



EASTERN SYNOD of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

CALL PROCESS MANUAL

SECTION 4: THE CALL COMMITTEE

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- 4B. Reviewing Availability For Call Forms**
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4A. GETTING ORGANIZED

The Call Committee is a special (ad hoc) committee whose sole purpose is to recommend a pastoral candidate to the congregation. Time needs to be taken for members of the Call Committee to become comfortable with one another and to cement a solid working partnership. Hours spent in healthy dialogue within the Call Committee will contribute to developing this relationship.

Prayer is an important activity for the Call Committee and for the entire congregation throughout this process. Call Committee members are encouraged to commit themselves to pray for one another and for the work of the Holy Spirit among them as they seek to discern God's will for their congregation. In the Appendix you will find "**Five Brief Devotions for Call Committees (and others)**" to help you in your prayers. (**Appendix 5**)

After some preliminary getting acquainted, the committee selects a Chair and a Secretary.

The Chair convenes meetings, sets meeting agendas, is the contact person with the Bishop's Office and may be the primary contact with candidates.

The Secretary keeps the minutes of Call Committee meetings. The Secretary is responsible for written communication between candidates and the committee (letters informing candidates of committee's time line and the interview process to be used, confirming invitations, travel arrangements, thank you notes, and letters informing candidates of decisions reached), sends copies of correspondence to the Synod Office, and may write the newsletter articles, notes for Sunday bulletins, etc. which keep the congregation informed of the committee's progress. Some of these duties may be delegated to other members of the committee.

The Call Committee, at its initial meeting, makes other decisions necessary for good order and clear communication, such as the frequency and duration of meetings, rules of order for transacting business, issues of confidentiality, and adoption of either a majority vote or consensus model for decision making. Committee members should also review the document "**Some Theological Considerations**". (**Appendix 6**)

COMMUNICATION

The Call Committee reports regularly to the Congregational Council. The Call Committee will need to determine, with the Congregational Council, the means, frequency and nature of communication with the congregation. The Call Committee may decide to communicate through a variety of means including:

- **Newsletter articles** explaining the Call Process to the congregation can be helpful; with follow-up articles each time another stage in the process is reached.
- Notes in the **Sunday bulletin** announcing that the Call Committee is meeting, keeps the congregation informed of progress.
- **Verbal reports** by a member of the Call Committee to update the congregation on a weekly basis might also be welcomed. (Even if the report is "nothing has changed from last week" - it is very helpful to let people know what is happening in the Call Process. Also, from one week to the next, you will not necessarily be reporting to exactly the same audience.)
- **Sunday / Weekday Adult Class** - use for re-emphasizing the process, "Where we are," etc. This format invites interaction and feedback
- **Bulletin board postings**
- **Informal conversation** with Call Committee members who have announced their availability at the coffee hour.

Some points to include in your communication are:

- (a) Description of process
- (b) Summary of specific presentations, i.e. the Bishop's visit
- (c) Outline of progress - this would include past, present and future
- (d) List of actions taken
- (e) The preferred process for communicating with the members of the Call Committee

Some things you want to accomplish through your communication are:

- (a) That the congregation will clearly understand the process, including the roles of the Bishop's Office, Council, Call Committee and Congregation
- (b) Clear identification of the members of the Call Committee
- (c) Members will have a clear understanding of the proper process for communicating with the members of the Call Committee.

With the exception of confidential materials, there is no such thing as too much information!

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality in the Call Committee discussions should be clearly agreed upon at the first meeting. Conversations about candidates need to be open and forth-right within the committee. These discussions should, however, be kept in confidence between the Call Committee members.

The importance of confidentiality cannot be overemphasized in the task of calling a pastor. It is inappropriate to mention specific candidates outside the Call Committee, including the names of those on the call list, until the committee is ready to share its recommendation with the Congregational Council. It is important to keep all names, as well as any verbal or written information about prospective candidates, within the confines of the committee. This means committee members will need to establish ground rules and boundaries, not only with the congregation at large, but also with those in their household or place of work.

