

WELCOME TO THE CALL PROCESS

Guidance for Congregations Seeking a Rostered Minister

Upstate New York Synod – ELCA

Transitions can be anxious times in the life of a congregation. This document outlines the basic process and highlights the variety of people from the wider church who may accompany you during this time – bishop, synod staff, conference deans, transitional leaders, intentional interims and synod representatives, in addition to rostered ministers and lay leaders from neighboring congregations. You will find that there is built-in flexibility for the different circumstances of each congregation. Throughout this journey, know that there are many others walking with you, praying for you, and available to assist you along the way.

TRANSITION BEGINS:

1. The Rostered Minister retires or resigns.
2. The Rostered Minister's resignation/retirement is reported to the Bishop's office by a representative of the Congregation Council. The Conference Dean may serve as lead Synod staff during the transition, alongside a Synod staff member for Mobility.
3. The Dean and/or Synod staff will arrange to meet with the Council to discuss interim options. At the invitation of the council, the Bishop and/or other Synod staff may attend a Council meeting to bring greetings, pray, and discuss the transition process in a more general way.
4. The Parish Records are examined by the Conference Dean. The departing rostered minister signs a form certifying that the records are accurate and complete.
5. All financial obligations between the Rostered Minister and congregation must be satisfied before departure.
6. The Conference Dean will conduct an exit interview with the departing Rostered Minister.
7. Prior to the Rostered Minister's departure, the congregation may plan an event to honor the resigning or retiring rostered minister and family, as appropriate. Saying farewell to a departing rostered minister and family is important for marking the end of their ministry in a congregation and for taking leave from a community. A liturgical recognition of leave-taking in the final worship service is also important. A copy of this liturgy is available in Sundays and Seasons, entitled, "Thanksgiving at the Conclusion of a Call" (www.sundaysandseasons.com).
8. Once a rostered minister's resignation becomes effective that person becomes a former pastor of the congregation. Former pastors of the congregation no longer have authority, privileges, rights or responsibilities within the congregation (e.g. visiting the sick, counseling, having responsibility for Confirmation classes, attending meetings of the Congregation Council, performing official pastoral acts such as baptisms, weddings and funerals). During a pastoral transition, Congregation Council members are responsible to see that matters of pastoral concern are referred to the Transition Leaders.

DISCERNMENT

Anytime a pastor leaves a congregation there is a measure of grief and loss. The relationship between a rostered minister and a congregation is unique. Attending to the hopes and expectations that surround the call, along with the feelings that a departure stirs up, is crucial to ensuring that the next rostered minister begins with a clean state.

It is normal for congregations to be tempted to work quickly to fill the vacancy. However, experience shows that the transition is an important time in the life of a congregation, to revisit their congregational identity and their God-given vision for ministry. Congregations that are patient and take their time in discerning their needs and mission are more apt to call a pastor who will fit their setting and their unique ministry needs. No two congregations are exactly alike, and the length of transition time will vary depending upon the length of tenure of the departing rostered minister, the circumstances surrounding the departure, the time it takes for the congregation to engage in their discernment process, and the search for rostered leaders who provide a good match to the congregation.

Prior to drafting a congregation's "Ministry Site Profile," it is strongly recommended that the community spend some time in deep conversation around their values and mission. We encourage each congregation to spend time considering who God has called them to be, and how God is sending them into the world as the church. Synod staff may be able to provide discernment tools to guide this discussion.

The Synod staff is committed to helping congregations through this part of the process. If you have an Intentional Interim they will also provide guidance in this phase of the process.

Following this discernment, you are ready to write the M.S.P!

PREPARING THE MINISTRY SITE PROFILE

1. Congregational leadership engages in writing a Ministry Site Profile. This is found online in the Call Process section of the ELCA website. Go to: <https://www.elca.org/Resources/Call-Process>
2. A working group composed of a cross-section of congregation members is formed to write this document. Members of this committee may be appointed to the call committee. We recommend that you download the form to complete and edit it offline, and then copy and paste your work into the online document. Be sure that your document is as complete as possible. You may make changes after submission, however any changes after submission will cause the document to be listed as inactive until it is resubmitted by the synod office.
3. If the congregation has completed their annual statistical reports, they will find much of the needed data in their Congregational Trend Report posted on the ELCA website. If the congregation has not completed (or has incomplete) annual statistical reports, it may be helpful to complete the reports listed below in order to provide accurate data to the Ministry Site Profile. Congregational trend reports and local demographic trends and projections are available through the ELCA Department of Research and Evaluation: <https://www.elca.org/Resources/Congregation-and-Synod-Data>
4. Compensation guidelines are provided each year by the Synod and may be found on the Resources page of the synod website. <https://upstatenysynod.org/resources> Please refer to these for current minimum compensation numbers and benefits so that a budget can be agreed upon by the council prior to the call process. The Synod Mobility Specialist can help you determine what is

affordable to your congregation. The MSP provides a space to record the congregation's budget range for total compensation. If the council finds that a full time package is not realistic, please be in conversation with the Mobility Specialist.

