

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP  
NEW JERSEY SYNOD  
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

# The Pastoral Call Process

for

## Ministers of Word and Sacrament

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A Guide to Procedure and Practice

Revised October 2025

# ***STEPS IN THE PASTORAL CALL PROCESS***

## ***Step 1 – What to Do When Your Pastor Resigns***

- Notification and consultation with the Bishop
- Notification of chief lay officer, congregation council

## ***Step 2 – Initial Meeting with the Congregation Council***

- Review process
- Interim/vice pastor appointment
- Arrangements for Sunday pastoral supply
- Assess current situation
- Certification of parish records; certification of no indebtedness
- Review expectations regarding role of resigning/retiring pastor

## ***Step 3 – Mission Exploration Process***

- Gathering information: congregational survey, history event, and other ministry events as determined by council and office of the bishop
- Determination of financial readiness and ability to call a pastor
- Completion of Ministry Site Profile

## ***Step 4 – Appointment of a Pastoral Call Committee***

## ***Step 5 – Meeting with the Bishop***

## ***Step 6 – Pastoral Call Committee Preparation***

## ***Step 7 – Pastoral Call Committee Activity***

- Candidate identified by Office of the Bishop
- Call committee interview process (2 stages)
- Decision to recommend made by majority plus 1, or decision to begin Step 7 again

## ***Step 8 – Joint Meeting of the Candidate, Council and Call Committee***

- Candidate interview
- Decision to recommend made by a two-thirds affirmative vote, or decision to return to Step 5 or 7

## ***Step 9 – Special Congregational Meeting***

- Informal gathering (recommended)
- Candidate presented to the congregation
- Candidate leads worship and preaches
- Congregation votes with two-thirds affirmative required for election, or back to Step 5 or 7

## ***Step 10 – Congregation Council Issues Letter of Call***

- Candidate has up to two weeks for a decision
- Council prepares for welcoming the new pastor

## The Pastoral Call Process in the New Jersey Synod

A congregation's calling a pastor is not the same as a business or organization's hiring an employee. This is not so much about finding a particular person to do a particular job as it is about entering into a relationship. A pastor brings a previously affirmed commitment to Word and Sacrament ministry into a specific community, and there promises to care for and nourish the congregation and to stand as a faithful witness for the sake of the Gospel in that place.

In so doing, the pastor brings the care and concern of the whole Church; indeed, the whole Church is concerned for the faithful proclamation of the Gospel in that place. The pastor is ordained by the whole Church both to provide for the baptized members of the congregation, and to lead and enable those same disciples in their witness and service to the community in which they are placed.

We believe the Holy Spirit works through the Church – in the work of bishops and synod staff, mission districts and their deans, congregation councils, and call committees – to establish, renew, and change these relationships between pastors and congregations of God's people. To that end we are called to be constant in prayer for trust in and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to understand that it is God's intention for us that we are trying to discern, and not the satisfaction of a two-thirds majority of congregational wants.

**Suggestion:**  
**Lift up the call process and the names of the call committee in the public prayers of the church each week.**

In the time when a congregation is seeking a pastor, the Office of the Bishop assumes a very important role. The process of calling a pastor is outlined in this Procedure and Practice document. The process itself has three major concerns:

1. Care of the congregation in the interim time between pastors;
2. Adequate assessment and evaluation of the mission tasks, needs and opportunities of the congregation and its community;
3. *Vertical* consideration of a pastoral candidate – that is, the candidate is interviewed and assessed on the basis of abilities and ministry style in light of the missional requirements of the congregation, and not in comparison to other candidates (*horizontal*).

To meet these three concerns, these commitments and understandings are provided for in the call process:

- A shepherding of the congregation, its council and call committee, through the interim period and the call process. This is accomplished largely through the ministry of those whom the Bishop designates and appoints for such tasks.
- Presentation of one candidate at a time to the call committee. This person will be the best candidate available in the judgment of the Bishop and staff. If the call committee or candidate determines after the initial interview stage or later that the process should not continue, the Bishop and staff will review and present another candidate.
- Thorough knowledge of the congregations of the Synod and pastors. This would include provisions for effective resources for congregational assessment and evaluation.
- A prevailing understanding throughout the Synod that since pastors are pastors of the Church, there needs to be an openness by congregations to the fact that the Bishop may, from time to time, ask a pastor to talk with a call committee; and that call committees may from time to time be present at a service to hear the pastor conduct worship and preach. In some cases the call committee may not be present for the purpose of hearing a particular pastor, but there at the Bishop's suggestion to gain needed experience, such as hearing a woman preach, or being part of a bi-lingual service.

In every instance the final decision about a candidate rests with the call committee, council and ultimately with the congregation.

