Close with a moment or two of silence

Passages to contemplate using Lectio Divina:

Psalm 46: 1-3, 10-11

Isaiah 55: 10-13

Romans 8: 38-39

Psalm 60: 1-4

Matthew 6:31-22

Romans 12: 1-2

Psalm 121: 1-2, 7-8

John 12: 20-24

Philippians 4: 4-7

Psalm 139: 7-12

Romans 5: 1-5

Philippians 4: 8-9

Isaiah 43: 1-3

Romans 8: 26-27

Ephesians 1: 7-10

Practice: Ignatian Contemplation (adapted)

Listen to the scripture story as it is read slowly and deliberately.

- First reading—Close your eyes and imagine the sensory details of the story. What do you see, hear, smell, touch, taste? Is it hot or cool? Day or night? Is the wind blowing? Where are people standing? What do you notice?
- After 2 - 3 minutes of silence, share your perceptions with each other.
- Second Reading—close your eyes and imagine that you are IN the story. Which character are you? Or are you off stage, observing the action? How do you feel? What is your response to what is happening in the story? What do you notice?
- After 2-3 minutes of silence, share your experience with each other.

Passages to contemplate using Ignatian Contemplation:

Genesis 32: 22-31

Ruth 1: 6-18

Matthew 6: 25-34

Mark 4: 34-41

Luke 10: 27-37

Luke 10: 38-42

Luke 24: 28-35 (setting: afternoon of resurrection on the road to Emmaus)

John 21: 1-14 (setting: after Jesus' resurrection)

John 21: 15-19 (setting: after Jesus' resurrection)

Four Primary “Movements” of Transition and Call

FAREWELL

CLARIFYING
MISSION

LEADER
SEARCH

WELCOME

1. Fulfilling Farewell

- What is the information that we need passed on from the pastor/deacon?
- What events do we want to host to celebrate and give thanks for these pastor years together?
- Who will be the point person for these plans?

2. Clarifying Mission (congregational self-study)

- What are the key questions we want to ask of ourselves during this time of transition?
- How will we invite input from all who would like to offer it?
- Who will serve us as pastor during this Interim time?
- Who will be the people who lead this process and write our Ministry Site Profile? (Transition Team)

3. Pastoral Search

- What does our constitution say about a Call Committee?
- Who are the people who will be able to serve this role faithfully on the Call Committee, putting aside their own agendas to discern the work of the Holy Spirit?

4. Welcoming the New Pastor or Deacon

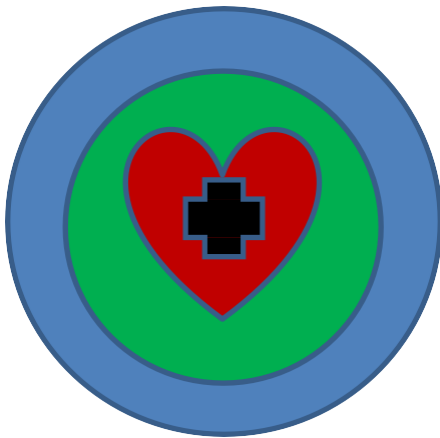
- How will we introduce the new leader (and possibly family) to the congregation?
- How will we help him/her/them get settled and oriented in the community?

The Work of the Transition Team

(The material in this section will be explored in-depth at the Transition Team orientation with Bishop's Associate, Rev. Rebecca Shjerven. Please contact her when your Team is ready to meet; shjervrl@plu.edu)

When a congregation enters a pastoral transition process it can feel disruptive to the regular rhythms and habits of life together. Transition creates anxiety in some people, excitement in others. . . a mixture of both for many. Pastoral transition, when undertaken thoughtfully and strategically, can be a time of both increased mission clarity and renewed engagement. The Transition Team has an important role to play in creating opportunities for people to reflect on where they see the Spirit of God at work and how they are being called to engage in this holy work for the sake of the world.

Identity, Vocation and Resource. . . in that order



At the heart of our life together as Church is the liberating love of God in Christ Jesus. God's love has the power to free us from all that holds us captive, both as individuals and as the human family. Joined to Christ Jesus in baptism, we are called to be his body in the world. This is our identity as Christian people.

How do we both give and receive this love? How does God's love call us to repentance and to new patterns of living? How do we love and care for each other as Jesus instructed? How do we see and respond to the needs of our neighborhood, community and world, following his example? This is our vocation as people joined to Christ.

When we are grounded in our identity and vocation, we are able to determine what resources we need to live out our calling as a congregation. Resources is a broad category that includes people (both staff and volunteer), space, finances.

