

Protocol for Congregations and Workers during the Call Process

Guidelines to assist commissioned ministers when they receive, consider, and accept/decline a call

When a commissioned minister receives a call to a different location, it is suggested that the following outline be used. While the calling process can be a traumatic time for the commissioned minister, the family, and the congregation/school, the call process is part of our church doctrine and practice. That being true it is necessary that to preserve continuity in ministry, consideration of a call proceed in an orderly and decent manner.

1. Proper lines of communication

When a commissioned minister receives a call, it is important that communication proceed in three directions...

■ The calling congregation...

Once the call document and the accompanying information are received, the commissioned minister should notify the calling congregation by letter that the materials have been received. The letter should contain an assurance that the call will be seriously considered with prayer, asking the guidance of God himself. The individual should inform the calling congregation of his intended procedure for considering the call, i.e. if he intends to visit, as well as the time by which he hopes to reach a decision.

■ The congregation presently being served...

Since the call is a public act, the commissioned minister is advised to *immediately* inform his/her present congregation that he has received a call. Immediate contact with the pastor and board chair should be followed by an announcement on the next Sunday, either verbally or through a written notice in the bulletin. This should be done in a way that encourages prayer and discussion as you seek the Lord's will. (*A call should never be used as a "bargaining chip" to enhance his current position.*)

■ The Church-at-large, namely the District President and Executive Assistant to the President: Parish Services...

Because we walk together in the Synod, the called individual should send copies of all correspondence dealing with the call to the District President and the District Parish Services Executive. If the call is to another District, the corresponding District officials in that District should also receive copies of your correspondence.

2. Consideration of the call

■ **Setting a target date**

As stated above, it is strongly encouraged that the called individual establish and publish a deadline by which he will decide to accept or decline. This is only fair to both the present congregation and the calling congregation. It is suggested that the call be considered for a three to five week time frame and, except for extremely unusual circumstances, should not exceed six weeks. If a decision has not been reached in that time frame, perhaps the Holy Spirit is telling the individual to stay where he is.

■ **Receiving appropriate counsel**

While the decision to accept or decline a call rests with the individual, it would be well if, as part of his consideration, the advice of pastor, colleagues, district officials, and members of the congregation.

■ **Visiting the calling congregation after the call has been received**

It is common for calling congregations to provide for an onsite visit for individuals called to administrative or leadership positions (e.g., principal, Director of Christian Education). Calling congregations may extend a visit invitation to individuals called to teach. Before visiting, it is wise to make sure who is responsible for the costs of the visit. If a visit is made, conversations should be scheduled as appropriate with pastor(s), board members, and, in the case of a school, faculty members.

■ **Review the call documents**

Read the call document and all accompanying materials carefully. Draw up a list of questions to be answered by the calling congregation. These questions can usually be answered in phone conversations.

■ **Decision-making process**

While each individual will develop his/her own process to reach a decision, it is often helpful to develop two lists. One list identifies positive reasons for accepting the call. The second list identifies positive reasons for remaining in the current ministry. Above all, pray, and invite others to pray on your behalf. The Spirit may speak loudly or in a “still, small voice.” Be alert to your feelings. Once you have reached a decision, live with it for two or three days. That will often give you guidance in the correct direction. Invite your spouse (if applicable) to “live” both decisions with you. Discuss it between the two of you. In reaching your decision, “Go” to a new ministry. Don’t “leave” your present one. Once you have reached a final decision, don’t look back.

3. The decision

- **If the call is declined...**

Notify the calling congregation by phone and follow with an appropriate letter of declination. If there are some specific reasons relating to that congregation which contributed to the declination, it is appropriate, and helpful to the congregation, if you identify them in your letter of declination. Copies of this letter should be sent to your District President and District Parish Services Executive and to the corresponding district officials in the district of the calling congregation. Notify the pastor and board or your present congregation and provide an appropriate public announcement to your congregation on the next Sunday.

- **If the call is accepted...**

Notify the calling congregation by phone of your intent to accept the call. Follow the phone notification with the signed acceptance document. Immediately notify the pastor, board, and board members of the current congregation that you are accepting the call. Request a peaceful release from your call. Immediately complete and mail the post cards with accompanied the call documents. It is the called worker's responsibility to contact the current District Office (Parish Services Executive and District President) to request a transfer to your new district. If you are simply accepting a call within the same district, it is still important that you notify the District President and the District Parish Services Executive that you have accepted the call. (Only the District President can authorize your installation and that can only be done when the appropriate notification steps are taken. Please don't wait until a week before installation to complete the notification process). Discuss the termination date with your present congregation. For the purposes of Concordia Plans, the termination should occur on the last day of the month with a starting date on the first day of the month (meaning the day after termination).

4. After accepting

Work with your present congregation to smooth the transition. The amount of attention it will require depends on the position you held. If you are administrator, beware of making plans and commitments for staff, plans and commitments which you won't be present to monitor. Avoid the temptation to become involved in the replacement process, even if approached by board members. It is now the congregation's responsibility to plan for its future staffing needs. Make certain that the "house is in order" before you leave. Graciously accept the good wishes of members and colleagues. Leave with good feelings.