The process described in this document offers efficiency and a high level of communication. It places significant responsibility upon the Office of the Bishop, emphasizing the role of the Bishop as pastor to the congregations of the Synod, as well as to pastors.

*Consistent with the faith and practice of this Church, every ordained minister shall preach the Word, administer the sacraments, conduct public worship, provide pastoral care, and speak publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, calling for justice and proclaiming God's love for the world.*

*Each ordained minister with a congregational call shall, within the congregation, offer instruction, confirm, marry, visit the sick and distressed, and bury the dead; shall supervise all schools and organizations of the congregation; shall install regularly elected members of the Congregation Council, and with the council administer discipline. Every ordained minister shall seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the ministry of the Gospel and strive to extend the Kingdom of God in the community, in the nation, and abroad; shall impart knowledge of the church and its wider ministry through distribution of its periodicals and other publications and shall endeavor to increase the support given by the congregation to the work of the ELCA and of this synod. (Synod Constitution, S14.02)*

## Procedure and Practice for the Call Process

Calling a pastor to be engaged in mutual ministry with the members of a congregation and the community in which it is located is an important event. As such it is necessary to recognize that it is our Lord Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, who works in guiding each of us. The congregation council, the pastoral call committee, the congregation, the designated representative of the bishop, the mission district dean, and the bishop of the synod are all involved in calling a person to be pastor of a congregation.

The steps described in this document are to be followed as a congregation engages in the process of calling a pastor.

### **Step 1 – What to Do When Your Pastor Resigns**

When the congregation experiences the loss of its pastor, a situation of change, uncertainty, and potential instability occurs. Such a time holds the possibility of being either constructive or destructive. It is the intention of the Office of the Bishop to make this period of time as productive as possible by providing careful guidance. The kind of support and guidance required will be determined by the circumstances of the pastor's departure.

**Important – Notify the Office of the Bishop as soon as you learn of your pastor's resignation!**

It is important for the congregation council to know to whom to turn, what to do, and what procedures are to be followed upon learning of the resignation of its pastor. Immediately following the resignation of the congregation's pastor, the relationship between the congregation, the bishop of the synod, and the

bishop's designated representative in the process takes on new dimensions. To achieve a smooth transition into this intensified relationship with the synod, the resigning pastor will normally take certain important steps.

The pastor, prior to submitting a resignation, is expected to consult with the bishop. The pastor normally notifies the chief lay officer of the congregation, and then meets with the congregation council to present the letter of resignation, which is subsequently sent to all members of the congregation. The pastor would also see that the chief lay officer has addresses and telephone numbers for the bishop, the mission cluster counselor, the mission district dean, the supply preaching coordinator, and the synod office.

Upon receiving the resignation of the pastor, the chief lay officer of the congregation should immediately communicate with the bishop. *Exhibit A* provides a model letter that can be sent to the bishop, enclosing a copy of the pastor's letter of resignation and a copy of the congregation council's communication of the resignation to the congregation.

The chief lay officer should contact the bishop's office to establish dates for a meeting with the congregation council. This meeting should be scheduled as soon as possible, and prior to the pastor's leaving. The resigning pastor does not attend this meeting. In this meeting, the congregation council will be assisted in its responsibility to lead the congregation during the transition, to arrange for pastoral services as needed, and to initiate the process, which would normally lead to the calling of a new pastor.

## **Step 2 – Initial Meeting with the Congregation Council**

At the appointed time, the bishop or a designated representative will meet with the congregation council to outline the call process. The agenda will include:

- Appointment of an interim pastor
- Arrangements for Sunday pastoral supply
- Assessment of current congregation needs
- Certification of parish records and no financial indebtedness
- Expectations of the role of the resigning pastor
- Initiate the Mission Exploration Process

The bishop will verify that the congregation is under no financial indebtedness to the pastor who has resigned, and that the pastor is under no financial indebtedness to the congregation.

### **In case of financial indebtedness...**

*If a financial indebtedness does exist, such indebtedness shall be removed or a suitable plan put into place in writing and approved by the bishop. Copies of the plan shall be provided to the pastor, the bishop and the files of the congregation. The pastor and council will share responsibility for assuring that a mutually acceptable agreement on liquidation of any indebtedness is formulated.*

The Mission District Dean or Cluster Counselor and the chief lay officer will have the responsibility to review together the parish register and to ascertain that its records are in good order. Such certification is required before: (a) the resigning pastor is installed in another call, (b) is issued a certificate of dismissal or transfer, or (c) is certified for retirement pension benefits of this church.

