

# **GUIDELINES FOR CALLING PASTORS**

## **The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod**

### **Eastern District**

#### **I. DEFINITION AND SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND**

##### **A. Definition**

An Interim begins when a pastor ceases to serve a congregation. This may occur through his death, resignation, retirement, rightful removal, or his acceptance of a Call to another congregation.

##### **B. Scriptural Background**

While Scripture does not speak specifically of pastoral vacancies, the passages of God's Word are to be applied that deal with the congregation and its ministry, as well as, those in which the Lord's will as to the conduct of Christians toward one another is laid down in more general terms. On the basis of these Scripture passages, it is clearly God's will.

- 1) It's desirable that a congregation have a pastor at all times, also during the interim between permanent pastorates. Titus 1:15; Matt. 9:36
- 2) The vacancy or interim pastor is to be regarded as the pastor of the congregation in the full sense of the term, though his tenure of office is only temporary. I Cor. 4:1; 1 Tim . 5:17.
- 3) During the interim, all functions of the Christian congregation should continue. Acts 2:42; 8:4; Romans 12:11
- 4) All things are to be done in an orderly fashion before, during, and at the conclusion of an interim. I Cor. 14:40
- 5) The law of Christian love is binding also upon congregations having a pastoral interim and should regulate all decisions and actions: (Romans 12:10; I Cor. 13:4,5)
  - a) In calling a permanent pastor.
  - b) Or, if necessary, sharing a pastor with another congregation.
  - c) Or, if necessary, in adopting a different solution such as amalgamation or dissolution.
- 6) The mission and relationship of the Church-at-Large dare never be forgotten in the congregations deliberations during an interim. Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:19
- 7) An interim period should be borne with patience, since it is the Lord Jesus who rules His Church and gives pastors and teachers at His good pleasure. Rom. 8:28; Eph. 4:11
- 8) An interim time may offer the congregation an excellent opportunity to grow and develop spiritually, especially in applying one of the great truths of Scripture - the universal priesthood of all believers. 1 Peter 2:9

II. PROVISIONS OF THE SYNODICAL HANDBOOK

Congregations that have joined Synod have thereby also agreed to work with the officers of Synod, specifically the District President and his representatives on the circuit level, the Circuit Counselor and area Vice-President, to guide and assist them in their interim and calling procedure, so that the interests of the entire work of the Kingdom may be served in accordance with the objectives of our Synod (Constitution III).

Congregations who are not yet voting members of Synod, but served by pastors trained through the common efforts of all sister-congregations, are morally obligated to follow the same practice as voting congregations in this matter.

In pursuance of the 'objectives' of Synod, Constitution III, 7: *"Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith,"* the following Guidelines are presented for use by the congregations of the Eastern District.

III. PROCEDURE DURING A PASTORAL INTERIM

A. As soon as the pastoral office is vacant in a congregation -

- 1) The Chairman of the congregation is to notify the District President, Regional Vice-President, and Counselor of the interim. In the case of a subsidized congregation, the Executive Director of Missions is also to be notified at once.
- 2) The congregation through its Chairman is to arrange for a meeting with the Counselor to discuss interim procedures and problems and choose an interim pastor.
- 3) Ordinarily, the pastor leaving the congregation will continue to provide pastoral care to the congregation until his farewell service, at which time his pastoral care and responsibility to that congregation shall cease. Arrangements for serving the congregation during the interim, as well as, all Church Council and Congregational meetings, are to be handled by the Counselor or Interim Pastor. In emergency situations, emergency measures should be taken by the congregation in consultation with the Counselor.

IV. THE INTERIM PASTOR

- A. At a meeting of the congregation, attended by the Circuit Counselor, a pastor of a sister congregation or other minister of the Gospel in fraternal relation with the congregation is to be elected as Interim Pastor in the manner in which elections are conducted in that congregation. He becomes Interim Pastor upon his acceptance of this Call and the approval of his congregation, supervising board, or agency.
- B. The Interim Pastor is to be regarded as pastor of the calling congregation until a new permanent pastor has been installed.
  - 1) It is the duty of the Interim Pastor to have the general oversight of the congregation in accordance with God's Word.

- 2) The congregation, in consultation with the Interim Pastor, should assign as much as possible of the work of the congregation to its own members. This includes clerical work (as bulletins, records), visitation (sick and shut-ins, prospective and delinquent members), instruction (Bible Class, perhaps even confirmation instruction and Sunday School teacher training), youth counseling, and communion announcements. It is to make full use of all its resources in carrying on the church's full program to the best of their abilities.
- 3) The calling congregation is to adjust its schedule to the situation of the Interim Pastor. If he is unable to preach in every service, he may, with the consent of the congregation, use substitute preachers. Taped sermons or prepared sermons to be read by an Elder or appointed Lay Leader in reading services are other possibilities in emergency situations. No essential meetings are to be dropped. Every attempt should be made to arrange those meetings, which the interim pastor must attend, in such a way that he can be present at a number of meetings on the one trip to the congregation. He is in charge of the solemnization of the official acts of the congregation, either personally, or through a representative.
- 4) The congregation is to give the Interim Pastor a salary (we suggest up to 1/2 the previous pastor's salary), as well as, remuneration for expenses incurred in serving the parish.

In unusual cases, such as dual parishes, the Interim Pastor shall receive the salary, which he shall in turn share with any assistants. The area Counselor too should be reimbursed for the expense he has incurred in attending the various meetings of the congregation, rendering other service during the interim.

- 5) The District President and area Vice-President should be informed of the name and address of the Interim Pastor. This may be done through the Counselor.