One of the things to consider as you think about confidentiality is the difference between openness and holding confidence. Openness means that the Call Committee needs to report regularly to Council and the congregation in order to help everyone understand the process.

Holding confidence means that the Call Committee needs to keep all of the verbal and written information about the individual candidates to themselves.

At the end of the call process, all materials related to candidates not being called shall be destroyed.

SATISFACTION

Many people report that serving on a Call Committee turned out to be one of the most important things they ever did as members of the Church. It allowed them to experience firsthand how the Holy Spirit works through committed Christians to help the Church be faithful to its calling. It gave them an opportunity to see how the local Church is vitally connected to the whole Church and to participate in opening a new chapter in the life and ministry of their congregation.

We hope and pray that this will be the case for you!

HELP ALONG THE WAY

Sometimes the call process can be confusing! The staff advisor appointed by the Bishop is there to help you. Please do not hesitate to call for assistance. In some instances Synod Office may be able to match you up with a neighbouring parish who has recently completed the call process in order that they can share their newly acquired expertise!

4B. REVIEWING AVAILABILITY FOR CALL FORMS

After meeting with the Congregational Council, the Bishop will write to the potential candidates requesting Availability For Call forms. **(You will find a sample Availability For Call form in Appendix 7.)** The candidates will be asked to send their Availability For Call forms to the synod office for certification and subsequent submission to the Call Committee by a specified date.

Once all Availability For Call forms have been received, and hopefully within thirty days of your initial meeting with the Bishop or Bishop's Representative, the Call Committee needs to meet and review the forms, go through a rating process, and come up with an interview list of not more than three names.

Every member of the committee should have ample opportunity to read through each candidate's Availability For Call form, making notes of their comments or questions. Hopefully this can be accomplished before the Call Committee meets as a whole.

The committee as a whole should review the Availability For Call forms one at a time, allowing lots of time for discussion and the sharing of individual comments and questions. Keep in mind that just because people say that they have attended a course or say they are interested in a particular aspect of ministry does not guarantee that they are good at it!

RATING THE AVAILABILITY FOR CALL FORMS

Once the Availability For Call forms have been reviewed, it is time to begin a more formal rating process. The most important thing to keep in mind as you begin this step is that you need to view the candidate's Availability For Call forms through the "lens" of the Congregational Mission Profile. You have probably already noticed that questions 42 and 43 in the Congregational Mission Profile contains the same information in the same order as the Ministry Priorities, Skills, Interests section in the Availability For Call form. Comparing these two sections will help you to narrow down which candidates might be a good match for your congregation.

SELECTING AN INTERVIEW LIST

After you have rated the Availability For Call forms, you need to identify a list of candidates that you want to interview. There should be no more than three names on this list. You may feel comfortable with only selecting one or two names.

NOTE: Once the interview list has been determined it is important that you immediately inform any candidates that will no longer be considered. Use the sample letter identified as **Appendix 8a**.

FOLLOW-UP

Once your interview list is complete, you need to contact the candidates on the list by letter, **(using the form letter you find identified as Appendix 8b)**, inviting them for an interview, and requesting, where applicable, a copy of their most recent annual report. In the letter you will promise to follow up with a telephone call. With the letter you will send a copy of the Congregational Mission Profile and your most recent annual report. Please send copies of all letters to the Bishop.

The chair of the Call Committee will then follow up the letters by telephone to arrange interviews. There is a possibility that some of the candidates might decline to be interviewed. Do not be discouraged by this, but continue on with the rest of your list. If at all possible, arrange for interviews to take place as soon as possible, hopefully within a month of identifying the interview list.

Follow up your telephone conversation with a letter which reviews the place, time and expected length of the interview. If there is a spouse, the Call Committee needs to clarify whether the spouse is invited to accompany the pastor to the interview. The letter also contains travel instructions to reach the place of an interview, and indicates the commitment of the congregation to provide reimbursement for all expenses. A prompt reimbursement of expenses incurred by the candidate should follow the interview.

TO VISIT OR NOT TO VISIT?

In order to get more information about the candidates, you may choose to arrange to visit the congregations where the candidates are currently serving. Sometimes it is not possible to arrange such visits due to distance and costs involved.