The bishop will review with the congregation council the expectations and ethics related to the resigning pastor. These expectations will have been reviewed with the resigning pastor and the bishop prior to this meeting. The congregation council will certify that these expectations have been clearly communicated and will disseminate these expectations to the congregation when the resigning pastor leaves. (*See Exhibit E*)

**It is helpful to have copies of *Exhibit E* available for the congregation. This clarifies the expectations of the resigning pastor.**

A letter certifying that the congregation is under no financial indebtedness to the pastor or the pastor to the congregation (or specifying the plan that has been mutually agreed to for the liquidation of any indebtedness), and also certifying that the pastoral records are in good order and the expectations of the role of the resigning pastor have been reviewed shall be sent by the secretary of the congregation council to the bishop. (*See Exhibit B*)

At the initial meeting with the council, the appointment of an interim or vice pastor will be discussed. The congregation council may suggest names and interview a candidate for interim ministry before appointment by the bishop.

The duties of the standard interim pastor are defined in the Synod Constitution, which reads as follows (S14.17):

*During service to a congregation, an interim pastor shall have the rights and duties of a regularly called pastor. The interim pastor may delegate the same in part to an interim supply pastor with the consent of the bishop of this synod. The interim pastor and any ordained ministers who may assist shall refrain from exerting influence in the selection of pastor. Upon completion of service, the interim pastor shall certify to the bishop of this synod that the parochial records for the period for which the interim pastor was responsible are in order. (Synod Constitution S14.17)*

Further delineation of responsibilities of the standard interim pastor includes the following:

- Attend all meetings of the congregation council
- Be responsible to conduct or arrange for all official pastoral acts such as marriages, funerals, baptisms
- Teach, or at least supervise, the catechetical programs of the congregation
- Visit the seriously ill and home-bound members
- Upon request be available to persons needing pastoral care
- Maintain the parish register

In some circumstances a part time or full time intentional interim or transition pastor may be suggested by the bishop, or a standard interim augmented by a stated supply pastor. In all cases the bishop will provide a proposal for remuneration of the interim pastor.

### **Step 3 – Mission Exploration Process**

Prior to the appointment of a pastoral call committee, the congregation council shall prepare a Ministry Site Profile (available at [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org)). In order to complete this report, the congregation will engage in a mission exploration process that will include anywhere from one to six steps. Based on the assessment of current needs that is done with the congregation council, the bishop, in consultation with the congregation council, will recommend which of these steps to complete. The purpose of engaging in this process is to define future directions and priorities for the mission and ministry of the congregation. The information gathered during this process will assist the congregation council in completing the Ministry Site Profile.

The purpose of the mission exploration process and completion of the Ministry Site Profile is to:

- Review the congregation's life and mission as part of the Church, the body of Christ
- Evaluate the congregation's present strengths
- Identify specific areas for further attention
- Assess the financial ability of the congregation to call the next pastor
- Specify resources necessary to fulfill the mission of Christ's Church including and especially mission tasks in the parish community
- Arrive at a current understanding of the mission/purpose of the congregation
- Identify the gifts that are most important for the next pastor to possess

The Ministry Site Profile will also provide a description of the congregation for use by the bishop in seeking persons who might be nominated as pastor, as well as for use by a candidate in preparing for an interview by the call committee.

Possible steps in the mission exploration process may include events in the following areas:

- History event exploring the congregation's past ministry
- Community demographics
- Outreach exploration
- Community asset mapping
- Stewardship
- Mission review
- Congregational gifts assessment

**This is the fun part!  
Exploring the mission  
and ministry possibilities  
can energize the whole  
congregation.**

#### **Step 4 – Appointment of a Pastoral Call Committee**

The call committee should not be appointed until after the congregation council has assessed congregational needs, has satisfactorily completed the mission exploration process, and forwarded copies of the Ministry Site Profile to the bishop. According to the *Model Constitution for Congregations of the ELCA*, the pastoral call committee is composed of six persons. The majority shall be persons not currently serving on the congregation council. The composition of the call committee should intentionally reflect the makeup of the congregation, assuring that all persons and age groups are represented.

In small membership congregations (those with fewer than 50 average attendance), the congregation council may function as the call committee. This decision should be discussed with the Office of the Bishop and clearly communicated with the congregation.



It is recommended that the chairperson of the call committee be a member of the congregation council. Because of demands placed upon the chief lay officer during a pastoral vacancy, it is recommended that they not chair the call committee. Call committee members shall be confirmed, regularly communing and contributing members of the congregation. Upon appointment and approval by congregation council, the names, addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of the call committee along with the designation of the chairperson shall be communicated by the chief lay officer in writing to the bishop. *(See exhibit C)*

**Does our call committee reflect our mission needs? Do we have a wide diversity of ages, length of membership, interests and a gender balance on our call committee? Is our call committee made up of people committed to the future mission of our congregation?**

The pastoral call committee's primary responsibility is to interview pastoral candidates recommended by the bishop and observe them in the conduct of worship. The call committee is responsible for making specific recommendations of a pastoral candidate for consideration by the congregation council.

