

GUIDELINES for

Assisting Congregations in Dealing with Pre-Call Interviews

The following guidelines have been prepared and adopted by the Council of Presidents for use by the congregations of the Synod. They are intended for those instances when a congregation chooses to interview candidates for the office of pastor before extending him a solemn call.

PREAMBLE¹

Believing that servants in the office of the public ministry administer the means of grace through which God brings to individuals the benefits of Jesus' ministry, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod deems the personal suitability and preparedness of the person who bears that office and responsibility to be of high import. Heeding the Holy Scripture, the LCMS therefore declares that such a person must be a baptized Christian man who is exemplary in his faith in the forgiveness of sins and in a sanctified life that is "above reproach." By natural endowment and from education, he must be "apt to teach," having intellectual command of the doctrines of Scripture and the ability, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, to apply and communicate them. He must have his own household in order and demonstrate his aptitude to serve the church as a wise leader in worship, pastoral care, admonition, teaching, evangelization and works of charity.

PRESUPPOSITIONS

- 1) The decision to call a pastor is among the most important that a congregation ever makes.
- 2) In recent years, congregations have sought more information about candidates on a call list. As a result, some congregations are conducting interviews before issuing a call.
- 3) Pre-call interviews are neither commanded nor forbidden by Holy Scripture or the Lutheran Confessions. However, if a congregation chooses to conduct pre-call interviews, great care should be exercised so that consciences are not offended.
- 4) The objective of conducting pre-call interviews should be to become more familiar with the candidate's theology, interests, experience, skills, and leadership style so that the congregation can equip itself to make an informed decision at its call meeting.

¹ The Preamble is based upon "Scriptural Standards and Ecclesiastical Expectations for Servants in the Office of the Public Ministry," a document adopted by the Council of Presidents in 1989. (Note: The Call Committee is encouraged to obtain and use a copy of this longer document in its work. Copies are available from the District President.)

- 5) Pre-call interviews can be a valuable component of the call process in special circumstance (e.g., team ministry situations).
- 6) Pre-call interviews also involve risks.
 - a. Answers to written or telephone interviews may give a misleading picture. The pastor and the congregation may not present themselves as they really are.
 - b. Personal interviews can place undue emphasis on the outward aspects of the call (e.g., appearance of the sanctuary, the condition of parsonage, the neighborhood, the community, the people, etc.) rather than on the challenges and opportunities for mission and ministry. Furthermore, personal interviews can be very expensive.
 - c. Not every LCMS pastor will submit to an interview. Some excellent candidates, who will not participate in an interview, may thereby be eliminated from consideration.

GUIDELINES

- 1) Congregations should wait to decide on whether or not to conduct pre-call interviews until after they have received their call list and have reviewed the information provided by the District President.
- 2) Pre-call interviews should only be conducted with those individuals who are named on the call list provided by the District President.
- 3) A pre-call interview may supplement the information/advice supplied by the District President and should only be done with his knowledge and approval.
- 4) A pre-call interview should not be conducted until after the congregation has completed a careful and thorough self-study.
- 5) Congregations choosing to conduct pre-call interviews will be careful to maintain the dignity and divine nature of the call. When calling a pastor, congregations are not hiring an employee, but asking God to send them a pastor.
- 6) Congregations will surround the entire call process with fervent prayer.
- 7) Pre-call interviews may be conducted by letter, by telephone, or through a face-to-face visit.
- 8) The actual interviewing will normally be done by members of the Call Committee. (The Call Committee and the Interview Committee may be the same group of individuals or two different groups of individuals or a sub-committee of the Call Committee as the congregation directs or as the Call Committee structures itself for its work. Throughout this document, it is

understood that references to 'the committee' speak of the group—whatever its title—that undertakes the interviewing task.)

- a. If the congregation's constitution does not provide for a Call Committee, an enabling resolution should be adopted by the voters' assembly establishing both the make-up and the duties of the Call Committee.
 - b. The congregation should outline for the Interview Committee the kind of report or recommendation it expects from the Call Committee.
 - c. The candidates for interview will be taken from the Call List as prepared by the District President.
- 9) The Interview Committee will be careful to conduct each candidate interview in the same way. The Committee should limit the number of questions addressed to the candidates. The same person should ask the questions of each of the candidates.
 - 10) A written summary of each interview should be made and distributed to each member of the Call Committee. It is from these summaries that a report can be made to the congregation.
 - 11) As a matter of courtesy, congregations will communicate with each candidate who has been interviewed, expressing appreciation for his participation.
 - 12) Congregations will work closely with the District President and the Circuit Counselor in carrying out the interview process.
 - a. If personal or telephone interviews are used, the District President, or his representative, should be invited to participate in the actual interviews.
 - b. If telephone or letter interviews are used, the District President, or his representative, should have opportunity to review the interview questions and make suggestions for change or improvement.