Before you decide to make visits there are some ideas you need to think through.

- What is the purpose of the visit? What are you looking for?
- Who is going to do the visiting? Will everyone go or just a few? How will you share the information you gather?
- What if you can't visit all of the candidates? Do you go ahead with some visits? Do you ask the candidates you can't visit to submit a video or audio tape of a service?
- How will you conduct yourselves during the visit so as not to needlessly upset the congregation. Remember, your candidate is still someone else's pastor!!
- If you do decide to visit, remember that the traditions and customs you observe may reveal more about the pastor's ability to adapt to that congregation than it does about his/her personal preferences. Watch for the pastor's ability to give leadership in spiritual matters, revealed in her/his love for the people and the general feel of the service.

4C. THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

A good interview begins with good planning. How will you meet and greet the candidate? Where will you hold the interview? Who will ask questions? What will you ask? Answering these questions will allow you to make the best use of the interview time as well as putting you and your congregation in the best possible light.

An attempt should be made to conduct each interview in the same setting and manner. The Call Committee should be consistent in having the same person lead the interview each time and plan for committee members to ask the same basic questions of each candidate. This will assure that all the bases are covered in each instance once the interview process begins. If the Call Committee eats in a restaurant with one candidate, the same pattern should be followed with any subsequent candidates.

It is extremely important, in fairness to all candidates and for effective functioning of the committee, that all Call Committee members commit themselves to being present for all interviews.

A crucial aspect of interviewing is the art of listening. To be a good listener, several things are important.

- The person being interviewed has invested time and effort to be with you. Therefore, he/she is worthy of the committee's respect, interest, and undivided attention.

- The committee gives the person time to formulate thoughtful answers.
- Building on what the person has said, the interviewer asks questions that pick up on information already shared in the interview. This indicates that you are listening.
- The committee listens for key words and phrases, making certain that they are understood by all.
- The interviewers listen for main ideas, not just facts and figures. They should ask themselves, “What is this person telling us?”
- Interviewers ask clarifying questions to make certain they are really understanding what the person is saying. If a response is not clear, the committee should ask for it to be clarified. Doing so does not reflect ignorance but demonstrates that the committee is truly interested and trying to understand what the person is attempting to communicate.
- Committee members can learn to set the candidate at ease by their own relaxed body language, which conveys openness and a welcoming and non-defensive atmosphere.

As the Call Committee prepares its questions, it recalls the top six leadership needs identified in the Congregational Mission Profile. These leadership needs are used to form an outline for the upcoming interview with the candidate. The committee selects eight to ten questions that will shape the primary part of the interview. The committee is flexible in realizing that a give-and-take conversation will not necessarily allow you to ask the questions in predictable order.

Here is a list of sample questions for you to consider.

- (a) What events led you to prepare for ordained ministry?
- (b) Briefly state your personal faith.
- (c) How do you describe yourself theologically?
- (d) How do you nurture yourself spiritually?
- (e) How do you care for yourself physically, emotionally, socially?
- (f) What personal traits and gifts do you have that make it possible for you to be effective as a pastor?
- (g) What books have you read recently that have made an impression on you?
- (h) How do you prepare a sermon? What do you try to achieve in your preaching?
- (i) Describe the areas of pastoral ministry you enjoy the most.
- (j) Describe the areas of pastoral ministry you enjoy the least.
- (k) What role do you see yourself fulfilling in relating to committees?
- (l) Tell us about your philosophy and style of pastoral visitation.
- (m) Discuss your expectations concerning catechetical instruction.
- (n) Share your thoughts regarding the worship life of a congregation.
- (o) In what ways do you participate in the community? In the synod?
- (p) What areas of involvement in your last/current parish gave you personal satisfaction?
- (q) What is it about our congregation that interests and challenges you?
- (r) How do you determine what priorities to put on the tasks you must do?

- (s) Can you tell us about a time when you had to deal with a difficult parishioner regarding a complaint? How did you handle the situation?
- (t) Tell us about a time which was very stressful. How did you cope?
- (u) Give us an example of how you motivate and enable your parishioners to be effective in ministry.
- (v) Do you consider yourself to be flexible? Can you give an example?