What often happens in the life of a congregation is that "outer circle" matters begin to move to the center. Resources can become our central concern, especially if we feel that we may not have enough of them to live as we are accustomed. Transition times in the life of a congregation present wonderful opportunities to put "first things first". . . to get clear about our identity and our mission as followers of Christ. We do this by engaging in worship, scripture and holy conversations.

Three Goals for the Transition Team

1. **Increase engagement** among members by providing opportunities for input and involvement in the transition process.
2. Through a process of self-study, **grow in clarity about the congregation's mission** at this particular time and in this particular place.
3. **Complete a Ministry Site Profile** to bring to the congregation for feedback and conversation and to bring to the Church Council for approval.

Appointing a Transition Team

The Church Council appoints a team, usually 5-7 members, to carry out the congregational self-study. Members of the team need to be good listeners and able to set aside their own opinions and agendas in order to hear the input of others. The Council can prayerfully discern who has these gifts.

It is helpful when members of the team are active members of the congregation and connected to a wide variety of ministries and people.

When the Transition Team is appointed, the Bishop's Associate will schedule an orientation to the work and address any questions that the team may have.

Congregational Self-Study

The Church Council can assist the work of the Transition Team by identifying core ministries and people to be interviewed as part of the self-study. These interviews can be carried out with groups (i.e. the quilters, the education committee) or with individuals (i.e. the church musician).

The Council can also identify core community partners and people to interview as part of the self-study (i.e. the neighboring elementary school principal, the retirement or care facility where members live).

In addition to scheduling interviews, the team will want to design a process through which all who are interested can offer input (i.e. staffing a table in the narthex over several Sundays).

Examples of Interview Prompts/Questions:

- Describe your connection to _____ Lutheran Church.
- Why does _____ Lutheran Church exist and for whom?
- What would someone who observes our congregation conclude about our sense of mission and purpose?
- What is our congregation clearly good at? What ministry activities bring out the best in us and seem to be valued by others? What are we excited about?
- What are the needs of our neighborhood? Where do you see God's presence in our neighborhood and community? What would our neighbors miss if we were not here?
- How has _____ changed in the past 3-5 years? What have been the challenges? What have been the opportunities?
- What are our top three mission priorities at this time? What is God calling us to focus our attention on in the next 3-5 years?

Examples of Questions for Community Partners:

- Are you familiar with _____ Lutheran Church? If so, how did you become familiar?
- How does _____ add value to our community?
- How could we be a good neighbor to you and/or your organization?

If people offer input on what specific gifts and experience they desire in the next pastor, take notes. But try to make sure the conversation is not only about the next pastor, but about the vocation of the congregation.

When interviews have been completed, the Transition Team reads through all of the notes, looking for common themes, concerns and hopes. This information is distilled and becomes part of the Ministry Site Profile for the congregation.

Ministry Site Profile Process

A Ministry Site Profile (MSP) is the instrument which summarizes the identity and direction of the congregation. It is especially useful to the Call Committee when interviewing candidates. The Synod staff will send the Ministry Site Profile to prospective candidates for discernment. While not everything on the Ministry Site Profile is essential, care should be taken to provide the basic information. Some congregations have added even more information as longer explanations on the form, or as additional attachments.

To find essential resources related to the MSP, go to elca.org, click on “Call Process” (upper right), click on blue “Ministry Sites” button (middle of page). You will find Sample Forms, a guide, as well as a tutorial video.

Much of the information needed for the MSP is available from current church records. Information regarding the community can be drawn from several sources, including the school district(s), the chamber of commerce, census reports and past congregational parochial reports. The rest of the information comes from interviewing congregation members, member surveys, and maybe even working with an outside consultant to assist the congregation in looking toward a new future.

When the Transition Team has completed its draft of the Ministry Site Profile, it is important that the congregation has opportunities to talk about it together. While the MSP does not need formal approval from the congregation, it is important to take time to discuss what has been heard and what has been written. This document represents the voice of the congregation. Taking a “pause” for community conversation around the MSP can be one of the most enlightening and creative times in the transition process. It is a key step in coming together to discern a new leader.

The Ministry Site Profile will need the review of the Church Council when it is completed and discussed. The Council will pay particular attention to the compensation information to see that it is in keeping with the capacity of the congregation's resources.

Once the Council has approved the MSP, it may be uploaded to the ELCA database. If instructions on how to do this are needed, please watch the tutorial video mentioned above.

Please note that there is only one copy of the Ministry Site Profile online. Every time you take it down to update some information, or maybe to fix a typo, it is no longer visible to anyone. You MUST resubmit it every time you make a change to the document, so that others can see it.