It is also the responsibility of the call committee to keep the congregation regularly informed about the status of the call process. This can be done through occasional announcements at worship, newsletter articles, or even a poster display listing the steps in the process and indicating those completed. This information regularly shared concerning the status of the call process can greatly reduce congregational anxiety about the steps being taken to call the congregation's next pastor.

Confidentiality regarding the name of any candidate is of utmost importance and expected of those involved in the call process.

The pastoral call committee will be expected to reimburse any candidate for expenses and provide overnight accommodations for out of town candidates. Members of the call committee are to be reimbursed for expenses they may incur in the call process. Therefore, the congregation council should authorize funding for the pastoral call committee.

### **Step 5 – Meeting with the Bishop**

When the mission exploration process and Ministry Site Profile have been completed and received by the bishop's office, and the call committee identified, the bishop will arrange to meet with the congregation council and the call committee together.

The bishop will conduct the meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to review submitted mission exploration information and discuss implications in an effort to further clarify the needs and expectations for ministry in and through the congregation. The information provided in this combined meeting will be used by the bishop in making a candidate

recommendation to the call committee. The call committee may also at this time bring to the bishop's attention names of pastors in which there is expressed interest.

Following this meeting, the bishop will, with the staff, engage in a process to identify, interview, select and nominate a candidate for the consideration of the pastoral call committee. Criteria that will be used include:

- Specific skills which a pastor should possess in order to help the congregation fulfill its mission tasks
- Comparison between the responses of the congregation in the Ministry Site Profile and the information potential candidates have provided
- Challenges and opportunities for ministry by the congregation
- Location of the parish and its general characteristics
- Mission of the congregation in the community
- Financial provision the congregation is able to offer the pastor

Time given by the bishop and staff in study of the specific situation and in securing the interest of any candidate is an investment in our mutual ministry. Prayer and patience are important.

### **Step 6 – Pastoral Call Committee Preparation**

The primary responsibility of the pastoral call committee is to interview and screen any pastoral candidate recommended by the bishop, and when ready, to make a specific recommendation of a pastoral candidate to the congregation council. It is important to note that the call committee is a subcommittee of the congregation council and as such, it is accountable to the congregation council. The bishop will conduct an orientation session with the pastoral call committee in preparation for the candidate interview. This is usually done on the same date as Step 5, after dismissing the congregation council. During this orientation the committee will:

- Review the Ministry Site Profile
- Review information provided by the mission exploration process
- Identify other specific items that it considers of importance in fulfilling the mission tasks of the congregation
- Develop specific questions related to professional skills which will be used in the interview *(See Exhibit F)*

This orientation is an important preparatory step, which should provide a framework that will help to assure an effective interview.

The call committee members are expected to approach their task with a high commitment to the Gospel and to be faithful representatives of the congregation that has chosen them to serve in this capacity. Likewise, they seek to listen carefully to the leading of the Holy Spirit as they interview a candidate. Call committees generally understand that God calls many different kinds of persons with a great variety of gifts into the ordained ministry.

Nevertheless, some problems remain. Chief among these is age discrimination, racial/ethnic prejudice, gender discrimination, and bias against those who are single, and those who are differently-abled. Our baptism into the family of God calls us to stand firmly against all forms of injustice which in any way demean the dignity and self-worth of any of God's people. It is our aim as a synod to insure that every call process results ultimately in the affirmative call, that is, a call free of inappropriate discrimination or unjust relationships with candidates. Discussion of what is appropriate and inappropriate in the interview step will be important in this orientation meeting.

### **Step 7 – Pastoral Call Committee Activity**

The bishop will submit the name of one candidate at a time. Only after a pastor has given consent to be nominated will the bishop propose their name to the call committee. If the pastor is from another synod, the bishop will first clear that name through the bishop of the synod involved. No pastor is to be considered by the call committee apart from this procedure.

**Prayer and  
Patience are  
most important  
in this process.**

This is one of the more difficult stages of the call process. Members of the congregation, and especially members of the call committee and council, may well be concerned that a new pastor be called as soon as possible. The bishop shares that concern and is also concerned that the best possible selection of a candidate be made.

In order to select the best possible candidate, a great deal of consultation and correspondence is normally required. Consequently it may take several weeks before a recommendation is made to the call committee by the bishop. After careful review of the congregational situation and the gifts and availability of candidates by the bishop and staff, the call committee will be given the name of the best candidate available for their consideration and decision. If either the call committee or the candidate determine not to proceed with the conversation after the initial interview step, or any point thereafter, the bishop and staff will review and nominate another candidate.

