

# A GUIDE TO THE MDS

## for Bishops, Call Process Administrators, Churchwide Personnel

*Not for general distribution*

Call Process Online: <http://www.elca.org/call-process/>  
CPA Login: <https://community.elca.org/login>

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You are encouraged to read  
**A GUIDE TO THE MSP** and **A GUIDE TO THE RMP**  
as companion pieces to the information found here

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## A TEACHABLE MOMENT

**Many, if not most, of the tasks** that bishops and members of the synod staff perform on a daily basis offer the opportunity to teach and grow people in their discipleship and understanding. Call process is among these. Call process is a partnership of common purpose as ministry sites, rostered ministers, synod bishops and churchwide offices find ways to mutually engage in, cooperate and coordinate their efforts in the call process for the sake of Christ's work in the church and for the world.

To that end, much of the design and intention of the Mobility Database System, especially in the design of the forms and the governing protocols of the system, aspires to encourage reflection, reward initiative, stimulate creativity, promote cooperation and achieve results that reflect this church's core convictions about mission, calling and faith. Anything less than this aspiration would be to allow call process to drift into the secular realm of jobs and job descriptions, hiring and firing, duties and expectations.

Congregations come to the work of call process expecting that their efforts will not be unduly hampered by requirements and rules, that their position will get the best possible exposure to the available pool of candidates, and that the process will end in a good match. Rostered ministers expect that their availability for call will be handled with confidentiality, that the process will be fair and level, and that it will be treated as a Call and not an employment process. Bishops and CPAs expect that their shepherding role in defining and directing call process will be honored, that they will be able to appropriately regulate the flow of the process and information, and that the three expressions of this church – congregations, synods and churchwide – will be mutually respected for the roles they serve in the ELCA.



## Potential Benefits of the MDS

- Forms are flexible and adaptable to most settings and needs
- Forms reveal each individual's and site's creativity, initiative and energy
- MDS gives a greater transparency to the call process
- Users are urged to be thoughtful, discerning and specific
- Forms are grounded in a structured process of discernment
- Users are able to take active responsibility for their mobility and search
- Call Process Online embodies the "partnership of common purpose" by being the place where all the partners to call process come together: sites, ministers and bishops
- The MDS offers the prospect of speed, accuracy and efficiency
- The MDS is a tool in the total process of reaching the desired outcome – identifying leadership for mission.

## INTENDED USERS

The Mobility Database System is intended to be used solely within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to support congregations and church-related organizations (schools, healthcare institutions, agencies, social ministry organizations, and global mission sites) that seek to call an ELCA rostered minister (ordained and lay rostered minister) to their ministry. As such, the MDS is not designed to support searches conducted by organizations that are not organically linked to a synodical bishop or for searches for non-rostered persons within congregations or church-related organizations (e.g. non-rostered musicians, educators, youth and family ministers, administrators and the like).

### Special Considerations

#### Rostered Minister Profile

- Candidates for rostered ministry who are completing their training and preparing for Assignment are asked to complete the Rostered Minister Profile.
- Rostered Ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada seeking a call within the ELCA may utilize the MDS if they are in conversation with an ELCA bishop and have obtained a valid Leader Key from the ELCA Office of Secretary.
- Synodically Authorized lay ministers do not have access to the MDS.

#### Ministry Site Profile

- The MSP is designed for use by congregations and those congregations under development that will call a rostered minister upon organizing. Congregations complete the entire MSP.



- The MSP may also be used by ELCA Global Mission in its search for rostered ministers to serve as missionaries. Global Mission sites complete the entire MSP.
- Ecumenical settings that include the participation of the ELCA and that are open to calling an ELCA rostered minister may use the MSP. Ecumenical settings complete the entire MSP.
- The MSP is designed for use by multiple-point parishes. To take advantage of the MSP's emphasis on building a shared vision of purpose, resources and context, it is recommended that all the congregations in the ministry partnership work together to complete a single MSP. In such a case the "Commentary" section of the MSP (Part IV) can be used to have each individual congregation describe the ways they are unique within the cooperative ministry. If it is necessary that each congregation in the partnership completes a separate MSP, the "Commentary" section should be used to detail the governing principles and shared understandings of the cooperative ministry.
- Congregations and church-related organizations that seek to call more than one rostered minister should complete a MSP for each position. This can be accomplished either by (1) editing and resubmitting the first MSP so that it now reflects the second position, or (2) opening a blank MSP using the same ID/Password as was used for the first MSP.
- Church-related organizations may, with the concurrence of the synod bishop, complete only Parts I, III, and IV of the MSP.