An effective interview is a two-way street, with the candidate also bringing questions and concerns. Allow time and opportunity for the candidate to ask questions and be prepared to address them.

Here are some questions that may be asked of you as a committee.

- (a) What is the focus of your congregation? Describe your mission.
- (b) What is the role of staff and what is the role of the laity in your congregation?
- (c) How many people are involved in leadership roles? How are lay people involved in worship?
- (d) In your opinion, how are decisions made in your congregation?
- (e) What long- and short-term goals has the congregation adopted? When was the last time an in-depth self study was conducted?
- (f) What is the congregation's commitment to support of and partnership with the synod and the ELCIC?
- (g) How does the congregation respond to change and how are changes made?
- (h) What part should family members of staff play in the congregation?
- (i) What would you display on a highway billboard regarding your congregation?
- (j) Why did the previous pastor leave?
- (k) Are there skeletons in the closet that I should know about in considering the call here?
- (l) How many hours a week do you expect the pastor to work in the parish?

To help prepare yourselves for the interviews you might want to consider inviting a neighbouring pastor to do a "Practice Interview." A practice interview helps the committee prepare to interview pastoral candidates, sharpen the questions they desire to ask, and receive feedback about the process they hope to use. You may wish to give an honorarium to the pastor for helping you out in this way.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

The Call Committee should designate a committee member to host the candidate. Be certain that this committee member is on hand well before the candidate's anticipated arrival at the interview location. If the interview is to take place in the church building, and if time permits, the host might consider providing a guided tour of the church facilities before the interview. The Call Committee may also decide to host the candidate at a local restaurant before the interview.

Following brief, informal introductions, a member of the Call Committee may conduct an opening devotional.

Following the devotions, each member of the Call Committee may again introduce him or herself to the candidate, identifying his or her vocation and role played in the congregation.

The committee member chosen to direct the interview should then outline the anticipated procedure for the interview, indicating the time allotted for the interview, the “question and answer” format, and an invitation to the candidate to ask questions of the Call Committee.

Before the committee’s pre-selected questions are posed, it is appropriate for the Call Committee Chairperson to ask the candidate to share something about himself or herself. The invitation, “Tell us something about yourself,” is purposefully general and open-ended. A time limit of from five to seven minutes is suggested for this opening self-introduction by the candidate.

The formal questioning now begins, remembering that it is very important that the same questions are asked of each candidate for later comparison. Questions may be assigned to various members of the Call Committee, thereby assuring that all present actively participate.

If the response received from the candidate seems incomplete or unclear, the person asking the question may pose a follow-up question, asking for elaboration, clarification, or examples. The committee should not expect finely polished, textbook accurate answers to spur-of-the-moment questions. If committee members are not satisfied with the answer, clarification can be requested before the next question is asked. Remember to give time for the candidate to answer the questions adequately. You may get a period of silence after a difficult question. Resist the temptation to jump in or answer for the candidate.

There are some other interview pitfalls you will want to avoid:

1. Don’t rate a candidate on the basis of physical and personal characteristics unrelated to their qualifications. Be able to substantiate interview impressions with objective behaviours and comments.
2. Resist the tendency to rate the candidate as good or bad on the basis of one trait or comment. Remember that people are complicated, never wholly good or bad.
3. You may experience awkwardness at the beginning of your interview process. That is just the reality of learning how to work together as a group. Try not to project that awkwardness on to the candidate.
4. Make every effort to treat each interview independently. Resist making comparisons between candidates before all of the interviewing is completed. Judge each candidate on her/his own merit.
5. Resist being swayed by first impressions. Try to base your opinion of a candidate on the whole interview, not just on the first few minutes.

A committee member may be designated to record candidate responses during the interview, for further scrutiny by the committee. Note taking should be done as unobtrusively as possible, and if it is to occur, the Committee Chair should explain the purpose of the note taking to the candidate. Some committees might consider recording the interview. Recording should only take place with the consent of the candidate, and with assurances of confidentiality.