The Work of the Call Committee

(The material in this section will be explored in-depth during the Call Committee Orientation with Bishop's Associate Rebecca Shjerven. Please contact her when the Committee is ready to meet; shjervrl@plu.edu)

Part 1: Getting Started

The first step is to refer to your congregation's constitution C.13.05 for a description of the process your congregation uses for assembling your Call Committee.

The gifts and skills required for this role: listening skills, commitment to the mission of the congregation, awareness of one's own biases and the ability to "shed" personal preferences, grounded in faith and open to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Whether voted on by the Council or by the congregation, it is important to resist "stacking the deck" in favor of one interest group or age group in the congregation.

Establish Working Rules at the Beginning

No matter how solid your congregation, a call process is likely to provoke big questions and some fear. Setting working rules in place before beginning your tasks can be extremely beneficial.

Some issues to consider:

- How will you choose your leaders?
- How many will be alternate members? Will they have voice and vote? When?
- What vote percentage in committee will be necessary to nominate a candidate to the congregation?
- How will you keep the congregation informed?
- Do you have the authority to take a nomination to the congregation, or do you take it to the council?
- Do you have a solid sense from the Council as to the salary and benefit range that can be offered by the congregation? Do you have this in writing before interviewing?
- Do you have your own budget? What money is available to bring candidates in for interviewing or to host a "meet-and-greet" event?

Exploring the Ministry Site Profile

At the beginning of its work, it is important for the Call Committee to take time to read and digest the congregation's Ministry Site Profile. If possible, it is good practice for the Call Committee to meet with the Transition Team to ask any questions they may have and to seek clarification.

The MSP represents the discernment and the voice of the congregation. It will guide the Committee's discernment (rather than personal vision or preferences).

A Few Process Details

Prayer Team - It is helpful to have a group of members “on call” to pray for the committee whenever it is in sessions. The Call Committee will want to pray as it begins and ends each session, including meetings and interviews. At the time of making decisions, allow plenty of time for individual and group prayer. Never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit.

Meeting times can fluctuate, but it is best to set a pattern of specific days or evenings. Once a chair has been selected, an agenda can be set up. Each member of the Call Committee will recognize the importance of candor, openness, and a willingness to examine and discuss all the issues and candidates.

Interim Ministers are normally not involved in the Call Process, except on those rare occasions when requested by the Bishop. It is not usually recommended for an Interim Minister to be considered as a possible ministerial candidate for your congregation.

Continuing staff (paid) are normally not involved in interviews. Arrangements can be made for candidates to meet with staff as appropriate in each situation. It is helpful to be clear what the role of staff is in providing feedback on the candidates. If feedback is desired, to whom shall it be offered?

Synod Office maintains a list of ELCA ministers who are actively seeking call. This paperwork is called a Rostered Minister Profile (RMP). The Bishop's Associate contacts those candidates, with permission from their bishops, who appear to be a good match for the congregation, as described in the Ministry Site Profile. Rostered Minister Profiles for these candidates are submitted to the Call Committee.

Part 2: Interviewing

When the Call Committee is ready to consider candidates, the Bishop's Associate will bring Rostered Minister Profiles to a meeting of the committee. This is confidential personal paperwork available only to members of the Call Committee.

If the Call Committee receives candidate nominations from the congregation using the appropriate form (see next page), please provide these to the Bishop's Associate who will make contact with the nominee's bishop.

After reading and discussing the RMPs, the committee will decide who to interview. First interviews are often on Zoom. If the Committee plans to interview more than one candidate, the format of the interviews should be consistent (if one is Zoom, all are Zoom).

It is good to prepare interview questions ahead of time and conduct practice interviews. If the Committee would like to practice interviewing with a pastor or deacon (who is NOT in the process), please contact the Bishop's Associate. This can be good experience for a committee, especially if interviewing is a new skill.

The Call Committee will provide the candidate with information about when he/she/they will hear from the committee after the interview. It is important to be faithful to this timetable. If a candidate's name is released, it is up to the Call Committee Chairperson to call that candidate and let him/her/them know as promptly as possible.

When a candidate is brought for an in-person interview, the congregation should offer to pay expenses related to travel, lodging, rental car (if needed) and meals. During the in-person interview, it is good to provide some social time (perhaps a meal) and a tour of the area. If the candidate's family is coming, please plan activities for them during the time of the interview.

