



Sierra Pacific Synod
committed to being re-formed

www.spselca.org

Congregation Call Committees

Sierra Pacific Synod Office of the Bishop
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Selecting the Call Committee

The members of the call committee may be elected by the congregation or appointed by the congregation council. Be sure to check your congregation's constitution. If allowed, we recommend that the council appoint a committee size of 5 - 7 members representative of the areas of congregational life.

A critical relationship is that between call committee and the Congregation Council. Again, be sure to check your constitution. Most often, the Call Committee is commissioned with all the aspects of identifying a candidate to recommend to the congregation for call, with the Church Council preparing a compensation package in keeping with the synod guidelines.

It is helpful to select a chairperson for the Call Committee who is not the chief elected lay officer of the congregation (president or vice president, depending on your structure). That person will have ongoing responsibilities for congregational life. The Call Committee chair need not be a member of the Council.

The characteristics desired in Call Committee members are as follows:

1. Worship Participation

Regular participation in worship speaks of a commitment to honor God, hear God's word, and receive God's gifts of mercy and grace. Familiarity with the worship life of a congregation is critical for a call committee member. The member should know how the congregation worships and what its expectations are relating to worship. If there is more than one worship service time,

2. A Person of Prayer

The call committee will seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer as it goes about its work. The committee will invite and lead the congregation in praying that God's will be accomplished in the call process. A person who prays will be able to entertain new thoughts and directions as the Spirit leads.

3. Can Represent the Whole Congregation

The call committee should consist of persons who know the needs of the whole congregation, and while they might have a primary interest in one area, they are able to make judgments based on the greater good of the whole congregation. The goal is to make winners of the whole congregation with no one feeling that they were the loser.

4. Able To Speak Out

People on the call committee need to be able to express their thoughts and feelings. They should not be domineering or authoritative persons. Rather, they should be people who have confidence in their thoughts and reflections, and be able to give them voice at the appropriate times.

5. Able to Listen

While they need the confidence to speak, they will also need the skill of being a good listener. They will need to listen to one another, and they will need to listen deeply and thoughtfully to a candidate being interviewed.

6. A Person of Conviction with the Ability to Reach Consensus

The most effective members will be those who have clear convictions and are able to express them, while listening to the thoughts and convictions of other members. They will need to be people who are capable of working together towards consensus, trusting that the Holy Spirit is at work through them. Taking a vote is discouraged as it tends to cause more division than consensus. Continued conversation will ultimately allow one candidate to rise to the top or not.

7. Available

The time commitment is normally around one year. During that time, there will be regular meetings early in the process and more frequent meetings during the interview time. Call committee members will need to be able to adjust their schedules so that they can attend ALL committee meetings, especially during the interviewing time. Only members present during the interview of all the candidates being considered should participate in the decision making discussion.

8. Balance and Representation

The committee should reflect the various groups in the congregation, seeking age and gender balance, racial representation, and take into account each person's length of membership in the congregation to make certain both new and longer time members are included. It is often very helpful to include a youth member (15-20 years old) to serve on the committee, using the same set of expectations for involvement, availability and maturity.

9. Additional Best Practices

- It is rarely helpful to have a staff member serve on a call committee (a bit like hiring one's own boss, from the corporate perspective). Essential staff members might be incorporated into the interview process as things progress.
- It is never a good idea for more than one member of a family (no matter how "extended") to serve on a call committee. That places a disproportionate amount of power in one group.

Call Committee member form

Please fill out this form and email it to manda@spselca.org

Congregation:

Address:

President:

Address:

Telephone Numbers: Cell:

Other:

E-mail:

Chair of the Call Committee:

Address:

Telephone Numbers: Cell:

Other:

E-mail:

Secretary of the Call Committee:

Address:

Telephone Numbers: Cell:

Other:

E-mail:

Other Committee members: (Names, Phone numbers, E-mail addresses):

Installation of Call Committee

To be included in the worship service before the prayers of the people.

Interim Pastor: The following persons, having been chosen/elected to be the Call Committee, are asked to come forward as their names are called:

Interim Pastor: Saint Paul writes: There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability for some particular service to everyone. The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.

You have been *appointed/elected* to a position of leadership and trust in this congregation. You are to seek the will of God and the mind and spirit of the congregation with regard to our ministry and leadership needs.

You will examine the qualifications and interview prospective pastors/deacons. Ultimately you will provide a recommendation to the congregation regarding the issuance of a call. In all your deliberations, you are to be examples of faith active in love, seeking to maintain the life, harmony and ministry of this congregation.

On behalf of your siblings in Christ, I now ask you: Will you accept and faithfully carry out the duties of the Call Committee?

