

UNDERSTANDING CALL

In our baptism, God has called us all to be part of the body of Christ. Martin Luther reminded us of the Latin origin of the word “vocation” – vocare – which means “to call.” All of us take up our vocations – our callings – as God’s people. We are all ministers in whatever daily activity is ours. Within this priesthood of all believers there exists the ordained office of ministry, the “office of Word and Sacrament.”

On the basis of our Lutheran theology, a pastor is called, not hired, to serve a congregation. The call process is not the same as the hiring process in other parts of society. Any process that seems to focus on “head hunting,” resume shuffling, or high anxiety interviews is missing the point in the calling of a pastor. A call is one element in the church’s seeking and following God’s movement into the future. The Synod Office assists congregations in this work.

The Lutheran call process is unique because it offers several opportunities to “look” at a pastoral candidate in an effort to discern what God wants for the local church and for the whole church in order that the Gospel may be proclaimed and the sacraments administered in accordance with the Gospel.

WHAT OUR LUTHERAN HERITAGE TEACHES US

The Lutheran Church looks to the documents called “The Lutheran Confessions” for its understanding of scripture, the faith and the church. Chief among these documents is the Augsburg Confession, adopted by the reformers in the city of Augsburg (Germany) in 1530. These short, concise statements help us understand the nature of the office of ministry in the Lutheran Church:

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel.

(Article V, The Augsburg Confession)

Nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call. All Christians are called to the ministry of serving God and neighbor, but for the sake of good order in the church certain Christians are specially called to the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament.

(Article XIV, The Augsburg Confession)

THE CALL TO MINISTRY

It is through the church that God calls some Christians to ordained ministry. Once that call is discerned, the candidate normally devotes years to study, training, and preparation under the guidance of the whole church.

In a similar way, it is through the church that God calls ordained ministers to a specific pastorate. Not only does the local congregation participate in the call process, but so does the whole church through the office of the Bishop. Just as the whole church took an active role in the call to ordination, so now the whole church takes an active role in the call to a specific ministry.

THE CHURCH AND CALL

The local church is fully the church, but the local church is not all the church. The local church calls a person to be its pastor, but the whole church has a vital interest in who is called and how the call process is handled.

The Call Committee and the entire congregation participate fully in the Call process, as does the Bishop who represents both the interest and the commitment of the whole church in seeing that the pastor called is suited to ministry under the call that is extended.

The Bishop's office has a deep concern for the well-being of the congregation's life and ministry. The Bishop and the staff also have a deep concern for the person and the gifts of the prospective pastor. In the Call process, the Bishop and staff, the congregation, and the prospective pastor work together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring about a new partnership that is faithful to the Gospel, empowers the local church in its ministry, and strengthens the whole church as people of God.

WELCOME THE NEW PASTOR

MOVING

Moving expenses are the obligation of the calling congregation. There should be clear understanding of arrangements and reimbursements. It is common to ask the pastor to submit estimates of moving expenses (provided by a mover) to the congregation for approval prior to the move.

SCHEDULE THE INSTALLATION

The Congregation President and the newly called pastor need to confer to decide upon a date for installation, in consultation with the Synod office. The Presiding Minister and Preacher for the Rite of Installation is usually the bishop or a Synod staff person. It is a fitting symbol, especially if the installation happens shortly after arrival, for the bishop or staff to preach and preside over the service up until the point of installation, which happens after the hymn of the day. This represents the pastoral care of the whole church over the congregation. Then, upon the completion of the Rite of Installation, the newly-installed pastor becomes the presiding minister for the remainder of the service.

In most cases, the installation takes place Sunday afternoon at 3:00 p.m. Local ELCA pastors are welcome to participate. The color of the day is red.

PORTICO

The newly elected pastor and congregation will need to fill out several forms with Portico. It is right and fair that as a congregation you begin paying for pension and benefits based on the start date of ministry together. Please be an advocate for your new leader and complete the *Change in Salary* form promptly. The pastor will also need to fill out the *Change of Call* report. This form can be found at <https://employerlink.porticobenefits.org/Home/Resources.aspx> or by calling Portico at 800.352.2876.

PRESS RELEASE

The press release about the arrival of your new pastor is an opportunity for outreach. Consider what usually appears in the religion section of the newspaper: a pastor's educational background, previous congregations served, major accomplishments, and sometimes information about the family. Look at it from the perspective of church members.

Think about those who are inactive. Are there unchurched people waiting for a congregation to show interest in them, rather than just itself? These folks are asking themselves, "What difference does the new pastor make to me?" "How might I benefit?" "Why should I care?"

People look for congregations offering a clear Biblical message, an interest in their needs, and a place that makes them feel wanted. Using the press release for outreach means that the image of the pastor and congregation portrayed in print must be what people experience in the church.

How does the congregation benefit from this approach? First, it's free. Second, as a public article, it shows that the newspaper sees the event as genuinely newsworthy.

The press release as an outreach tool helps to create a congregational image in the community as well.

WELCOME CELEBRATION

Some kind of welcoming event helps celebrate the new beginnings; often the day of Installation involves a special reception or luncheon to which congregation and neighbors are invited.