Pastoral candidates are not expected to take a Sunday to come and preach in a congregation as part of the interview process. Many times, they are currently serving a congregation and that congregation is their Sunday morning priority. It is not a fair expectation for them to take a vacation Sunday to interview and preach as part of a call process. Call Committee members are free to go to worship in the candidate's congregation or make use of the many online examples of preaching and worship leadership that are typically available.

Candidate Nominations from Congregation

In some instances, names of possible ministerial candidates surface in the congregation. These names should be directed to the Call Committee Chair using the official **CONGREGATIONAL NOMINATION FOR CALL** form (see below). The nominee must be a person on the ELCA clergy roster or an approved and available seminary graduate assigned to this Synod. The names will then be submitted to the Synod Office for consideration along with other potential candidates. If the candidate is on the clergy roster of another synod, our Bishop's Associate will need to obtain clearance from the Bishop of that Synod.

CONGREGATIONAL NOMINATION FOR CALL

I nominate

(name) _____

who is currently serving as (position, congregation, city) _____

Nominations must be submitted in writing, using this nomination form. **No** nomination may be made from the floor at the call meeting.

Nominations must be received by the church office no later than _____.

The Synod staff will be able to better evaluate the nominee's qualifications with the information requested below. (Use other side of sheet, if necessary)

Person Submitting Nomination: _____

Known strengths of this nominee:

Reasons why I feel he/she/they should be nominated for Call to our congregation:

Please send the completed form to Call Committee Chair, who will send to Synod Office (swwasynod.org).

Sample Questions for Candidate Interviews

The following questions are merely suggestive; however, in forming any particular question the key issue is, "What answer are you looking for? How will you know when it's answered well?" Each question may be evaluated in three ways: (a) What does it have to do with the position? (b) What do we need to know? (c) Would we be willing to answer the same questions about ourselves?

- Tell us about your faith journey.
- Share with us your calling that led you to become a pastor/deacon.
- Describe the areas of ministry which you value as high priorities.
- Talk about the ministry areas you like to do. Why?
- What ministry roles give you the most trouble? Why?
- Discuss your strengths as well as those areas in which you need work.
- Share your thoughts regarding the worship life of the congregation.
- What are your expectations for yourself and lay persons in liturgical practices?
- Describe your preaching philosophy and style. What things do you emphasize in your preaching. What are your ideas regarding children's sermons?
- Discuss your thoughts, expectations and requirements concerning catechetical instruction.
- Discuss in detail your expectations/philosophy of, and pastoral involvement in: Educational Ministry, Evangelism, Stewardship, Benevolence, Youth Ministry and Social Ministry.
- From your perspective, what were the areas in the last parish which gave you personal satisfaction?
- What role do you see the pastor fulfilling in relating to committees?
- How do you see your role in relation to congregation council?
- Describe your philosophy of visitation and pastoral calling.
- Why are you considering accepting this call?
- How do you see yourself involved in our community and the Synod?
- Tell us about your hobbies.

The Committee may want to ask specific questions based on the areas that they have identified as high priority on their Ministry Site Profile. Following are some sample questions in each of the areas:

Worship / Preaching

- Describe how you go about preparing for the worship service on Sunday morning.
- Think back in your ministry and tell me about the most difficult sermon you ever preached.
- Share some of your thoughts about the worship life of a congregation.

Social Ministry

- Tell us how you evaluate community needs and community strengths.
- Describe how you have contributed to the quality of life in your community.
- Describe how you go about motivating members of your congregation to respond to community needs.

Administrator / Leader

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

Teaching the Faith

- How do you evaluate the faith development of others?
- Describe your approach to helping adults to grow in their faith.
- Describe your approach to teaching children and young people about the Christian faith.

Evangelism

- Describe ways in which you typically become acquainted and associate with unchurched people in your community.
- What kind of guidance and training do you provide members of your congregation for reaching unchurched persons in the community?
- Describe how you have achieved a multicultural approach to your ministry.

Interpersonal Climate

- What steps do you take in helping others feel secure, trusted, and open with you?
- When pressure mounts how do you maintain your cool in ministry?
- Describe an experience where conflict arose between yourself and another person and how resolution was finally achieved.

Ministry in Crisis / Counseling

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

Interpreter of Theology

- Describe ways in which you communicate the faith.
- Describe your skills as teacher and preacher.
- What resources keep you theologically and biblically fresh and current?

Innovator

- Describe your approach to introducing new ideas in the congregation.
- Describe your current vision for ministry and how you would help others in the congregation to capture that vision.
- Think back in your ministry and describe a situation that was stagnate or failing and describe how you stepped in to revitalize it.