In formulating questions, carefully avoid those which can be answered with a response of “yes” or “no.” For example, the questioner should not ask, “Do you think you are effective in your ministry to youth?” The candidate will almost surely answer, “yes.” Rather, ask, “Describe how you minister to youth. Give us some examples of how you have worked effectively with youth in your present or former parish.”

When the committee has completed its list of pre-selected questions, the Committee Chair may invite additional questions. Though the Call Committee is “in charge” of the interview, it is helpful to remember that the interview is intended to be a dialogue and not an inquisition! This is intended to be a “mutual” interview. Invite the candidate to ask questions and provide additional comments during the interview.

The committee member leading the interview is responsible for keeping the interview within the anticipated time period previously established. Prolonged interviews are usually counter-productive. If all is not accomplished in the first interview, a second interview can be scheduled.

In concluding the interview, the candidate may be invited to “answer questions not asked” or make any other comment he or she would like to make. The candidate should be thanked for coming and encouraged to be in phone contact with a designated member of the Call Committee should there be additional questions which occur to the candidate in the days following the interview. The Call Committee should indicate the approximate time table involved in the completion of the congregation’s call procedures. If possible, at the conclusion of the interview, the committee should reimburse the candidate for any expenses incurred, such as travel costs, overnight accommodations, and meals. If the reimbursement cannot occur at the time of the interview, it should be completed within the following week and an appropriate explanation given to the candidate. There is a sample expense form in the appendix. **(Appendix 8c)**

While the interview is still fresh in the minds of committee members, it might be useful to reconvene the Call Committee, upon the candidate’s departure, for sharing initial impressions. It is important that these shared impressions are recorded for later reference.

The Call Committee should send a letter of appreciation to each candidate for his/her willingness to be interviewed. This letter may encourage the candidate to address any additional questions or concerns to the Call Committee. Any expense reimbursement not made at the time of the interview should be made now. Again, a promise of keeping the candidate informed regarding the call process is essential. There is a sample letter for this purpose in the appendix. **(Appendix 8d)**

4D. MAKING A DECISION

As your committee engages in the process of selecting one candidate, whose name will be recommended to the Congregational Council, it will be important to do several things.

1. Ask again for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
2. Review and clarify earlier understandings of what it means for the committee to reach an agreement.
3. Allow ample time for each Call Committee member to speak and be heard.
4. Come to a decision measured against the six top leadership needs of the congregation.
5. Choose the most suitable candidate, not necessarily the one you think is most likely to accept the call.
6. While listening to your own heart and impressions, go beyond asking “Which candidate do I favour?” to ask “Which pastor can best serve our congregation?”

Once the Call Committee has decided upon a candidate to recommend, the staff advisor is informed and a meeting of the Congregational Council is called. The entire Call Committee or only the Chair of the Committee may be present at this meeting. At this meeting, the Call Committee presents its recommendation to the Congregational Council. Careful preparation by the Call Committee member who is chosen to present the candidate is important. Providing thorough information about the candidate, with ample opportunity for dialogue between the Call Committee and the Council, will enable the Congregational Council to come to a decision regarding the Call Committee’s recommendation.

If you are unable to make a decision or feel that you can not recommend any of the candidates you interviewed, you will need to inform Council and your staff advisor. The process will begin again by establishing a new list of candidates.

4E. FOLLOWING UP

Once Council has made a decision to recommend a candidate for call, the staff advisor should be informed. The candidate will be contacted by the staff advisor and will need to withdraw from any other call processes they may be involved in.

There is a possibility that the candidate may choose to withdraw from your call process at this time.

It is also important to let any other candidates know that you are no longer considering them. You will find a sample letter for this purpose in the appendix. (**Appendix 8e**)

You should also inform your staff advisor when you are no longer considering candidates.

If Council votes to accept your recommendation, and the congregation subsequently votes to extend a call, your work as a committee is done! Please have each committee member fill out the “**Call Process Evaluation Form for Call Committees**” (**Appendix 9**) and return them to the Synod Office. You may wish to have a final meeting as a committee to discuss your responses and debrief your call process.