FORMULATING THE INTERVIEW

- 1) As part of the call process, whether interviews are used or not, the congregation needs to have a clear understanding of its mission and ministry and its current situation. Therefore, a careful and thorough congregational self-study is essential and should serve as the basis for developing the interview format.
- 2) In order for the congregation to have ownership in the results of the interview process, it should be given the opportunity to submit questions or subjects to the Call Committee to be touched upon in the interviews.

- 3) The Call Committee will be responsible for formulating the final list of areas/questions to be addressed in the interviews.
- 4) The approach needs to be framed carefully so that the ground to be covered can be accomplished in the allotted time.
- 5) Each interview statement should be written down and then evaluated in three ways:
 - a. What does it have to do with the position?
 - b. Why do we need to know?
 - c. Would we be willing to answer the same question about ourselves?
- 6) It is best to agree on a list of core questions, that is, questions to be addressed—in the same words and by the same person—to each of the candidates interviewed. These questions should be based on the congregational self study and pastoral position description and should be the same for all interviews.
- 7) Trick questions should not be included. They have no place in clergy interviews.
- 8) In framing the interview, focus on how the pastor functions rather than on the ideas and concepts he expresses. Remember that the manner in which a person has handled a situation in the past may well indicate how he might act in the future given the same or similar circumstances. Note especially expressions of energy, conviction, enthusiasm, respect for acceptable differences and the way personal faith is shared.
- 9) Try to avoid "yes/no" or other short answer questions. Examples of good questions include:
 - a. Tell us about a time when...
 - b. What do you want us to know about...
 - c. Give us an example of...
 - d. You say. . . about yourself. How has this been demonstrated?
 - e. Describe an experience where...

Listen carefully in order to ascertain how the pastor draws naturally, winsomely, and confidently on the resources of his education, experience, and faith.
- 10) Some areas of concern and typical questions relating to them may be of benefit to you as you form your approach for your interview process (see attached Sample Interview Format). Your approach, of course, should be based upon your own congregational situation and upon the information about the candidates being interviewed.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 1) In carrying out its responsibilities, the Interview Committee will work closely with the District President or his representative.
- 2) The Call Committee will need to determine:
 - a. Who from the Committee will participate in the interview;
 - b. The number of candidates to be interviewed (It may be appropriate for the Voters' Assembly to be involved in this decision.);
 - c. How the candidates to be interviewed will be selected;
 - d. The type of interview to be used, e.g., telephone, letter, face-to-face, etc.;
 - e. If face-to-face or telephone, the time and place of the interview, together with its anticipated length;
 - f. If face-to-face, the arrangements for inviting the candidates (be very specific about arrangements for transportation, hospitality, lodging, expenses—with flexibility for the comfort and convenience of the pastor and his wife);
 - g. If telephone, the arrangements for the date and time of the call, together with clear information about who will be (or is) listening in for the congregation;
 - h. The person responsible for inviting the candidates, meeting them, arranging for lodging, seeing to it that expenses are promptly paid, etc. (It is better to have one person do this or one person for each candidate.);
 - i. The person responsible for sharing information on the process with each candidate.
 - j. Those interviewed should be informed when a call is extended to another candidate.
 - k. The report that will be given to the congregation (how it will be presented, in what format, and by whom). Ordinarily, the Committee will recommend at least three choices to the congregation.
- 3) The committee does not act on its own behalf, but as the representative and servant of the entire congregation. Its agenda should be that of the congregation and not some private or individual agenda.

Prepared by
The Clergy Call and Roster Committee
The Council of Presidents
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
2002

Sample Interview Format
for
Congregations Interviewing Pastoral Candidates
Before Extending a Call

Having in mind some areas of concern, and typical questions relating to them, may be of benefit to you as you structure your interview process. The following statements or questions are meant to serve as thought starters in developing your interview format. Your statements or questions, of course, should be based on your own congregational situation and on the information about the candidates being interviewed.

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND PREACHING

When a change in pastors takes place, changes are also likely to take place in the worship practice of the congregation. The principle concern in the interview is for the committee to determine the candidate's attitudes and convictions about worship, preaching, and the liturgy.

Preaching, teaching, and leading worship are important aspects of the pastor's work. However, there is often a variety of attitudes concerning what constitutes a "good" sermon, a "good" Bible class, and "good" worship. Therefore, some issues to discuss in this area might be:

- 1) Describe how you make decisions about worship content and style.
- 2) Describe how you have introduced changes in the worship practice of your present congregation.
- 3) Describe your convictions about the importance of liturgy and the Sacrament of the Altar and how you carry out these convictions.
- 4) Describe how you go about preparing your sermons, using, e.g., the church year, the Scripture lessons, personal experiences (your own or others), current events, contemporary issues in culture and society.
- 5) What is the average length of your sermons?
- 6) Describe how important you consider preaching to be in the life of the church.