## FOCUS ON MISSION AND CALLING

Both the *Rostered Minister Profile* and the *Ministry Site Profile* are designed to encourage reflection, reward initiative and stimulate creativity. Questions that call for thoughtful, concise and summary statements should encourage discussion and reflection. The ability to engage the bishop and CPA, to monitor their portfolio of information, and shape how the ministry site and position opening are publicized can reward initiative. The optional "Commentary" section and optional additional form on "Reflections on Ministry and Context" provide some flexibility in the use of the forms and can stimulate creativity.

- The RMP should not be used as a way to catalog all that can be said about a rostered leader's life, faith and career. Nor should the MSP be an exhaustive description of the setting, quirks, history and self-diagnosis of the site. Both forms should be treated as a way to summarize the essentials that will allow then for a fuller and fruitful discussion to ensue during the interview.

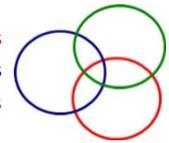


- Having the completed MSP publicized in the congregation and approved by the Congregation Council prior to submitting is an important step in achieving transparency, ownership and shared vision.
- Rostered ministers and ministry sites create “portfolios” of information which include the RMP/MSP, the *Reference Recommendation* form and the *Reflections on Ministry and Context*. They may submit other documents to the bishop (e.g. résumé, history, strategic plan, financial statement) for inclusion in their portfolio.
- Because all MSPs and RMPs must be approved for posting to the system, the bishop and CPA have the opportunity for care, support and counsel of the ministries and ministers within the synod as they review the forms and give feedback.
- Because rostered ministers and ministry sites gain access to the MDS only through the synodical bishop, it is hoped that rostered ministers and ministry sites will be motivated to work cooperatively with the synodical bishop in their call process work, opening doors to dialog, synergy and common purpose.

### Rostered Minister Profile

The Rostered Minister Profile seeks to focus the rostered minister on his/her sense of *CALLING*. Calling can be thought of as what happens when the rostered minister feels God stirring his/her Passions and Convictions, when he/she is maximizing their Gifts and Talents, and when he/she senses God pointing to a specific kind of ministry or context. Such discernment is a spiritual exercise, often accomplished best in conversation with a trusted friend. The RMP's Parts II and III seek to capture the results of the rostered minister's discernment.

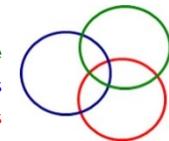
Passions & Commitments  
Gifts & Talents  
Context & Preferences



### Ministry Site Profile

Likewise the Ministry Site Profile seeks to focus on *MISSION*. The mission of a ministry site can be thought of as what happens when the members are true to their Identity and Purpose, when they are maximizing their Gifts and Resources, and when they are responsive to the needs in their context. All three of these areas of discernment should be framed as having spiritual and practical dimensions and should be pursued in the context of prayer and bible study. The MSP's Part II seeks to capture the results of the ministry site's discernment.

Identity & Purpose  
Gifts & Resources  
Context & Needs



### Supporting Forms

#### Authorization and Release

Each rostered minister is to submit a signed *Authorization and Release* for every RMP and RMP update that she/he submits for approval. This is a legal necessity. A copy



should be placed in the file and forwarded to each ministry site that is considering the rostered minister. The rostered minister is to send a copy to the reference completing the *Reference Recommendation* form.

### Reference Recommendation

The MSP and RMP both require an outside recommendation in order to add another perspective on the rostered minister's leadership or the ministry site's mission. The form should not be treated as perfunctory. It can be very useful, especially in that questions are asked in the recommendation form that echo what the rostered minister or ministry site have already stated within their RMP/MSP. This gives a point of validation and contrast. The MSP recommendation should be shared with the candidates for call; the RMP recommendation should be shared with the ministry site. Beyond this, the forms are considered confidential.

### Reflections on Ministry and Context

The RMP and MSP *Reflections* forms are optional, though some synodical bishops may elect to require that one or more of the questions be addressed by all rostered ministers or ministry sites.

## BISHOP'S CONFIDENTIAL FORM

The *Bishop's Confidential Recommendation* form is, strictly speaking, not a part of the Rostered Minister Portfolio. (A "portfolio" is that collection of information that the rostered minister develops in support of his/her mobility.) The bishop's form is a private bishop-to-bishop communication that is considered highly confidential. It is never to be distributed to people outside the bishop's office and may not even be shared with others within the bishop's office if the bishop so elects.