5. Once the Ministry Site Profile draft is completed, the congregation sends it to the Dean for preliminary feedback. The Dean, in turn, returns the MSP to the congregation with any suggestions for revision.
6. Once revisions are finalized, the Council President contacts the Mobility Specialist that they may be aware of financial considerations and any other issues as they prepare to search for a candidate.
7. Instruct indicated References to complete their official recommendation.
8. Click **SUBMIT!**

THE CALL COMMITTEE

A Call Committee is appointed or elected according to the provisions of the congregation's constitution by the Council (C13.05 in the Model Constitution for Congregations). Name, address and phone number of the call committee chair will go into the Ministry Site Profile. This is the person with whom most communication will happen throughout the process.

The following is a list of best practices when appointing a call committee:

1. The Call Committee should be representative of congregation diversity in: age, gender, culture, length of belonging in the community, involvement in various programs, organizations and activities. The congregation is best served by call committee members who can see and understand the needs of the entire congregation.
2. It is encouraged the Call Committee members not also be current Congregation Council members. Council Members will have their own opportunity to interview and consider the Candidate. Try your best to expand and include as many people as possible in the various groups involved in the interview and call process. If that is not possible, and there are people serving on both the call committee and the council, please contact the Synod Mobility Specialist.
3. The Call Committee should provide regular reports to the Congregation Council and regular communication with the congregation, remembering to keep the boundary of confidentiality for a candidate's name and identifying information.
4. Once the Call Committee has received a recommendation from the Bishop, the Committee holds the identity of the Candidate in strictest confidence for the sake of the pastoral candidate's current call, and so neither rumors spread among the congregation, nor unnecessary pressure is exerted on the call committee.
5. The congregation is responsible for all costs related to the call process including travel/lodging costs for candidates and the Call Committee.

6. It is expected that the Call Committee will be willing to travel and possibly spend an overnight in order to interview the Candidate, if necessary. Most often, the candidate travels to the congregation, but this is not always possible.
7. The Call Committee may suggest names of potential candidates to the Bishop through the Dean or the Mobility Specialist. No candidate may be approached directly by a congregation without prior approval of the Bishop due to ELCA mobility practices. If the Bishop does not give approval it is likely because 1) the total pastoral needs of the Synod would be harmed by a given pastor making a change in pastorate at that time, 2) personal matters make it inappropriate for a pastor to consider a new call at this time, or 3) the candidate has not been released or recommended for consideration by their synod bishop.
8. It is important for congregations to make sure their websites and other social communication tools are current, prior to receiving a candidate's name. The Call Committee is encouraged to assemble a "Welcome Packet" for the candidate which provides a combination of information about the congregation, and about the communities the congregation serves. Include the latest newsletter, video promotion, or links to local attractions or events.
9. The Call Committee prepares for the initial interview. Call Committees are encouraged to conduct one or more "mock" interviews. Conference pastors are often willing to help with this. Interview training may also be available for Call Committees and Congregation Councils. In preparation, call committees are encouraged to allow their congregation's vision for mission, and learnings gained from writing the Ministry Site Profile to guide their questions. Sample questions are included in the congregation's "welcome to the call process" packet and available on the synod website at <https://upstatenysynod.org/resources>

PREPARING TO INTERVIEW

As you wait for a candidate's name it is appropriate for the committee to meet and prepare *relevant* questions for the interview. While similar to traditional job interviews, the interview between a candidate for ministry and a congregation is different in significant ways. The interview might more appropriately be thought of as a conversation because both the Candidate and the congregation, seeking to determine if this would be a good fit of skills, abilities, gifts and personalities. With that in mind, this conversation is much more focused on discerning the suitability of a potential call as a partnership, as opposed to trying to fill a position. As mentioned above, a practice-interview may be arranged with a local, conference pastor; contact the Conference Dean to help with these arrangements.

Call Committees are encouraged to be open to congregational reflection and evaluation in this process. Call Committees are to be prepared to articulate their congregation's strengths, share examples about what congregational life is like, and to be honest with their history, hopes, challenges, and opportunities.

During a call process congregations and potential leaders are engaged in listening for how God is speaking through the Holy Spirit. The Call Committee is encouraged to take the time necessary to listen carefully for God's voice throughout this process. The Congregation as a whole is encouraged to pray for the process publicly in worship in the petitions of the people. Pray for the Call Committee, The Congregation Council, and potential candidates that they may be open to the call of the Holy Spirit.

WHAT TO DO WHEN CANDIDATE PAPERWORK IS RECEIVED

The Bishop recommends a rostered minister to the Call Committee for their consideration. This recommendation is made only after the Bishop or synod staff have consulted with the congregation regarding the needs and mission of the congregation and its resources.

You will receive the following documents:

- a) Bishop's Letter of Introduction
- b) Short Form Rostered Minister Profile
- c) Sample Questions
- d) This document for review

The Call Committee Chairperson contacts the rostered minister within 48-hours of receiving the Rostered Minister Profile. The purpose of this contact is to serve as an initial contact acknowledging their paperwork has been received. The Chairperson may acknowledge they will be contacting the candidate a second time to set up the first interview and neutral site worship service or how to experience their preaching and worship leadership digitally.

The Call Committee chairperson takes a consensus of the Call Committee for potential initial meeting and interview dates and then notifies the Conference Dean of potential dates so that arrangements for a Synod Representative to be present can be made. The Synod Representative provides communication between the Call Committee and Synod Staff and is a resource and local support to the Call Committee and Pastoral Candidate.

The Call Committee shall review the Bishop's recommendation and Rostered Minister Profile, and supplemental documents. These are a starting place for conversation with the Candidate.

The first meeting between the Call Committee and the Candidate includes the Call Committee experiencing the Rostered Minister leading worship (if a minister of Word and Sacrament) or a ministry event/activity (if a minister of Word and Service) at a neutral site which is distinct from the calling congregation/community and the Candidate's current setting. The Dean will assist the Call Committee to find the neutral site venue.

Following the worship service or ministry event, The Call Committee and Candidate hold a significant interview (90-120 minutes) at a neutral site, with a Synod Representative present. Preceding or following the significant interview an introductory tour of the local area would also be appropriate.

Immediately following the interview, it is helpful to have each committee member privately record their own reflections of the Candidate including such things as strengths, weaknesses, impressions and unanswered questions. These reflections serve as the starting point for a subsequent meeting of the Call Committee.

Following the initial interview, additional information, such as online examples of preaching or worship leadership, is sought. References provided on the Rostered Minister Profile are contacted at this time. An additional interview is occasionally helpful in the discernment process. To avoid further travel, this interview can be conducted via Zoom or similar digital platforms.

It is recommended that the Call Committee wait between one to five days following the interview in order to individually consider, and prayerfully reflect on the Candidate. The Call Committee then meets to consider if the Candidate is a good fit for the congregation's pastoral needs. It is helpful to have each member of the Call Committee share the reflections recorded after the initial interview. The Call

Committee considers at this time whether they have enough information to make a recommendation, or if they have additional questions or need additional information from the Candidate. The recommendation does not need to be unanimous. Remember to inform the Conference Dean of this meeting so that a Synod Representative may be present to share communication and answer any questions.

When the Call Committee feels that their discernment process is complete they report a decision with the Congregational Council.

- a) When the discernment results in a favorable recommendation, the committee prepares a written report for the Congregation Council with their recommendations and rationale. The chair (and perhaps members of the committee) meets with the Congregation Council to share the report. This is done before the Candidate is invited to meet with the Council. Please share this report with the Conference Dean and copy the Synod Mobility Specialist.
- b) When the discernment results are not favorable, it is the responsibility of the Call Committee to notify the Candidate and the Dean as soon as possible with the reasons for the Committee's decision. If it is helpful to have a conversation with the Bishop and/or the Assistant to the Bishop prior to sending this letter, please consider doing so. You should contact the candidate first by phone or personal contact and followed immediately by a letter addressed to the Candidate with the same information. This letter should be copied to Conference Dean, the Bishop and the Synod Mobility Specialist. The recommendation process will then begin again.

THE CANDIDATE IS RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL

Upon receiving a positive written recommendation from the Call Committee, the Council President immediately begins the process of initiating a Background Screening of the Candidate. It is important that one person be designated to receive the information from the screening and that the results are received prior to the congregational call vote. If such a Criminal background screening reveals information that was not known or that is contradictory to what has been provided by the Candidate, the Council President (or Council designee) should confer with the Bishop or the Mobility Specialist. The Synod will identify some resource people who can assist in interpreting such information.

The Congregation Council invites the Candidate and their spouse (if applicable) to the site for a significant interview. The expenses for this visit are the responsibility of the congregation. During this visit the Candidate and their spouse will have the opportunity to see the church facilities, including the parsonage (if provided). They should also be provided with an opportunity to meet congregation staff, visit the community, including sights of significant interest for the Candidate (i.e. schools, community facilities, realtor). This date is set with the approval of the Conference Dean. A synod representative must be present for the interview.

Similarly to the Call Committee, the Congregation Council is to intentionally consider the questions and points of discussion for the interview. They may refer to the Call Committee's report to highlight areas where they would like to explore further, or find matters of ministry yet to be raised.

Decisions on all facets of ministry, including the compensation package are made here. The minimum compensation package provided by the Synod Bishop may be increased, but not decreased. The council and candidate must agree to the compensation package. Following this visit and interview, the Congregation Council meets to consider the candidate and make a recommendation to the Congregation.

IF the discernment results in a favorable recommendation, the Congregation Council sets a date for a call service and vote, with an opportunity for the candidate to meet the whole congregation. **The name is to remain anonymous until the weekend of the vote.** This date needs to be agreeable for the congregation, the candidate and a Synod representative to be arranged by the Conference Dean. Regular Congregation constitutional guidelines for calling a Congregational Meeting are to be followed. The Congregation Council may wish to host a “Meet & Greet” the weekend of the Congregational Meeting in order for members, guests, and community members to meet the Pastor and their family.

IF the discernment results are not favorable, it is the responsibility of the Congregation Council to notify the Candidate and the Dean as soon as possible with the reasons for the Congregation Council’s decision. This should be done first by phone or personal contact and followed immediately by a letter addressed to the Candidate with the same information. This letter should be copied to the Dean, the Bishop and the Synod Mobility Specialist. The recommendation process will then begin again.

CALL SERVICE AND VOTE

1. A Special Meeting of the Congregation is called according to the provisions in the congregation’s constitution (Section C10 in the Congregational Model Constitution) to consider the Congregation Council’s motion to call the Candidate to the pastoral office. The Congregation Council may provide for a “Meet & Greet” or similar informal gathering with the Candidate some time prior to experiencing the Candidate leading worship. The Conference Dean will arrange for a Synod Representative to be present who may also be available to chair the Congregational Meeting on behalf of the Council President. The only agenda item for the meeting is the call of a pastor. Following a prayer, brief discussion may precede the vote allowing for reports of the Call Committee and Council to be received as well as time for discussion. The vote shall be by written ballot. Once the ballots are counted, the pastor is told the results by the Council President and Synod Representative and provided the opportunity to consider the results. If the pastor accepts right away, the congregation can be told the results immediately. The results may not be published until the newly called Rostered Minister has given permission, generally, after they have time to tell their current congregation.
2. The Synod Representative lets the Dean know the results of the vote and completes the Synod Representative Report on the Calling of a Pastor. The Council President and Pastor-Elect complete three copies of the *Initial Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Expenses of the Pastor* (received from the Assistant to the Bishop for Roster Care) as soon as possible after the result is known and sends them to the Bishop for their signature. The congregation will also receive *Letters of Call* for the pastor shortly after the successful call vote. These documents are to be signed and returned in a timely manner for the Bishop’s signature.
3. The Pastor-Elect sends a formal letter accepting the call to the congregation with a copy to the Bishop.
4. Ordination arrangements (if applicable) are made with the Synod Bishop. Installation arrangements are made with the Conference Dean. The Installation of the new pastor may be scheduled once the Bishop has officially attested to both the “Letter of Call” and the “Initial Definition of Compensation, Benefits and Expenses of the Pastor.” Normally the Installation of the new pastor is held as close as possible to the start of the pastor’s service in the new congregation.
5. The Conference Dean will set up a meeting with the new pastor and the Congregation Council within the first 9 to 15 months of the new call to check in on the transition and to provide insights and resources that may be useful as the pastor and congregation engage in their mutual ministry.

6. Congratulations! The Congregation has a new pastor!!!

“The gifts Christ gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” (Ephesians 4:11-12)

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Edited and revised by LMM II, RS and JG