Denominational Leadership

- Describe how you have guided your congregation into understanding their relationship to the greater church.
- Describe your participation in the work of the church beyond the congregation, including ecumenical relationships, church agencies and institutions.
- Describe what your congregation believes to be their role as a congregation of the ELCA.

Stewardship

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

Personal Growth

- Describe some of your most important accomplishments and how you went about reaching those goals.
- How do you work at making yourself more effective in your work?
- Briefly describe ways in which you care for yourself physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

Your Call to Ministry

- Briefly describe the events which led you to prepare for the ministry.
- Describe the process of deliberation which helps you determine God's call.
- In what ways has your call to ministry changed over the years?

Possible Interview Questions for Associate Pastor and Deacon Candidates

- What are the essential things for maintaining a good and effective relationship with the senior pastor and other staff?
- Tell about a time when you had a disagreement with a co-worker or supervisor. How did you react? What was the conclusion of the disagreement? What did you learn? What would you do differently?
- Tell about a time when you were unclear about direction from your supervisor or colleagues. How did you handle it? What did you like about your reaction and what would you change?
- [Assuming that the candidate has met with the senior pastor, and that the sr. pastor is not in the room] After your meeting with the senior pastor how do you see your styles complementing each other? What do you see as the potential difficulties in your working relationship?
- [Describe whom the Associate Pastor or Deacon report to? Who does their evaluations?] How do you react to this structure?

Questions the Candidate May Ask You

- What is the rostered staff person's role, the lay staff person's role and what is the laity's role in this congregation?
- What is the congregation's history: stewardship, age levels, leadership?
- How many interest groups and organizations are there?
- How many innovative worship services have you had during the year, and what was the response?
- How many people are involved in leadership roles? How are lay people involved in worship?
- How involved do you like your staff person to be in the community?
- Describe your administrative structure.
- What has been done in:
 1. Evangelism?
 2. Finance?
 3. Social Ministry?
 4. Christian Education?
 5. Stewardship?
 6. Outreach?
- Is there a need for a building program? How do you rate your facilities?
- Details of Call: salary, housing, benefits, and what will be done in the future?
- What long- and short-term goals has the congregation adopted?
- When was the last in-depth self- analysis of the congregation's program/function done?
- What are the links between this congregation and the community, other churches?
- Describe the "personality" of your congregation.
- What does the congregation provide for my continuing education?
- What other staff are employed? Are changes in these positions expected?
- How does the congregation respond to change?
- What is the congregation's benevolence record for the last three years?
- What part should my spouse and family take in the parish? What are your expectations for my family's involvement in the parish?

The Work of the Council

Issuing the call

When the Call Committee recommends a candidate, they have done their work, and the process is handed over to the Church Council.

The Church Council :

- Hosts a “meet and greet” opportunity for the congregation with the candidate.
- Develops a Compensation and Benefits package for the candidate; The Council must prepare the document “Definition of Compensation, Benefits and Responsibilities” before the Special Congregational Meeting. Find this form at www.elca.org. Click on “Resources”, the “Office of the Secretary”, then “Compensation and Benefits for a Pastor” (or Deacon, if a Word and Service Call). A step-by-step guide to completing this form can also be found on the same page.
- Schedules and hosts a Special Congregational Meeting to vote on Call and Compensation.

A Synod representative must be present to attest a call/compensation vote. Please remember to consult with the Synod Office when selecting a date for your congregational meeting.

If the vote to call is successful (2/3), the congregation notifies the Bishop, who attests the call. The Letter of Call is created by the Synod Office and signed by the Council President and Secretary. It is forwarded to the Synod Office for the Bishop's signature and seal, and they send to the candidate for call, along with the “Definition of Compensation. . .” form.

Last Things

- The candidate receiving a Letter of Call has 30 days to accept or decline. If the call is accepted, the process continues.
- If the call is declined, the process begins again with a review of the Ministry Site Profile.
- Once the call is accepted and filled, the interim ministry is concluded according to the terms of the Interim Work Agreement.
- The congregation plans a time to thank and bless the Interim Minister.
- The congregation plans events to welcome the new Minister. Ordination (if applicable) and Installation services are planned and carried out with the assistance of the Synod Office.

The Synod Bishop conducts the Ordination of all rostered persons in this synod.

How to conduct a Call Meeting

1. It is the responsibility of the Church Council to conduct the call and compensation vote meeting. The president of the congregation or an appointee of the council should conduct the meeting.
2. **NOTICES:**
 - Verify that the congregation has been properly notified of the meeting according to your church constitution.
 - Verify that the Synod Office has been properly notified of the meeting time and place and that a representative of the Bishop's Office will be present.
 - Verify that a quorum exists according to the requirements of your church constitution.
3. Tellers should be appointed for counting the votes. You may choose to do written ballots or have some of your people call in on a teleconference, including Zoom. No one can vote who has not attended the meeting (absentee). No one can vote for someone else (proxy).