- Bishops complete the form by using their personal login to *ELCA Community* and going through the "Synod Portal" to "Call Process" and then "RMP Activity Log". Simply select the rostered minister's name and then choose "PDF" to read the existing recommendation.
- If the bishop wishes to edit the existing recommendation, choose "ON FILE" / "EDIT".
- If no recommendation currently exists, the bishop will see the option to open a "NEW" form.
- The bishop will have the opportunity to enter comments into a separate text box that only other bishops can read.

## ADDITIONAL PROTOCOLS

The Mobility Database System is only a technological tool for streamlining and facilitating call process work. Procedures and protocols that bishops and CPAs have established for



their respective synods in the past should continue. Nevertheless, the following protocols will help insure that all parties to call process work share a common understanding of the MDS' purpose and use.

## Relational Agreement

Synodical bishops have agreed to work cooperatively, supportively and openly with one another, respecting each other's ministry and territory. Among other things, the bishop's document, *A Shared Vision of Episcopacy and a Relational Agreement* (2008), states:

- Each synodical bishop has pastoral and administrative responsibility for their synod. Specifically, each synodical bishop has responsibility for determining how call process will be conducted within her/his synod territory.
- The synodical bishop works interdependently, rather than hierarchically, with the other two expressions of the church – congregations and churchwide.
- Bishops work collegially together, including the sharing of ministers and information as is good for the whole church and not just the local synod. Bishops will be candid and forthright about all relevant information about rostered ministers or ministry sites.
- Bishops strive to deal fairly and evenhandedly with all candidates, rostered ministers, congregations, institutions and agencies.
- The *Bishop's Confidential Recommendation* form is privileged bishop-to-bishop communication.
- If a synodical bishop wishes to recommend a rostered minister to a ministry site and wishes to contact that rostered minister to discuss his/her mobility, the bishop (or CPA) will first contact the rostered minister's home bishop for permission to do so.
- Bishops will normally permit another bishop to contact a rostered minister regarding mobility unless there is a compelling reason not to (e.g. premature interruption of a call under three years or a pressing personal or family circumstance).
- Bishops do not support any attempt to conduct conversations or negotiations between candidates and ministry sites prior to formal Assignment or recommendation.
- Bishops give particular attention to persons who experience difficulty in the call process due to ethnicity, gender, being married to another rostered minister, age, challenging personal conditions, service in the military chaplaincy, and returning missionaries.
- Bishops attest all Letters of Call signifying that the call has been properly extended and that the stated terms are accurate.

## Use of the MDS Forms

- The Leader Key and Social Security numbers should always be treated as private and confidential information.
- Rostered ministers generally expect that their availability for call will be treated confidentially so as not to undermine their current call.
- A RMP should not normally be marked "active" on the *RMP Activity Log* unless the *Rostered Minister Profile*, *Reference Recommendation* form, *Authorization and Release*, and *Bishop's Confidential Recommendation* form have all been submitted.
- A MSP should not normally be marked "active" on the *MSP Activity Log* unless the *Ministry Site Profile* and *Reference Recommendation* form have both been submitted.



- The MSP Reference Recommendation should be given to candidates for call and the RMP Reference Recommendation should be given to the Call Committee. Beyond this, the forms should be treated as confidential.
- RMPs submitted by Assignment Candidates appear on the list of rostered ministers in the *RMP Activity Log* in red.
- Call Committees should normally only be provided with Parts I–IV of each RMP as well as a copy of the signed *Authorization and Release*, the rostered minister's *Reflections on Ministry and Context* (if completed), and other documents submitted by the rostered minister. Part V of the RMP is intended to be a rostered-minister-to-bishop communication and thus private.
- Each time a RMP is updated and re-approved for posting to the MDS, a new *Authorization and Release* applicable to that RMP should be requested.
- Bishops can deactivate a MSP or RMP at any time if, in their estimation, the conditions warrant it. Forms that are over one year old should be deactivated until they can be updated and resubmitted.
- At the time that a call process concludes, it is good practice to commit copies (hard or soft) of the MSP and the RMP of the called candidate and their supporting forms to a permanent file maintained by the synod office.

### Use of the MDS Search Applications

- Access to *RMP Search* should never be given to Call Committee members or others. This search application is for use by authorized synodical personnel only.
- Access to *MSP Search* on the secure side of the site should never be given to rostered ministers or others who are conducting personal searches. Rostered ministers are limited to using the information found at *Current Openings*.