The bishop will appoint a designated representative to shepherd both the congregation and potential candidates through the remaining steps of the call process. Once a candidate has been nominated, the call committee shall take responsibility to contact that candidate and set up an interview in a timely manner.

**The name of any candidate being or having been considered is not to be revealed by the call committee.**

The bishop's designated representative may accompany the candidate to the interview, introduce him/her, and remain at the meeting.

The purpose of the meeting is:

- To give the candidate opportunity to see the church facilities and gain initial exposure to the community including schools, shopping facilities, medical resources, community services including libraries, parks and recreation, etc.
- To become acquainted—candidate and call committee members, and vice versa
- To review biographical data and other pertinent information provided by the candidate
- To review congregation data with the candidate, discussing congregational needs and expectations in relation to the candidate's expressed needs and expectations

**A welcoming atmosphere for the interview will help set the tone!**

The pastoral candidate and, if married, the candidate's spouse, shall be invited to visit the parish on the day of the meeting and tour the facilities and community. The candidate shall be reimbursed by the congregation for the expenses of the visit. For married candidates travelling a significant distance, the congregation is expected to pay the expense of the spouse for at least one trip.

**Note...**

*It is hoped that there will be some interaction between the call committee members and the candidate's spouse. However, the spouse will not normally attend the interview. Members of the pastoral call committee, the congregation council, and the congregation are reminded that the spouse is not being considered for a call, and are also advised against having any particular expectations of the spouse in relation to the congregation.*

At one time, call committees went to visit the pastoral candidate in the congregation where they were called to observe their worship leadership. That is no longer the norm. While it is important to get a sense of a candidate's worship leadership style, including preaching, that can happen without physically attending a worship service. Most pastoral candidates have online sermons and worship services that may be viewed by the call committee. Asking a candidate to lead an extended time of devotions can also serve to give the call committee a sense of their leadership style. If a call committee determines they must observe worship in person, it is up to the call committee and candidate to determine the best way to do so.

It is also important for both call committee and the candidate to keep the bishop's designated representative informed of their developing relationship. If, after the interview process, there is no continuing interest in a given candidate, the chairperson of the call committee shall quickly notify in writing both the candidate and the office of the bishop of such a decision, and the factors which shaped the decision. If, after the interview, the

candidate has no continuing interest in the congregation, they shall notify the office of the bishop of that decision.

When after prayerful consideration, the pastoral call committee has interviewed a pastoral candidate it believes can well serve the parish, and providing a majority plus one of the call committee favor recommendation of the candidate to the congregation council, the chairperson of the call committee shall inform the office of the bishop and shall request a special meeting of the congregation council to present the candidate.

### **Step 8 – Joint Meeting of the Candidate, Council and Call Committee**

When the call committee has identified a pastoral candidate to recommend to the congregation council, arrangements shall be made for a joint meeting with the council, call committee and candidate. The bishop's representative working with your call process may attend this meeting. The interim pastor does not attend this meeting.

The chairperson of the pastoral call committee shall prepare a written resume of the candidate being recommended and the committee's rationale for the recommendation. This written report can be distributed to council members prior to the joint meeting. If differences between the pastoral candidate and the call committee have been identified, those differences and their proposed resolution should also be submitted to the council at this time.

**A one-page written resume on the candidate and the committee's rationale for the recommendation should be prepared and distributed to the council.**

A proposal for compensation shall be prepared by the office of the bishop for discussion and approval by the council at this meeting. This proposal may be shared with the council and finance team in advance of the meeting. If agreement on compensation cannot be reached at this council meeting, authorization may be given by the council for the candidate and finance team to negotiate the compensation in advance of a congregation call meeting. The agreed upon compensation must be approved by the council prior to a congregation call meeting.

The chief lay officer of the congregation should conduct the joint meeting. The purpose of this meeting is:

- To receive the report of the call committee and meet the recommended candidate
- To provide the congregation council members with an opportunity to discuss the possibility of mutual ministry between the congregation and candidate.
- To discuss and approve issues related to compensation.

After the call committee has presented the candidate, and sufficient discussion has taken place, the candidate should be excused. The congregation council should take action on the call committee's recommendation. A two-thirds affirmative vote of the council members is required to approve the recommendation of the call committee.

When the congregation council has given such an approval, the chief lay officer should arrange for a meeting of the congregation in which the congregation will vote on the recommendation. Setting the date for the congregational meeting is done in consultation with the candidate and with the bishop's appointed representative working with the process.