Call Committee: We will and ask God to help and guide us.

The committee faces the congregation, which stands.

Interim Pastor: People of God, I ask you, will you support these, your siblings in Christ, in their task, and will you undergird their efforts with your prayers?

Congregation: We will.

Interim Pastor: I now declare you installed as the Call Committee of this congregation. God bless you and your work together.

Prayers for the Call Committee

For The Work Of The Call Committee

Almighty God, giver of all good gifts: Look on your Church with grace and guide the minds of those who shall choose a pastor or deacon for this congregation, that we may receive a faithful servant who will care for your people and equip us for our ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For the Departing Pastor:

Gracious God, you have united us all in one body. We give you thanks for the work of Pastor _____ among us. As *he/she/they* leaves to a new call/ retirement surround *her/him/them* with your Spirit. Give us the courage to release *her/him/them* to a new call and bless our remembering of the work that has been done among us. Guide Pastor _____ and us as we continue to seek to share the Good News of salvation through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

During the Interim Time

Loving God, be with us and guide us during this time of discernment. Fill our leaders with your wisdom. Keep us mindful of the work you would have us do. Lead us and guide us O Lord to be about the work of your kin-dom even as the search for a new *pastor/deacon* continues. Bless all who have taken on extra responsibility, and fill them with a sense of your love and presence. We pray in your Son's name, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

During Interviews:

Loving God, be with us and guide us during this time of discernment. Fill our leaders with your wisdom. Keep us mindful of the work you would have us do. Lead us and guide us O Lord to be about the work of your kingdom even as the search for a new *pastor/deacon* continues. Bless all who have taken on extra responsibility, and fill them with a sense of your love and presence. We pray in your Beloved Child's name, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

During Interviews:

God, keep us mindful of your presence among us as we seek to discern your will for us. We pray that you will help us see beyond our own needs to the needs of your Church. We pray that you will open our eyes to new possibilities, and new opportunities of being your people. Guide us and lead us O Lord. Amen.

At Meetings

Life-giving God, create among us a desire to do your will. Open our hearts to your Word. Lead us as we seek to lead. Guide us as we seek to guide. God, we seek a new *pastor/deacon* to be among us to lead us and walk with us into future ministry. Direct and sustain us as we wait. Bless all who serve in the congregation, especially those who have the responsibility to lead us during the Call Process. Bless us Lord Jesus. Amen.

Devotions and Suggested Biblical texts

The following are just a few texts that may be used for devotions or bible study during the Call Process. The lessons for each Sunday may also be used for your study.

- Matthew 28: 16-20
- The Call of Matthew: Matthew 9:9-13
- Call of the first Disciples: Luke 5: 1-11
- Romans 12: 1-8 (9-21)
- I Corinthians 3:1-9
- Ephesians 6: 10-18
- Philippians 2: 1-11
- I Timothy 2: Instructions concerning Prayer
 - 3:1-7 Qualifications of Bishops
 - 3:8-13 Qualifications of Deacons
 - 4:6-16 a Good Minister of Jesus Christ

- Reflections on God's Call:
 - Call of young people:
 - Samuel : I Samuel 2:1- 3:18
 - Mary: Luke 1: 26-38
 - Call of Elderly:
 - Elizabeth and Zechariah : Luke 1
 - Abraham and Samuel: Genesis 18: 9:15
 - Simeon and Anna: Luke 2: 22-38
 - Call of the Disciples:
 - Follow Me: Matthew 4:18-22; Mk:1-16-20; Luke 5: 1-11

- Reflections on being the Church:
 - Read The Book of Acts together. Read one chapter a week and begin meetings by reflecting on recent readings and the ministry of your congregation.

- Reflections on "Wilderness Wandering"
 - God's People waiting for clarity: Numbers 9:15-23
 - God's people grumbling in the wilderness – and God providing: Exodus 16:1-7

Bible Study

LEADER: Open with Prayer:

(Suggestion: Almighty God, we look to your Word for guidance and hope. Open our hearts and our minds that we may hear your word for us. Guide us through your Word to hear the good news for our lives together through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.)

A. One person reads the lesson:

- In silence write one word or phrase from the lesson that seems significant:
- Each person shares the word or phrase without additional comment.

B. A second person reads the lesson:

- In silence reflect on what this passage is saying to you.
- Each person may share their reflection without additional comment.

C. A third person reads the lesson:

- Each person reflects in one sentence or less what this passage is saying to the Congregation at this time while you are in the Call Process.
- As time allows, a 10-20 minute open discussion may be included at this time.

Closing Prayer:

LEADER: *Gracious God, we are your servants in need of your love.*

The leader then offers a prayer for the person to their right. That person prays for the person on their right, continuing around the room until each person has been included.