## V. THE CALLING OF A NEW PASTOR

### A. The list of candidates.

- 1) In conformity with the divine regulation that all things be done decently and in order, and complying with the provisions of the Synodical Handbook, Bylaw 5.01, the congregation through the Circuit Counselor shall request a list of candidates from the District President after completing a congregational self-study. Since the District President has a picture of the total Church's needs and the qualifications of the various pastors, he is able to suggest candidates to the congregation.
- 2) All communicant members of the calling congregation have the right to suggest possible candidates. The names of all such candidates, suggested by the members shall be sent to the District President by the Circuit Counselor, together with, any details as to the special needs of the parish of which the President should be aware.

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- 3) The President shall give due consideration to all names submitted by the congregation. From this list, as well as, from those whom he feels would best serve the Lord as pastor of the parish in question, he shall, as soon as he is able, select names, which he will submit to the congregation through the Counselor, together with, a characterization, biographical materials, qualifications, etc. This is the list from which the congregation is to Call. No names are to be added to the list without consultation with the District President.
- 4) Additional information can be obtained by contacting the candidates directly, if the congregation so wishes. This may be done by phone, or by personal contact. The candidate's (SET) Self-Evaluation Tool is a useful source of information. We have always discouraged 'trial' sermons.

### B. The calling of the pastor

- 1) The names of candidates submitted by the District President, together with the announcement of the time of the Call meeting, shall be published by the congregation either in a service of public worship or in a bulletin or other publication of the congregation so that all may be aware of the ones who may be their new pastor. Brief characterizations of the candidates may also be published if the congregation so wishes. Should anyone have just reason why a candidate could not be acceptable to him as his pastor, he is to state his objection and reasons for it to the elders, who will communicate this to the congregation at the Call meeting. If the objection is accepted as valid by the congregation, the name should be removed from the list.
- 2) At the time announced, the Call meeting shall take place. If at all possible, the Circuit Counselor should be present. If this is not possible, the Interim Pastor or area Vice-President shall take his place. The list of candidates, together with the characterizations, will once more be reviewed. Ballot votes will then be taken until one candidate has an absolute majority of all votes. By a rising vote, he will then be declared the unanimous choice of the congregation. While the congregation is still assembled, the Circuit counselor should then phone the pastor-elect to inform him of his Call and to inquire whether he would be able to consider a Call at this time. If not, proceed to vote again. No candidate is to be called unless the name has been cleared by the District President. The District President and area Vice-President should be informed as to who has been called and a carbon copy of the Supplement and the accompanying letter be sent to the District President.

Note: It is deemed advisable for the congregation to offer the Pastor-elect and his spouse the opportunity to visit with the call committee and the members of the church council at the congregation's expense before making a decision on the call.

- 3) The congregation must also decide on the terms of the Call, both what will be expected of the pastor and what the congregation will furnish in salary, housing or housing allowance, utilities, pension, mileage, car replacement, and the like. Arrangements should also be made to have on hand sufficient funds to cover the cost of the transportation of the pastor's family and personal effects. In the case

of subsidized congregations, the Mission Board assists in the decisions in these matters.

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- 4) The Call Form should be prepared by the Circuit Counselor or one of his representative and signed by designated officers of the congregation. An accompanying letter shall be drawn up by the congregation and Interim Pastor in consultation with the Counselor, giving the elected candidate information on the congregation, its growth, program, special needs, mission challenge, housing facilities, and the like. A copy of the Self-Study Document should be included.
- 5) If the Call is not accepted, the congregation should inform their Circuit Counselor and District President and proceed as before to call another pastor from their list. If he too declines, they should ask the District President for additional names and he shall proceed as outlined in V.A. 3, and following above. Since the choice of a pastor is always a matter of far-reaching importance, it is advisable that the congregation proceed prayerfully and deliberately, patiently submitting to the Lord of the Church.
- 6) In the event that the congregation decides to extend a Call to a seminary graduate or pastoral candidate accepted by colloquy, a Diploma of Call should be filled in and signed, leaving the line indicating the name of the man called blank. This, together with the Information Sheet required by the Board of Assignments, and the accompanying letter should be sent to the District President who will represent them before the Board of Assignments. In calling candidates, certain definite deadlines must be observed. The President will supply this information on request.

## **VI. PROCEDURE UPON ACCEPTANCE OF A CALL**

- A. The pastor accepting the Call is to inform not only the congregation that issued the Call of his acceptance, but also his District President. If the Call is to another congregation of the same District, the District President shall either plan to install the pastor or authorize another to do it in his place (Bylaws 5.23). If the Call is to a congregation of a different Synodical District, the pastor called is to request from his District President a transfer to the new District, as well as, to request from the President of the District into which he is transferred, an authorization for installation (Bylaws 5.33).
- B. Ordinarily, the District President will install the newly called pastor. If he is unable to do so, he will authorize the Circuit Counselor, area Vice-President, or another pastor in good standing to attend to this duty.
- C. The congregation whose Call has been accepted shall notify the District President, area Vice-President, and Circuit Counselor of this fact. They shall ascertain the time of the arrival of their pastor-to-be and shall, in consultation with the District President and the Counselor, fix the time of the Service of Installation, making the necessary arrangements as to speaker, liturgists, program, and reception. If at all possible, the installation should be set on the Sunday following his arrival. Neighboring sister congregations should be invited to the service.

- D. If there is a parsonage, this should be cleaned, fixed up, and fully readied for the occupancy of the new pastor and his family.
- E. Where the District President was not in personal charge of the installation, his representative who did the installing, should fill out and return to the President the report blanks affixed to the authorization as soon as possible.