If you want to offer a remote option for voting at the congregational meeting, this must be specifically allowed in your constitution, per Washington State law (RCW 24.03A.485). If your constitution does not name this option, all voting must be conducted in-person.

4. Open the meeting with prayer followed by introductions of any visitors attending the meeting. Explain that this is a special meeting of the congregation and that the only business before the congregation is the call and compensation package for the recommended candidate. No other business may be transacted at this meeting. Ensure a quorum is met. (In your constitution C10.04)
5. Explain what will happen at the meeting:
 - a nomination will be brought by the Call Committee;
 - discussion of the merits of the candidate;Two votes will be taken: one to call the Minister (*requires at least a two-thirds majority ballot vote of members present and voting at a meeting legally called for that purpose - Model Constitution for Congregations *C9.0*) and one to approve the salary and benefits package (*vote may be written, by show of hands, or voice. It requires a simple majority vote.*)
6. A vote to call is taken. If successful, the meeting proceeds with presentation, discussion, and vote on the compensation package. If the vote to call is not successful, the meeting is adjourned with an explanation of the process to follow.

The Congregation Council is responsible for reporting the results of the meeting to the Synod Office and, if a call is issued, completing the Definition of Compensation form and signing the Letter of Call document that you receive from the Synod Office. Please return both completed/signed items to the Synod Office. Thank you!

Sample Voting Ballots

(date vote held) _____

Vote to Call (name) _____

as (position title) _____

Yes

No

Abstain

(please circle your answer)

If call vote passes, **then** the congregation may hold the compensation vote:

(date vote held) _____

Vote to approve compensation package for (name) _____
as outlined in supporting documentation.

Yes

No

Abstain

(please circle your answer)

Council Checklist for Transition Process

- Council notifies Synod Office of the vacancy or new position
- Communication plan in place for transition and call Process (bulletin, social media, etc.)
- Transition Team selected
- Ministry Site Profile read and opportunities provided for congregational conversation. MSP uploaded to ELCA database.
- Call Committee elected, either by Council or Congregation (see C.13.05 of constitution)
- Call Committee installed at worship (see sample Order for Installation)
- Consult with Synod Staff before scheduling special congregational meeting for call and compensation vote. A representative of the Synod must be present to attest the vote for the bishop.
- Consult Synod Staff regarding completion of the Letter of Call and the Definition of Compensation. These formal ELCA documents are provided by Synod Office to Council President before call vote meeting.
- Prepare materials regarding recommended candidate for Council and congregation
- Notify congregation of candidate, including opportunities to get acquainted.
- Prepare to speak in support of the recommended candidate at the congregational meeting
- Host special congregational meeting for Call and Compensation votes, in keeping with congregation's constitutional requirements
- Telephone the ministerial candidate after the meeting regarding the results
- Provide Bishop's Office with results, including tally of votes for each call
- Sign Letter of Call and return to Bishop's Office for signature
- Plan farewell and thank-you for Interim Pastor
- Plan Welcome activities for new pastor/deacon
- Plan Ordination, if appropriate, and installation service for new roster leader

Sample Order for Installation and Affirmation of a Call Committee

P Siblings in Christ, God has called us to a new time in our life as Church. It is a time for reflection and prayer, a time for self-examination and seeking, a time for expectation and hope. We need a shepherd to lead our flock, and God has promised that he will provide a shepherd for us.

A The following persons have been appointed/elected to serve as the Call Committee of our church.

As the names are read, those persons present come forward.

P Dear friends, you have been duly *appointed/elected* to serve as the Call Committee for this congregation in order to seek a minister to shepherd and lead us.

Yours is a spiritual endeavor on behalf of this congregation. Are you willing therefore to be open to the Spirit's leading, and, by prayer and holy conversation, to undertake this calling to seek a shepherd for us?

R Yes, and I ask God to help and guide me.

P Will you be diligent in your seeking, careful in your listening, purposeful in your questioning, and respectful in all that you do?

R Yes, and I ask God to help and guide me.

P Will you seek God's guidance through Holy Scripture and prayer and in your deliberations with your fellow committee members until you are brought to one mind and one will in Christ and have chosen God's shepherd for us?

R Yes, and I ask God to help and guide me.

A Let us pray for those who are being installed today and for our church as we seek God's guidance during this special time.

Almighty God, you alone are the great Shepherd of the sheep, and we turn to you to lead and guide us in all things. As you have raised up faithful servants of your holy word to tend your flock in each time and place, send us now, we pray, a faithful shepherd to lead our flock. Give us a holy patience in this time of our seeking, a patience that trusts in you for our present care, knowing that you will bring our good work to fulfillment in your time.

Bless those who are especially called to serve on the Call Committee. Give them the gifts they need to seek and find the minister of your own nurturing, that we might grow in faith and love and ministry. All these things we ask, O God, with whatever else we need, in the name of him who is the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The minister addresses the Call Committee.

P I now declare that you have been installed as the Call Committee of _____ . May God bring your good work to fulfillment and grace in Christ's name. Amen.

Sample Installation Rite for an Interim or Bridge Pastor

Presider: We are pleased to welcome Pastor _____, who will pastor (congregation) _____ during this time of transition. As we prepare to live and serve together, we make commitments to one another.

Ask pastor what scripture passage has been important to him/her/them in ministry; Read this passage as part of the Installation.

(addressing pastor)

P Will you preach and teach in accordance with the holy scriptures and with the confessions of the Lutheran church? Will you carry out this ministry in harmony with the constitutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America? If so, please answer, "I will and I ask God to help and guide me" *(pastor responds)*

Will you be diligent in your study of the holy scriptures and in your use of the means of grace? Will you love, serve, and pray for God's people, nourish them with the word and sacraments, and lead them by your own example in faithful service and holy living? *(pastor responds)*

Will you give faithful witness in the world, that God's love may be known in all that you do? *(pastor responds)*

(addressing congregation)

People of God, will you receive as a messenger of Jesus Christ sent to serve people with the gospel of hope and salvation? Will you regard *him/her/them* as a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God? If so, please answer "**We will and we ask God to help and guide us**". *(congregation responds)*

Will you pray for _____ help and honor (pronoun) for _____ work's sake, and in all things strive to live together in the peace and unity of Christ? *(congregation responds)*

Blessing

(people may be invited forward to lay hands on the pastor, if this is in keeping with local practices)

P Hear these words from St. Paul:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about^[a] these things. ⁹ As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do them, and the God of peace will be with you.

P _____, the office of Bridge/Interim Pastor is now committed to you in the name of God the Creator, Christ the Savior and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS — AN OVERVIEW OF THE CALL PROCESS

Who is responsible for keeping the congregation going until we have a new minister? Your Church Council, in consultation with the Synod Bishop, will decide how to best provide for ministerial leadership and care during the transition and call process.

Will we be able to save a little on the budget while we don't have a "real" minister? Probably not. The Interim Minister will be asked to do the same tasks your former minister did and will be paid on the same scale as your former minister. In addition, there will be some additional expenses related to the call process. This is a good time for each member to reaffirm their pledge to the common ministry and stay consistent in their giving.

How long will it take before we have a new minister? Each congregation will be unique. Factors include the length of the previous minister's tenure, any problems there may have been during that tenure, the clarity of mission among the membership, etc. Even the time of year can make some difference as committee meetings are more difficult around holidays and summer vacations. In an average congregation and under the best circumstances, the call process will take 6- 12 months.

Can our old minister perform weddings and funerals during the interim? As a rule, it is better that the former pastor performs no pastoral acts in the congregation. This respects the role of the Interim pastor and helps prepare the congregation to receive its new settled pastor.

How is our interim minister related to our call process? Officially, not at all. Interim ministers have a limited call and will have been asked by the Bishop to refrain from "assisting" in your process. The interim's task is to provide regular continuity in the essential tasks of your parish life.

Who selects the congregation's Transition Team? Refer to your congregation's constitution for this information. In most cases it is the church council after receiving nominations from congregation members. The Call Committee is usually elected by congregational vote.

Is there any collected wisdom about the make-up of the congregation's Call Committee? It's usually wise to find a way for the diverse interests and ages of the congregation to be represented on the call committee. Some councils ask for representatives of the various groups and committees. If there is any wisdom, it is to operate openly, encourage questions, and don't "stack the deck" in favor of one interest group over all others. 5-7 members is a manageable size and permits inclusive (male/female, different ethnicities, different ages, etc.) representation. It is recommended that no more than one council member and one transition committee member, if any, serve on the call committee- never as the Chair.

What is a congregational self-study? This is the responsibility of your Council. In most cases it will be assigned to the Transition Team. Though the task may seem impossible it can also be very satisfying because it results in a clearer sense of mission. Look forward to it as an opportunity to gain focus on the future and take pride in the diverse gifts of your church family.