Close with The Lord's Prayer

Lutheran View of Call and Vocation

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship

We believe it is our Savior Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, who guides the call process. The calling of a pastor or deacon represents a valuable partnership between God, the calling congregation, and the Sierra Pacific Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. An ideal call process builds on trust, openness, and good communication. When the call process results in a good match between minister and congregation, the total mission of the church is furthered.

Luther Says...

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

The Call to Ordained Ministry

It is through the church that God calls certain Christians to ordained ministry. Once that call is discerned, the candidate devotes years to study, training, and preparation under the guidance of the whole church through the bishop and the candidacy committee. Not only does the local congregation participate in the call process, but so does the whole church through the Office of the Bishop

Discerning the Call of Your Specific Ministry

During the time of transition between pastors or deacons, a congregation is invited to engage in a spiritual discernment process to discover its call—what God wants the church to be and do in the next phase of its ministry.

Without knowing where God is leading your congregation, a congregation cannot know what skills, direction, and priorities it needs in their pastor. Pastors are not called to provide the vision for congregations; pastors are called to help congregations move toward the vision they have for where God is taking them.

The interim time is a period for your congregation to intentionally engage in a process that involves Bible study, prayer, and an honest and thoughtful look at your congregation and community, as a way to discern the ministry direction where God is leading you. Only after your congregation discerns its ministry direction can the call committee begin to discern what type of pastor to call to serve them.

Once this becomes clear, the call committee, in consultation with Office of the Bishop, begins the discernment process of discovering who God is calling to be the pastor in this next chapter of your congregation's life and ministry. The discernment process is an exciting journey that will take you through specific steps but moves according to the Spirit's timing. Faithful attentiveness to and trust in the guidance of God's spirit, will help to make your journey rich and fruitful.

The Partnership Between the Whole Church and the Local Church

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

The call committee, the congregation council, and the entire congregation all participate fully in the process. As does the Office of 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 Office of the Bishop has deep concern for the well-being of the congregation's life and ministry. The Office of the Bishop also has deep concern about the person and gifts of the prospective pastor. In the call process the Office of the Bishop, the congregation, and the prospective pastor or deacon work together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring about a new partnership that is faithful to the Gospel, empowers the local congregation in its ministry, and strengthens the whole church as people of God.

The Call Process is Unique

On the basis of our Lutheran theology, a pastor or deacon is **called**. The call process is not simply hiring a new employee for the church as would be done in a secular workplace. It is participating in God's own choice for the church by opening ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit who will guide, nudge, empower, inspire, comfort, and inform the journey toward finding new leadership.

Called, Not Placed

Unlike some other denominations, Rostered Ministers in the ELCA are not "placed" or "moved around" by bishops. Neither can congregation councils or senior pastors unilaterally secure rostered people for congregational leadership. All rostered ministers must be **called** by a congregational vote.

Called, Not Hired

The call process is not the same as the hiring process in other parts of society. The pattern that includes head hunting, résumé shuffling, or personality contests is highly inappropriate in the calling of a pastor. Neither is the call process like a popularity contest in which hosts of candidates present themselves to their best advantage so the call committee can select one as the winner.

The ELCA call process is unique because it is an effort to discern what God wants for this congregation and for the whole church, in order that the Gospel may be proclaimed and the sacraments administered in accordance with the Gospel.

The Wrong and Right Questions

It is not appropriate for a call committee to be guided by questions such as: “Will the congregation like this pastor?” “Will they approve of the call committee’s choice of candidates?” “Will people feel good having this pastor around on Sunday morning?” “Will this person do for now until a better pastor comes along?” “How will this person look to the rest of the community?”

The foremost question for the call committee always should be “Is this is the person God intends this congregation to have as its pastor or deacon?” Human preferences and personalities should never come before the mission to which God calls the church. That is why every meeting of the call committee will include prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the work that is being done.

This means that candidates for the call will not be submitted — and should not be evaluated — on the basis of age, gender, race, physical limitations, or any other “human distinctions.” The call is about the spiritual gifts needed for leading and facilitating ministry in a particular setting; nothing more, and nothing less.

The Significance of Service on a Call Committee

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 a congregation. 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 congregation is vitally connected to the whole church. And it let them participate in opening a new chapter in the life and ministry of their congregation as part of the history long, worldwide Church of Jesus Christ.

Expectations

It is important to be clear about expectations. What do you and this congregation expect of your pastor in:

- Worship
- Learning, Teaching
- Stewardship leadership
- Fellowship leadership
- Witness, Evangelism, Outreach
- Pastoral Care
- Communication
- Administration
- Ecumenical leadership
- Service in the Sierra Pacific Synod/Wider Church
- Service Projects / Social Justice
- Other ...