The chief lay officer of the congregation should promptly notify the bishop in writing of the council action and the planned congregational meeting. *(See exhibit D)* If the candidate is to be present on a Sunday morning, it will also be necessary for the chief lay officer to see that the previously arranged supply appointment is cancelled.

**The name of the candidate being recommended is not normally revealed by members of the council or the call committee prior to the day of the congregational meeting.**

### **Step 9 – Special Congregational Meeting**

As per constitutional requirements, the congregation council shall inform the congregation, in writing, as to the day and time of the special congregation meeting. In that announcement, the name of the candidate shall not be revealed. The only exception to this will be with the specific approval of the Office of the Bishop. The candidate's name should not be given until the day of the congregation meeting. The announcement of the meeting may be made as follows:

*On Sunday, (date) following the (time) service, a special congregation meeting will be conducted to elect a pastor. The pastor (or pastoral candidate) being proposed by the congregation council will conduct the service, and preach. Following the service the congregation meeting will be held during which a congregational vote will be taken by secret ballot. A two-thirds majority is required for election of a pastor. A representative from the Office of the Bishop will preside at this congregation meeting.*

Additional information such as the following may also be included with the meeting announcement:

*A resume of the candidate will be presented in the worship bulletin on the day of the meeting. All voting members of the congregation are eligible to participate in the voting, and are urged to be present. Absentee voting is not permitted.*

The congregation meeting, with the representative for the Office of the Bishop presiding, will have the following agenda:

- Prayer invoking the guidance of the Holy Spirit
- Written recommendation by the congregation council that the pastor be called; salary and other provisions are to be stated in the recommendation
- Discussion
- Vote by written ballot
- Prayer and blessing

**A two-thirds majority of voting members present is needed for the election of a pastor.**

There must be a two-thirds majority of those members present and voting to elect. Should there be negative votes cast, there shall be no motion to make the vote unanimous.

### **Step 10 – Congregation Council Issues the Letter of Call**

An election by the congregation constitutes a call and authorizes the congregation council to issue the *Letter of Call*. The pastoral candidate and the bishop shall be notified as to the exact number of both affirmative and negative votes.

Three blank *Letter of Call* forms will have been supplied by the bishop to the chief lay officer. Within two days of the election, it shall be the responsibility of the chief lay officer of the congregation to deliver in person or by certified mail to the bishop three completed copies of the *Letter of Call*. If the documents are in good order with the provisions acceptable to the candidate and congregation, the bishop will attest the call, and then mail the three copies to the pastoral candidate.

The person called to become the pastor has up to two weeks in which to decide to accept the call. If the call is accepted, a signed letter of call will be returned to both the congregation and the bishop. The pastoral candidate shall indicate the effective date the ministry will begin. The acceptance of the call may then be publicized.

Following the acceptance of the call, the pastor will consult the bishop and chief lay officer to arrange for the pastor's installation, and with the chief lay officer regarding moving arrangements. It is the responsibility of the calling congregation to pay for the pastor's costs incurred in moving.

The congregation council should make special arrangements for welcoming the arriving pastor and family, if any. The appointment of a welcoming committee is desirable. Such a group might plan an appropriate *welcome to our congregation* event. All sincere efforts to greet, welcome, and assist the pastor in the start-up days of a new ministry will be much appreciated by the pastor and help to assure the good beginning of a strong, mutually developed ministry of pastor and people in the congregation.

**Congratulations! Your new pastor will be arriving soon. A welcoming committee can help make the transition hospitable.**

It is strongly recommended that a *Mutual Ministry* or *Staff Support Committee* be established within the first two months of the pastor's arrival. The committee's primary purpose is to strengthen the pastor's ministry through careful listening and sharing, reviewing and reflecting, praying and caring.

### **Conclusion**

The steps outlined in this process provide a common procedure for calling a pastor. Following the process affords the congregation and the Office of the Bishop the opportunity to work together in a way that is efficient, and positively directed.

This is also a time of special prayer and loyalty. Congregation councils should, with diligence, provide leadership to the congregation during the interim time, maintaining strong bonds of unity in the peace of God, and exercising sensitive care for all the people of the congregation. Congregational leaders have a challenging task. They also have the assurance that, when they are open and responsive, the Holy Spirit will guide them in calling a pastor who will assist the congregation in fulfilling God's mission for them in the name of Jesus Christ.



## **Congregations Calling a Second Pastor**

Congregations calling a second pastor should generally follow the same procedure as those congregations calling a solo pastor. Because there is a first pastor serving the congregation, there is normally no need for an initial meeting with the bishop's representative, interim pastor appointment or Sunday pastoral supply.