We did a "self-study" just four years ago. Do we really have to do another one? At the very least it should be reviewed and updated with some deliberateness. You may look much the same but the need in your neighborhood may have significantly changed. There is a Ministry Site Profile form that needs to be completed and submitted to the ELCA portal for use by the synod and candidates for your call.

May I nominate a candidate for this call? Yes. Any minister on the ELCA clergy roster is open to your call. Any congregation member may nominate a minister to the congregation's Call Committee. Since there may be an initial nomination of several candidates from various parts of the church, it is the task of the Synod and the Bishop's staff to produce a manageable list of qualified candidates for you.

We would like to consider our Associate Minister for the lead minister position. Do you have any concerns about that? Generally speaking, it can be difficult for an Associate to make the transition from a limited job description as Associate to the overall responsibility of a lead position. The situation may still call for an interim ministry period in order to clarify the mission priorities of the parish. In such a case the Associate might be among those interviewed for the new phase of mission in the congregation.

In our last call process we had a great candidate but it was too expensive to fly her here for an interview. Aren't we practically limited to ministers in this area? It probably will be more expensive to interview out-of-state candidates, but this should not prohibit you from doing so. This is one of the big reasons to covenant to hold your church budget together during the change--so you can cover these important expenses. You will be pleased to discover that ways can often be found to interview candidates who want to interview. Remember, it is in the best interests of the ELCA to have some movement of ministers across synod lines. You are the party with primary responsibility for call expenses.

Can we send a delegation to visit the church of a minister we're interested in? Yes. Good manners suggest you call ahead and inform the minister of your intention to do so. You may also want to be sure the minister is leading worship, etc. that day.

If the minister comes to the congregation for an interview, will the rest of us get a chance to meet him or her? Out of consideration for those being interviewed as well as for the congregations where they presently serve, the names of the candidates you are interviewing need to remain confidential. When you have selected the candidate you will recommend to your congregation for call, you may provide an opportunity for the congregation to meet this candidate prior to the call vote.

So when it comes down to it, who makes the decision to call? When the Call Committee has reached a careful decision, they will forward this information to the Council. The Council then calls a special congregational meeting, according to the congregation's constitutional bylaws, at which time the only agenda items are call and compensation. The call requires a 2/3 vote by ballot and the Bishop must be represented at the meeting to attest the call. Assuming all goes well, the only remaining requirement is the signature of the Bishop on the Letter of Call. If the Bishop has been a part of the process all along, there is little reason to doubt the letter will be signed.

Who, how, when is the financial package negotiated? Do we dare offer a minister less money than the minister is making now? Details of the salary package are the responsibility of the congregation Council. Some details will be known before the Call Committee selects a nominee. Other details must be worked out in cooperation with the candidate to be nominated, the Synod Office, and the council before the call meeting. If salary is less than Synod guidelines, the possibility of a part-time call remains.

After we issue the Letter of Call, what happens? Once the Letter has been received by the minister, they have 30 days to discern the call and respond. Your other candidates should be informed that a call has been issued and that they will be notified of the result. Only one call can be issued at a time.

Occasionally there will be contact with the minister to clarify details of the call. If the call is accepted, the Call Committee's task is over, and the Council handles the details. If the call is "returned" (not accepted) then the Call Committee reconvenes and reviews its work and the Ministry Site Profile, asks for new candidates from the Synod Office, holds new interviews, and nominates another minister to the council to take to the congregation for a call vote.

Southwestern Washington Synod Identity and Vision

We are the congregations, people, communities and ministries of the ELCA in Southwestern Washington. We walk together as communities-in-mission.

Our vision is Shalom - God's love, healing and justice at every level of life.

The Synod staff, in collaboration with the Synod Council, are called to accompany, support, equip and encourage the Synod body through facilitation, resourcing, stewardship, connection and pastoral care.

(for the full version of this statement, go to <https://swwasynod.org/about/our-vision/>)

Synod Staff

Bishop Rick Jaech jaechre@plu.edu

Pastor Rebecca Shjerven, Bishop's Associate shjervr@plu.edu

Joey Ager, Director of Evangelical Mission/Bishop's Associate joey.ager@elca.org

Melissa Anderson Trust, Associate DEM melissa.anderson-trust@elca.org

Stefanie DeZarn, Synod Administrator swwsynod@plu.edu

Mailing Address/ Office Location

420 121st Street South Tacoma, WA 98444
253-535-8300

Website: www.swwasynod.org
Main email: swwasynod@plu.edu