You should remember that the style and schedule of worship in the candidate's present congregation is not necessarily what he prefers or would choose, or would try to duplicate in another situation.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Your objective in this area is to discover what might happen if this candidate and your congregation undertake a spiritual journey together. You will be concerned here not only about the candidate's spiritual/devotional life, but also about the spiritual life, growth, and health of your congregation.

In discussing Christian education, your committee will be interested in some of the following elements in the candidate's responses: his level of creative energy, the range of resources he has used, his familiarity with various educational materials and curricula, his views on the training and involvement of lay people in various roles, and his level of direct personal involvement and competence in education.

Your committee will want to discuss all levels of congregational education as it now exists and as you hope it will develop including Bible classes, Sunday School, Confirmation instruction, youth programs, and topics for auxiliary organizations.

If you operate a Christian Day School, your Board of Education or whoever is responsible for its operation, undoubtedly will have a list of concerns relating to the school. Possible issues for discussion might include:

- 1) Describe how you and your present congregation have grown in spiritual life, separately and together.
- 2) Describe how you view Christian education and its role in the life of the congregation.
- 3) Describe some resources you use to enhance the spiritual life of the congregation.
- 4) Describe what you expect adults and children to learn and retain through the congregational education program.
- 5) Describe some of your favorite tools and resources for Bible study, Sunday School, and catechism.
- 6) Describe what curricular material you use for youth and adult confirmation and why.
- 7) Describe how you recruit, train, assist, support, and supervise a teaching staff.
- 8) Describe how you involve parents in the Christian education of children.
- 9) Describe how you teach people to pray.
- 10) Describe your experience with various traditions of spiritual life, for example, retreats, prayer disciplines, private confession, observance of church festivals, etc.
- 11) Describe what resources refresh you personally.

PASTORAL CARE

At all times, but especially in time of personal crisis or transition—birth, death, marriage, divorce, vocational stress or change, physical or mental illness—parishioners look to the pastor for pastoral care. They want to know and be convinced that their pastor really cares about them, that he will be available in time of need, and that he will apply the resources of the Gospel to their need. Parishioners are also interested in knowing how the pastor deals with problem situations. It is appropriate to visit with the candidate about his response to specific situations. For example:

- 1) Describe what kinds of pastoral care and counseling congregational members can expect from you.
- 2) Describe how you visit your parishioners (hospital calls, nursing homes, homebound, other).

- 3) Describe how you prepare a couple for marriage (pre-marital counseling).
- 4) Describe how you address the issue of couples living together outside of marriage.
- 5) Describe how you handle unwed pregnancies.
- 6) Describe how you work with:
 - a) Troubled teenagers.
 - b) Persons involved in abuse of alcohol or drugs.
 - c) Patient and family members in a terminal illness situation.
- 7) Describe how you minister to those afflicted with bereavement.
- 8) Describe what you do about people who are nonmembers but come to you for pastoral care or counseling.
- 9) Describe how you deal with your own limitations in counseling.
- 10) Describe how you provide for pastoral care when you are not there (e.g., on your day off or during vacation).

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

As the "overseer" of the congregation, a parish pastor faces a wide range of administrative responsibilities. In covering this area during an interview, you will want to keep your congregational situation in mind and concentrate on it rather than on the candidate's present situation.

During this part of the interview your committee may wish to ask the candidate to:

- 1) Describe how you relate to the staff, boards, committees, and other leadership groups in the congregation. How do you maintain a balance of power among the various groups of the congregation?
- 2) Describe how you handle conflict in the congregation.
- 3) Describe how you deal with staff changes.
- 4) Describe how you recruit and train volunteers.
- 5) Describe how the agenda is prepared for Council and Voters' meetings.

Many clues to the candidate's administrative skills will also emerge in the way he handles the correspondence and arrangements for the interview.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Many personal questions are illegal to ask during pre-employment discussions. In addition, you need to be guided by the principle: "Don't ask a question that you would not answer for yourself." You should not raise questions about the candidate's marital history, sexuality, personal financial matters, or past history of alcoholism or mental illness. If such matters are of concern to your committee, a means of dealing with them should be worked out before the interview with input from the District President and Circuit Counselor.

At the same time, a pastor is to some degree a public person so your congregation will naturally have some interest in the candidate as a person.

An appropriate approach here might be to ask the candidate to:

- 1) Describe your goals for your own personal development.
- 2) Describe how you schedule and use your time off.
- 3) Tell us what books you are reading.
- 4) Describe what you do for fun.
- 5) Describe your likes and dislikes about the way your life and ministry have gone thus far.
- 6) Describe your appearance and dress while in the office, attending meetings, or making calls.

CONCLUSION

Finally, your committee may find it useful to conclude each interview by asking the candidate one final question—Is there anything that we should know about you that we didn't ask?

Although each interview will be personal and unique, it is to be hoped that there will be enough uniformity of process and content so that conclusions about each candidate interviewed can be arrived at and compared with fairness and accuracy.

Prepared by
The Clergy Call and Roster Committee
The Council of Presidents
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod