

Northeastern Ohio Synod Congregational Call Process

INTRODUCTION

This process is designed to help congregations, pastors, associates in ministry, diaconal ministers, and synod staff to discern God's will. Faith is the central premise of this process.

In Ephesians 4 we read:

[God's] gifts 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, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Article V of the Augsburg Confession says:

God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, God gives the Holy Spirit who works faith, where and when it pleases, in those who hear the Gospel.

We pray that all involved in the call process may be instruments of God's will and work.

This call process is designed to help your congregation fulfill the stipulation of your constitution. (See last page of this document.)

PROCEDURAL STEPS

1. Rostered person resigns or retires

- a. Rostered person submits resignation in writing to council, copying the bishop.
- b. Congregation notifies bishop upon receiving resignation.
- c. Pastor brings parish records up to date.
- d. Rostered person submits a concluding report to bishop which may be shared with call committee and/or pastoral candidates.
- e. Congregation and rostered person make arrangements for the mutual settlement of obligations.
- f. Mutual Ministry Committee/council arranges for an exit interview with the rostered person.
- g. "Ritual of Closure" or "Service of Retirement" is a part of the rostered person's last worship service with congregation.

2. Interim care

- a. Bishop's assistant explains availability/purpose of interim care.
- b. Council decides on interim needs (time and tasks) and reports to bishop's assistant, who offers the name of an interim pastor to meet with council for conversation about an interim ministry agreement.
- c. Synod staff helps with supply pastors if needed.

3. Bishop meets with congregational council

- a. Discusses council's responsibilities during interim.
- b. Explains call process, including constitutional considerations.
- c. Gives guidance for selecting a call committee.
- d. Discusses congregation's mission and ministry.

4. Call committee is formed

- a. Council nominates/selects committee members (usually 5-9).
- b. Congregation elects/approves call committee.
- c. Call committee is installed during worship.
- d. Council notifies bishop's assistant when call committee is ready to begin.

If the pastoral vacancy occurs in a multiple staff setting, the senior pastor may be a member of the call committee; and in any case, shall be an advisor to the committee. Other staff members may participate in the call process through the congregational mission profile.

5. Bishop's assistant meets with call committee to:

- a. Review the call process.
- b. Explain the importance of the "Congregational Mission Profile" for the call process.
- c. Give guidance for identification of leadership needs.
- d. Encourage regular updates on committee's work to congregation.

6. Call Committee prepares "Congregational Mission Profile"

- a. Call committee reviews the mission profile; creates a profile where one does not exist; updates the profile where over two years old.
- b. Call committee solicits the congregation's participation in identifying leadership needs and vision for mission and ministry.
- c. Council gives general compensation parameters, keeping in mind synodical guidelines.
- d. Congregation affirms the vision for mission and ministry.
- e. Call committee meets with bishop's assistant to present and discuss the profile.

7. Identification of candidates

- a. Bishop and staff review the congregational profile.
- b. Bishop and staff assemble a list of candidates from among:
 - i. Rostered people whose mobility papers are on file.
 - ii. Rostered people identified by the congregation through the call committee.
 - iii. Rostered people who request consideration through the bishop's office.
- c. Bishop and staff nominate candidates on the basis of the congregation's mission profile and identified pastoral needs.
 - i. Three candidates are nominated; fewer candidates may be nominated with appropriate rationale.
 - ii. Candidates may interview simultaneously in multiple settings.
 - iii. Candidates' identities are kept confidential within the call committee until time of recommendation.

8. Preparations for interviewing

- a. Bishop's assistant meets with the call committee to:
 - i. Present mobility forms of nominated candidates.
 - ii. Explain interviewing procedures.
- b. Call committee schedules interviews with nominated candidates.
 - i. Committee is responsible for sending pertinent information to candidates in advance of the interview: newsletters, annual report, constitution, worship bulletins, video tapes, community information, etc.
 - ii. Committee determines questions for interview.
 - iii. Congregation covers the cost of interviewing—round-trip mileage or air fare, meals, lodging, etc.
 - iv. Normally the spouse of a married candidate is invited to attend.
 - v. Call committee maintains open and timely communication with the candidates and with the synod staff throughout the interview process.

9. Call committee interviews and recommends

- a. Call committee interviews candidates.
 - i. Provides candidates with tour of area.
 - ii. Spouses of married candidates may be present at interview, but not interviewed formally or informally.
 - iii. Committee shares decision-making process and time-table with the candidates.
 - v. If desired, and with candidates' agreement, the committee visits candidates' present congregational worship setting. (Care and discretion are required.)
- b. Call committee evaluates the interviews and selects one candidate based on the mission and ministry needs of the congregation.
- c. Call committee recommends a candidate by at least a 2/3 vote of the call committee to the council/congregation.
 - i. Informs candidate of decision to recommend.
 - ii. Notifies in a timely fashion non-recommended candidates.
 - iii. Informs bishop's assistant of recommendation.
 - iv. Shares information regarding the candidate with the congregation.
- d. The appropriate group (e.g., executive committee, congregational council) proposes compensation package.
- e. Congregational council, in consultation with bishop's assistant, sets a date for a congregational meeting, if possible, at a time when a representative of the bishop can be present.

10. Congregational meeting is held following the procedures outlined in the congregation's constitution

- a. A congregational visit by the recommended candidate (and family) may be scheduled for the purpose of introducing the candidate to the congregation. Worship leadership by the candidate is not recommended.
- b. Information regarding the recommended candidate and the proposed compensation package is presented for congregation approval.
 - i. 2/3 vote of all voting members present and voting is required to extend a call.
 - ii. Majority vote is required to approve the compensation package.

11. Congregation issues call

- a. Congregational council president/call committee chair informs candidate of congregation's decision.
- b. Call meeting report form is completed and returned to bishop's office.
- c. "Letter of Call" is completed and sent to the bishop for attestation of the call.
- d. "Letter of Call" is sent to the pastor-elect (associate in ministry/diaconal minister) through the bishop's office.

12. Pastor-elect (associate in ministry/diaconal minister) responds to call

- a. Pastor-elect (associate in ministry/diaconal minister) acknowledges the call in writing to the congregation with copies of the letter sent to the bishop of the calling congregation and if applicable to the bishop of his or her rostering synod.
- b. A post-call conversation between the pastor-elect (associate in ministry/diaconal minister) and the congregation's leadership may be held for further discussion of the congregation's mission and ministry.
- c. The pastor-elect (associate in ministry/diaconal minister) is given 30 days to respond to the call.
 - i. If the call is accepted, pastor-elect (associate in ministry/diaconal minister) informs the congregational council president/vice-president of the calling congregation and the congregation currently being served with a copy to the bishop(s).
 - (a) Relocation normally takes place within 30 days.
 - (b) Bishop is informed of acceptance and plans for the installation are made through bishop's office.
 - ii. If the call is not accepted, the congregation is informed in writing with a copy to the bishop(s).

The call committee is called back into session and seeks the guidance of the bishop's staff assistant for the next steps.

CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

S14.11 Each congregation of this synod shall consult the bishop of this synod before taking any steps leading to the extending of a call to a prospective pastor. When the congregation has voted to issue a call to a prospective pastor, the letter of call shall be submitted to the bishop of the synod for the bishop's signature.

S14.12 No ordained minister shall accept a call without first conferring with the bishop of this synod. The ordained minister shall respond with an answer of acceptance or declination to a letter of call within thirty days of reception of such call. In exceptional circumstances, with the approval of the bishop of the synod and the chair of the congregational council of the congregations issuing the call, an additional fifteen days may be granted to respond to a letter of call.

S14.15 The parochial records of each congregation shall be kept in a separate book which shall remain its property. The secretary of the congregation shall attest to the bishop of this synod that such records have been placed in his/her hands in good order by a departing pastor before:

- a. installation in another field of labor; or
- b. the issuance of a certificate of dismissal or transfer.

S13.12 A congregation under financial obligation to its former pastor or associate in ministry shall make satisfactory settlement of the obligation before calling a successor.

S14.16 The pastor shall make satisfactory settlement of all financial obligations to a former congregation before:

- a. installation in another field of labor; or*
- b. the issuance of a certificate of dismissal or transfer.*

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