Conversely, since congregational ministry is always a mutual ministry between the called minister and the congregation, what can or should the pastor or deacon expect of you in:

- Support of family and time for family life, or personal time / time with friends if single
- Compensation package
- Continuing education opportunities
- Opportunities to serve and lead at the synodical and churchwide levels
- Support through your prayers
- Honor and respect them as a leader in the Church
- Other...

Doing the “Rite Thing”

It’s often helpful to listen carefully to the words that are spoken during the Rite of Installation. A pastor is asked, *“Will you...”*

- discharge your duties in harmony with the constitutions of the church (See Chapter 7.31.11 & 7.31.12 of ELCA Constitution; Chapter 14 of the Synod Constitution; and Chapter 9 of the Constitution for Congregations);
- preach and teach in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church;
- love, serve and pray for God’s people; nourish them with the Word and Holy Sacraments, leading them by your own example in the use of the means of grace, in faithful service and holy living; and
- give faithful witness in the world, that God’s love may be known in all that you do?”

And the congregation is asked, *“Will you...”*

- “receive this messenger of Jesus Christ, sent by God to serve God’s people with the Gospel of hope and salvation? Will you regard them as a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God?;
- pray for them, help and honor them for their work’s sake and in all things strive to live together in peace and unity of Christ?”

Other “Right Now” Expectations

1. What are your expectations of the Call Process itself?
 - a. Do you clearly understand the process?
 - b. Do you understand the general time line for a “normal” process, and that this process ought neither be protracted nor rushed?
 - c. Do you understand how calling *your* pastor (or other rostered person) involves the entire synod and the whole church?
2. What are your expectations of this Call Committee?
3. What are your expectations of your Congregation Council?
4. What are your expectations of the Office of the Bishop?
 - a. In the ELCA, the Office of the Bishop and the congregation work in mutual consultation regarding the process and in identifying candidates for call. (C 9.01)
 - b. The bishop: attests Letters of Call, authorizes and provides for the installation of the pastor, authorizes and provides for the ordination of pastors.

5. What expectations do you have of yourself?
 - a. Pray; perhaps more than you have done in a while!
 - b. The Holy Spirit “calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies and keeps us united in faith.”
(Luther’s *Small Catechism - The Apostle’s Creed, Article 3*)

Confidentiality Revisited

Confidentiality cannot be overemphasized in the task of calling a pastor. Mention of specific candidates outside the call committee meetings is inappropriate until the committee is ready with its recommendation to the congregation. It is important to keep all names and both verbal and written information about prospective candidates within the confines of the committee. 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.

Openness

Reporting regularly to the congregation council and to the congregation helps keep everyone on the same level of understanding about the process.

Holding Confidence

The Call Committee must keep all verbal and written information about each and every candidate strictly confidential.

The reasons for this are at least twofold.

1. The congregations the candidates are serving are (most likely) unaware that they are interviewing. If a name should get out and back to a candidate’s congregation it could severely damage their ability to do effective ministry at that site. Never underestimate the “connectedness” - who knows whom - within the Lutheran community!
2. You run the risk of turning the whole congregation into a call committee. People will be second guessing why you decided what about whom; without having all the information - “the rest of the story” - before them. The call committee has been chosen and set aside to do this work on behalf of the congregation. The whole congregation will meet the final candidate when the time is right

Communication

While confidentiality is important, that does not mean secrecy. Every means ought to be utilized to keep the members of the congregation informed about the call committee's work and progress. There must be as much transparency as possible. Consider using:

1. **Newsletter articles** explaining the call process to the congregation; with follow - up articles each time another stage in the process is reached.
2. Notes in the **Sunday bulletin** announcing that the call committee is meeting helps keep the congregation informed of progress.
3. **Temple Talks** 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 be reporting to exactly the same audience).
4. **Announcements via email or newsletters** to announce open meetings.

5. **Have a Website section or page** dedicated to the Transition Process.
6. **Forums** can be used to make sure the congregation understands the call process; and to update them along the way. This format invites interaction and feedback.

As you keep the congregation informed:

- Always familiarize them with the process.
- Summarize specific presentations from the visit from the Office of the Bishop, and others the congregation may engage with during this time
- Keep them apprised of progress.
- Spell out preferred process for communicating with the members of the call committee

Do these things and:

- The congregation will clearly understand the process, including the roles of the Office of the Bishop, congregation council, call committee and congregation.
- The congregation will be able to identify and communicate with the members of the call committee.
- People 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.