

Suggestions for Pastor Call Committees

Even before we begin the process, we believe that God is calling someone to this specific place in this specific time, someone specific. Our role is one of prayerful discernment, as the Bishop's staff and as the Congregational Call Committee. The integrity of the process depends on mutual respect, honesty in dialogue, and openness to the surprises of God's ways. Invite the congregation to support this discernment by praying that God's wisdom might be present with this Call Committee, the Bishop's staff, and the candidate(s) who will be part of the process.

Preparing for the Process

1. Decide whether you will request one candidate at a time, more than one candidate at a time, or a first call (seminarian) candidate (in consultation with the synod liaison). First Call Theological Education (a three-year synodical program) is required of leaders in their first call setting, and congregational support is needed. Request details from your synod liaison.
2. After you have received the name(s) of the nominee(s), gather for prayer and review the "Invitation to Call" papers together. We ask you to interview all of the pastors nominated. If you choose not to interview a pastor, you should notify us before you begin your contacts.
3. Agree upon a format for your interviews. We recommend that they be as similar as possible, for it helps you make fair comparisons and a comprehensive presentation of your congregation. Agree upon the "rules" you will have about your committee's work, paying special attention to the final decision meeting. Review together the "Possible Interview Questions," and formulate a list of those you plan to use.
4. Schedule and invite candidate(s) for interview. Schedule interviews in close succession, but not on the same day.
5. Candidates will have been sent a copy of the Congregational Mission Profile you submitted. We suggest that you also send a page of short paragraphs about the call committee members, picture directory and membership directory, annual report, samples of past newsletters and bulletins, schedule for the interview, and map directly to your candidates.
6. Practice HOSPITALITY. The calling congregation is responsible for arrangements and expenses of travel, meals, and lodging of candidates. The candidates will have received a reimbursement form to submit to you.
7. We recommend this format for the time you spend with candidates: afternoon tour of the church facility and community, then at least two hours of rest, dinner with some or all of the committee members, an interview about 1 ½ hours in length, overnight in the community, breakfast with call committee chairperson (and perhaps council chairperson), interviews with other staff members (where appropriate), then homeward.
 - Spouses may be invited for tours, dinner, and breakfast. Spouses should not be expected at interviews, but you may decide if they are welcome at the interviews.
 - Housing is best in a hotel/motel rather than a private home.
 - You may wish to explore opportunities for spouse's profession, children's needs, housing options.

Conducting the Interview

1. Plan the interview. Ask the questions you have agreed upon of all candidates (you certainly may ask additional clarifying questions). We recommend that assignment of questions be given to each call committee member. Remember that this is a two-way interview: the candidate needs to ask questions about the ministry. Be prepared to offer time for this and decide how questions will be fielded. Keep interview to around 1 ½ hours in length.
2. As the interview closes, be clear with the candidate about your timeline. When do you anticipate that the candidate be hearing from you? (It is useful to put this in writing in a "thank you" note sent soon after the interview.)

Suggestions for Pastor Call Committees (continued)

3. Call committees often choose to travel to the place of the pastor's ministry to see the pastor lead worship and hear the pastor's preaching. (We highly discourage a "trial sermon" in the congregation at any time.) Visit with the pastor to make arrangements for visiting, taking care to be discreet.
4. It is helpful to "debrief" each interview one at a time, rather than wait until all the interviews are completed. Evaluate the climate of the visit, and exchange personal perceptions, questions, and concerns. "Does the candidate understand the mission of the Church and our congregation's mission goals for the future? Does the candidate have leadership skills to lead us into mission? What are the candidate's strengths and weaknesses?"

Making a Decision

5. Wait a few days after the last "debriefing" meeting and gather to make a decision about recommending a particular pastor. Begin with scripture and prayer. Review how you will make this decision together and follow through on the process you've determined.
6. Contact the pastor whom you will recommend to the congregation council for call. Ask permission to make that recommendation to the council.
7. Contact the pastors whom you are not recommending by phone and report your action, thanking them for their consideration. Follow up with a letter, sending a copy to the synod office.
8. Contact the synod staff person about your decision.
9. The entire call committee or a delegation should attend the council meeting in which you are making your recommendation. Describe the process used, keeping names not recommended confidential. Present printed and verbal descriptions of the pastor being recommended and why you are confident God is calling this person to serve here. Offer your continued assistance to the council in presenting and supporting the pastor to the congregation.

The Council Recommendation and Election Process: Step by Step

- The council provides for due constitutional notice to the congregation announcing the date of the special meeting being convened to issue a Call to a particular person. The Congregation President notifies the synod liaison concerning the date.
- The council prepares a communications strategy, providing thorough printed and personal announcements about the pastor being recommended, (perhaps a one or two page summary about the person and the process).
- The council prepares a proposal for compensation, including salary, benefits, and expectations using the documents "Minimum Salary Guidelines" and "Definition of Compensation..."
- The council decides upon provisions for the congregation to meet the candidate prior to the congregational meeting. The synod recommends an "open house" format during which the pastor might lead devotions and engage those assembled in conversation about the ministry.
- The congregation President (or designee) conducts the call meeting. (Two resolutions will be presented for action at the special meeting: one to issue a Call to the recommended candidate and the other concerning the offer of compensation.)
- After the meeting, the congregation President (or designee) contacts the pastor-nominee and the synod liaison to convey the decisions. (The Call Committee chair could also contact the nominee to offer encouragement and interpretation, or to offer aid in planning the potential transition.) If a Call is being extended, the President makes a plan for completion of the official call documents (and should clarify that timeline with the candidate). If a Call is not being extended, the Call Committee will reconvene to determine the next step in consultation with the synod liaison.
- The Council President and Secretary sign the completed documents and mail to the synod office for the Bishop's signature.
- When the call documents are sent to the pastor, the pastor has 30 days to respond. Start-up typically begins 60-120 days from the date of acceptance. The Congregation President and new Pastor make arrangements for an installation service with the synod liaison.