If the congregation has been served by a second pastor, and that pastor resigns, the council should follow the procedures for notifying the bishop of the resignation. To initiate the process for calling a second pastor, the first pastor or chief lay officer should request in writing that the bishop or the bishop's designated representative, meet with the council to discuss calling a second pastor, and to review the procedure for the same. At that meeting the congregation council should be able to present a rationale for the ministry of a second pastor, and be able to demonstrate a plan for financially supporting additional staff.

If after this meeting with the bishop there is still agreement that a second pastor should be called, the council should move to appoint a call committee of which the first pastor shall also be an ex officio member. A designated representative of the bishop will provide preparation for the call committee (*Step 6*).

The first pastor of the congregation will be invited to work with the bishop and staff in interviewing potential candidates. When the best available candidate has been identified, that person will be presented to the call committee by the first pastor and bishop's representative (*Step 7*). From this point the congregation council follows *Steps 7* through *Step 10*.

It is important to treat the process of calling a second pastor with the same attention and care as that of calling the first pastor. It is also important to see that there is a separate *Staff Support* or *Mutual Ministry Committee* for each pastor.

## Exhibit A

*Date*

The Rev. Christa M. Compton, Bishop  
New Jersey Synod, ELCA  
1930 Highway 33  
Hamilton Square, NJ 08690

Dear Bishop Compton:

At a meeting of the Congregation Council of (name of church), (address of church), the resignation of Pastor (name of pastor) was received. That resignation is effective on (effective date of resignation).

It is our request that you or your representative meet with us on (date and time) to outline the pastoral vacancy procedure. It is our understanding that at this meeting we will review the steps to be taken in proceeding with:

- The appointment of an interim pastor
- Arrangements for Sunday pastoral supply
- Assessment of current situation
- The Mission Exploration Process
- The Congregational Survey
- The Congregational Mission Profile

We ask for your prayers as we work with you in calling a new pastor for our congregation.

Sincerely yours,

Congregation Council President  
Or Lay Vice-President

## **Exhibit B**

*Date*

The Rev. Christa M. Compton, Bishop  
New Jersey Synod, ELCA  
1930 Highway 33  
Hamilton Square, NJ 08690

Dear Bishop Compton:

This is to certify that (name), the President (or Lay Vice-President) and your designated representative have examined the parish register of (name of congregation) and that the parish records are in good order.

I also certify that your representative reviewed with the congregation council the expectations for pastors resigning a call. We understand that Pastor (name of pastor) has also reviewed these expectations and has agreed to abide by them.

I also wish to inform you that (name of congregation) is under no financial indebtedness to Pastor (name of pastor) and that Pastor (name of pastor) is under no financial obligation to (name of congregation).

**OR**

I also wish to inform you that (name of congregation) is under no financial indebtedness to Pastor (name of pastor). Pastor (name of pastor) has a financial indebtedness to (name of congregation). It has been mutually agreed by Pastor (name of pastor) and the Congregation Council of (name of congregation) that the indebtedness will be liquidated in the following way:

Sincerely yours,

Secretary of Congregation

## Exhibit C

*Date*

The Rev. Christa M. Compton, Bishop  
New Jersey Synod, ELCA  
1930 Highway 33  
Hamilton Square, NJ 08690

Dear Bishop Compton:

This is to certify that at a duly called meeting of the Congregation Council of (name of church), (address of church) on (date) the following persons were approved, by Congregation Council action, to serve on the Pastoral Call Committee:

Name	Address	Phone	E-mail
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*(Name)* has been appointed Chairperson of the Committee.

Sincerely yours,

Congregation Council President (or Lay Vice-President)

## Exhibit D

*Date*

The Rev. Christa M. Compton, Bishop  
New Jersey Synod, ELCA  
1930 Highway 33  
Hamilton Square, NJ 08690

Dear Bishop Compton:

This is to inform you that at a special meeting of the Congregation Council of (name of church), (address of church), the Congregation Council met with Pastor (name of candidate).

At that meeting the Congregation Council received the recommendation of the Pastoral Call Committee that we call Pastor (name of pastor) to be our pastor. The action of the Congregation Council was positive by a vote of (number).

It is our intention to hold a congregational meeting on (date) at (time) for the purpose of voting to extend a call to (name of pastor). Since you or another designee of your choice is to preside at this meeting, will you please inform us whom you have designated to be your representative?

Sincerely yours,

Congregation President (or Lay Vice-President)

## **Exhibit E**

### **Expectations of a Pastor upon Resignation from a Congregation**

The following expectations apply when a pastor is leaving a congregation whether for retirement or a change of call. The transition time can be stressful for both the resigning/retiring pastor and the congregation. These expectations are provided to make clear the expectations of the Office of the Bishop regarding the resigning/retiring pastor and their relationship with the congregation. These expectations are discussed during the exit interview with the resigning/retiring pastor.