## SEARCH FUNCTIONS

The central feature of the Mobility Database System is the ability to quickly and easily search the database of rostered ministers on criteria like skills, preferences, compensation and location. This increases the possibility that bishops and CPAs can develop the best pool of candidates with the desired skill-set and ministry-passions for consideration.

- Synod personnel are given access to the MDS Search Applications when they are registered as Call Process Administrators.
- CPAs access the MDS Search Applications by logging into *ELCA Community* with their personal ID and password and then selecting “Synod Portal”.
- CPAs can change the email address used by the MDS by going to “Synod Portal” and then “Mobility/Call Process”.

### MSP Search

- *Current Openings* ([www.ELCA.org/call-process/current-openings](http://www.ELCA.org/call-process/current-openings)) provides the public with a searchable database of basic information about ministry opportunities across



the ELCA. Users can view a snapshot of information, but not the full MSP or *Reference Recommendation* form. If users want to know more about a site, they are directed to contact the synod's CPA.

- On the secure side of the web site, *MSP Search* gives the bishop and CPA the ability to search, read and print any MSP or supporting form.
- Only the bishop or CPA of the synod in which the ministry site is located should ever distribute that MSP to rostered ministers – by hard or soft copy (PDF only).
- One printed copy of each MSP and its supporting forms should be kept on file in the synod office.

## RMP Search

- The bishop or CPA can search, read and print any RMP using “RMP Search”, including the *Twelve Reflections* and *Reference Recommendation* forms.
- The *Bishop's Confidential Recommendation* form is not for printing or distribution.
- *RMP Search* allows for searches using a wide variety of search criteria.
  - Use the most important criteria for your search initially.
  - If that search returns too many matches begin adding criteria to further focus your results.
  - In *RMP Search*, there is both a list of the standard search criteria as well as advanced search criteria.
  - Result lists can be sorted by name, location and date submitted.
  - Selecting an entry on the results screen will produce a snapshot of basic information. Snapshots can be previewed rapidly.
  - The entire RMP can be read and printed using the menu options on the snapshot screen.
- Information found on RMPs is considered personal and sensitive and should always be handled with respect and confidentiality.
- Parts I-IV of the RMP can be given to Call Committees in hard or soft copy. Committees should also receive a copy of the *Authorization and Release*.
- Part V of the RMP is intended to be a way for the rostered minister to share with the bishop his/her preferences and needs. As such, Part V is not normally forwarded to call committees unless, in the estimation of the bishop and in consultation with the rostered minister, the bishop concludes that it contains important information necessary to the call committee and interview process.
- One printed copy of each RMP, the supporting forms and the original signed *Authorization and Release* page should be kept on file in the synod office.

## LIBRARY OF RESOURCES

Bishops and CPAs are invited to help make Call Process Online even more useful by suggesting helpful articles for publication on the site – either on the public side of the site where rostered ministers and call committee members can gain insight, or on the secure part of the site where documents intended for synod personnel will reside.



## BACKGROUND

Congregations and rostered ministers in the call process in the ELCA do not unanimously love the experience. Stories abound about bumping into unspoken rules and unwanted gatekeepers, the lack of transparency, the cloud of confidentiality, and the perplexing way practices differ from one synod to the next. Some searches seem endless; others do not seem to be set on a level playing field. In an informal survey by *The Lutheran* magazine in 2002, only 15% of the 280 respondents liked their experience of the call process.

The Churchwide Assembly of 2003 considered a memorial from the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod that cited the confusion and negativity associated with call process and called for research and recommendations. In 2006 the Task Force that took up the work made specific recommendations: that tools be developed to support all the parties in the call process, that best practices be identified and promoted, that resources be written with an eye for developing a common language and understanding of call process, and that emerging technologies be employed to undergird the work of call process.

As a part of the response to these recommendations, a team of people from the churchwide offices began work in 2007 on the Mobility Database System. From the beginning the goal was to create new forms that encouraged reflection, creativity and a missional mindset, that a database be created to house and easily process the information found on the forms, and that helpful resources be identified and made available at ELCA.org.

The MDS went live in March 2009 and underwent a significant review and updating in 2015. The hard work of creating the MDS was managed entirely by ELCA staff under the leadership of Marcia Johnson (Office of Bishop) and the Rev. Richard Bruesehoff (Leadership Support). The Rev. Dr. Stanley J. Meyer served as Project Director.

The Mobility Database System is a complex array of programming and protocols. You are encouraged to offer your comments to help improve its friendliness and functioning.

### CALL PROCESS ONLINE

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631  
[Mobility@elca.org](mailto:Mobility@elca.org)

November 2015

