

The Call Process
Southwestern Texas Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Initiating the Call Process

<p>Things to Know and Do When a Pastor or Other Rostered Leader Resigns</p>

This Information Bulletin is being sent to you because word has reached the synod office about the resignation of your pastor or your lay rostered minister (associate in ministry, diaconal minister, or deaconess). This is the first of several bulletins that will help you during the next few months as you experience the farewells, the vacancy, the search, and the excitement of a new beginning.

The Call Process

The Southwestern Texas Synod has a detailed and helpful procedure for assisting congregations during times of vacancy and searching. We refer to it as the "Call Process." The process moves in a step-by-step way, helping you—the congregation's leadership—bring closure to your present ministry, reflect on the congregation's future, and then initiate a search for a new pastor. The *Call Process Handbook* that you will receive describes the steps in a clear and orderly way.

Saying Thanks and Farewell

Your very first task, however, is to help the congregation bring closure to the ministry of the pastor. People will have feelings and thoughts that need to be expressed; they will need time to close this chapter of their lives if they are to be able to open a new chapter with a new pastor. Receptions, speeches, gifts, laughter and tears in small groups, large groups, and one-on-one settings are all appropriate. It is said that "the degree to which a pastor ends well is the degree to which a new pastor will be able to begin well." This is true. The Church Council should tend to these things and/or appoint a committee to care for them.

Some Final Business

Enclosed you will find some matters of business that are required by the constitution. (1) The *Certification of Completion of All Financial Obligations* is to be filled out and signed by the pastor and the congregational treasurer. It attests to the fact that there are no outstanding financial matters unresolved between the pastor and the congregation. (2) The *Certification of Church Records* is to be completed by the pastor and the congregational secretary verifying the transfer of the parochial records in good order to the secretary.

Interim Ministry

The constitution also refers to the way pastoral needs are cared for during a vacancy. If you need an interim pastor, the bishop will appoint—with your agreement—a pastor to serve you during this interim period. Also, a neighboring Lutheran pastor can be contacted to ask if he/she would be willing to be available in emergencies.

Orientation Session

To begin the Call Process, Pastor Michael Robinson or Bishop Ray Tiemann—will offer an orientation session for all in the congregation who are interested, especially the members of the Church Council and Call Committee. The session will outline all the steps of the process and answer all your questions. At your convenience, please call Pastor Michael Robinson to set up a suitable time for him to visit with you.

Selecting a Call Committee

The congregation's constitution will specify whether the committee is appointed by the council or elected by the congregation, as well as the number and distribution of the members. Please read the relevant sections and follow them carefully. Selection of the Call Committee should be regarded as the crucial first step in the Call Process. Here are some suggestions.

Call Committee members should be...

- persons of stature, who enjoy the trust and respect of the whole membership of the congregation,
- able to think and decide with the good of the whole congregation in mind rather than their own personal desires or wants,
- about six in number (it is difficult for larger committees to get the work done efficiently and to consistently hit 100% attendance for meetings which is so crucial),
- able to meet often,
- as diverse in age, gender, ethnicity, and interests as the congregation is at-large,
- a group that "looks like the congregation in miniature,"
- a group that does not include employed staff, past pastors or their spouses,
- persons not serving on the current Church Council (except that one person—preferably not the congregational president—may serve on both),
- persons who do not have personal agendas, grievances, or power issues within the congregation, and
- people who begin, end, and act in faith.

If the Call Committee is selected by the Church Council...

- The council may wish to solicit "suggestions" from the congregation in order to have everyone's ideas. Do this in a way that makes it clear that you are inviting suggestions and not staging an election.
- Please avoid asking for volunteers; the committee needs to be a balanced group of talented and diverse people that can only be selected through careful deliberation on the part of the council.
- After these persons accept the council's appointment, announce their names,

demonstrate pride and confidence in them, pray and support them.

- Use the "Installation" service as a way of gathering the whole congregation around them and their work.

If the Call Committee is to be elected by the congregation at large, the council can act as a nominating committee using the guidance above.

A Partnership

You are not alone in the work that is ahead. The work is shared between committee and council, congregation and synod, the people and the Spirit of God. Your every effort to carefully listen, plan, communicate, and rest in prayer will bear good fruit. Your synod staff person, in particular, stands ready to journey with you through all that is ahead. Blessings to you.

Information Bulletin #1a
To the Congregational President
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Also enclosed:
Installation of a Call Committee
Financial Statement
Church Records Statement