1. The pastor who is resigning or retiring will immediately move congregational membership to another congregation, and if at all possible, relocate to another town. Parish ministry is built on relationships. There is an absolute need for space so that relationships, particularly new ones, can develop. This encourages the congregation to be truly intentional about the new parish-pastor relationship.
2. The retiring/resigning pastor is not to return to the congregation until invited to do so by the successor. The appropriate response when asked by parishioners to return is that it is not appropriate. The rubric says no weddings, no baptisms, no funerals after the resignation date. In a rare instance of extenuating circumstance, in the early part of the transition period when there is as yet no regularly called pastor, permission may be given by the office of the bishop to return for a specific purpose. This, however, will be the remote exception to the rule.
3. The resigning/retiring pastor needs to be clear with the bishop about resignation/retirement plans/dates as soon as possible. Identify the last Sunday as early as possible so that the presence of someone representing the wider church can be arranged.
4. The resigning/retiring pastor should read the synod call process document, but not attempt to explain the process to the council or congregation. Let the bishop's designee do that as either an early, anxiety lessening summary of the process at a council meeting, or as the regular step at the appropriate time in the process.
5. The resigning/retiring pastor is not to get involved in selecting the call committee. The process and the bishop's designee provide that guidance to lay leaders.
6. The resigning/retiring pastor should write a letter to the congregation clarifying the ground rules for leaving. The pastor should ask the congregation not to put them in an awkward position with requests for pastoral ministry after the resignation date.
7. The resigning/retiring pastor will need to set the boundaries regarding ongoing contact with members via social media networks. The pastor should be removed from group email / text messages regarding congregation announcements (the exception being an electronic newsletter) or conversation. Decisions regarding "friending / unfriending", subscribing, following, etc. should be clearly discussed between the pastor and congregation.

## **Exhibit F**

### **Interview Guide for Councils and Call Committees**

A candidate interview is first and foremost an opportunity for conversation about the mission gifts and assets of the candidate as well as those of the congregation. The goal of the debate is to discover if a fruitful partnership can be formed for the mission future of the congregation.

While there are elements of a job interview as the participants seek to clarify points raised on the Ministry Site Profile and the Rostered Minister Profile, the main goal of the interview process is to share mission vision, probe faith and consider if the Holy Spirit is working to create a new missional leader relationship for the congregation.

It is important to plan your questions so that you are able to gain the maximum amount of information. Below are some guides that will help you find out what you need to know to make your decisions.

- Decide, based on your Ministry Site Profile, what are the areas of greater importance. Prepare your questions to gather additional information beyond what is in the Rostered Minister Profile. (For example if your future includes active faith formation for children and families, look for ways to find out what the candidate has done in the past that shows interest and experience about that.)
- Distribute the areas of questioning among the committee/council members. Each person can take the lead in a line of inquiry.
- Craft your questions with an open end. If they can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”, they will not lead to greater depth of understanding. For example “Do you believe in making visits?” is a yes or no question that does not help you know what the candidate does. A better question about visitation would be “Tell us how you have organized visitation as part of your pastoral care of the congregation,” or, “Give us some examples of what you do to follow up with new people attending worship.”
- Be sure that your questions are seeking to know the candidate rather than make sure that the candidate is/is not like your most recent pastor.
- The best questions are behavioral. That is because past behavior is a good predictor of future performance. “What have you done...?” , “Give an example of a way you handled....”
- Try to make your “questions” invitations to share. Some of the best questions don’t have question marks at the end.
- Find a couple of ways to probe faith and resilience, for example “Tell us about one of your worst mistakes and what you learned from it.” “Tell about a time when your faith in God was deepened” or, “Tell us your favorite story of Jesus and why it speaks to you.”

You should be prepared to answer candidate questions as well. Be ready to expand and explain those if the candidate asks about them

- Specific mission goals highlighted in the Ministry Site Profile.
- Particular challenges such as unresolved conflict, leader burn out, changing neighborhood, finances, building issues or construction
- Your own faith
- Resilience in the face of both discouragement and opportunity

# Interim Ministry and Call Process Resource Persons

## **Bishop**

The Rev. Christa M. Compton

NJ Synod, ELCA, 1930 Highway 33, Hamilton Sq, NJ 08690

**(609)586-6800**

**E-mail: ccompton@njsynod.org**

## **Mission Cluster Counselor/District Dean**

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(\_\_\_\_)\_\_\_\_\_E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

## **Interim Pastor**

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(\_\_\_\_)\_\_\_\_\_E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

## **Bishop's Designated Representative**

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(\_\_\_\_)\_\_\_\_\_E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Office of the Bishop, New Jersey Synod, ELCA  
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