

A GUIDE TO THE CALL PROCESS



Southern Ohio Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE BISHOP



Grace and peace be with you in the name of Jesus Christ.

Welcome to the Call Process for your congregation. God has called you to be a part of an exciting journey. The Holy Spirit is a vital part of this process, as are all of you, and the Bishop's Office together! The congregation trusts that you will find the next rostered leader and I know you will take on this responsibility with seriousness, prayer, thoughtfulness and humor (in a good way).

A Guide to the Call Process Manual has been given to you to assist you on this important journey. If at any time you have questions or concerns please do not hesitate to reach out to Assistant to the Bishop, Pastor Bob Abrams who will help guide you. We in the Bishop's Office keep your congregation, council and call committee in our prayers and we ask that you keep us in prayer.

In the Southern Ohio Mission Territory, we want good matches between pastors/deacons and congregations so that the Church will flourish in the proclamation of the Good News, the Gospel, of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ. Thank you for saying "yes" to this call to serve the Church and the congregation. Blessings and remember, you are not alone, we are in this together for the sake of the Gospel.

In Christ,

Bishop Suzanne Darcy Dillahunt
Southern Ohio Synod

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SOUTHERN OHIO SYNOD Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Call Process: Goals, Definitions, Procedures, and Tips

Congratulations on being named to the Call Committee! As ELCA Lutheran Christians, this means that you have been entrusted with a *spiritual responsibility*: the responsibility to determine the person whom God has already chosen to be your next pastor or deacon. A Call Committee is not a “hiring” committee – this process is not only about the evaluation of the skills of a candidate, who has the best paperwork, or “getting the pulpit filled.” Instead, this is a process, guided by the Holy Spirit, of finding the right match between pastor/deacon and people. As such, the call process is a trust committed to you by the people of your congregation, by the wider Church, and by God. Therefore, the goal of this process is to discern the candidate whom God has chosen and is sending to you to be your next pastor or deacon.

1. **Some Definitions** (defined terms are capitalized throughout this manual)
 - a. **“Call”** Lutheran Christians believe and teach that pastors are called by God’s people to preach the Gospel (the Word) and administer Baptism and Holy Communion (the Sacraments). Deacons are called to preach the gospel (the Word) and serve God’s people and the community (Service). This call is not simply an employer/employee relationship, but instead, a sacred trust guided by the Holy Spirit, who ensures that God’s people are fed with Word and Sacrament/Word and Service. Therefore, under Chapter 9 of your constitution, pastors are ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ called to feed God’s people with Word and Sacrament, and deacons are called to feed and care for God’s people and the community with the Word Service. They both therefore hold a unique and sacred trust in the congregation and in God’s Church.
 - b. **“Call Process”** The steps involved in calling a pastor/deacon to serve the congregation. There are three phases: the call committee phase, the council phase, and the congregational phase. If the call committee, the council, and the congregation all vote to approve the call (more details later), a “Letter of Call” is issued to the pastor/deacon.
 - c. **“Call Process Administrator”** It is the constitutional role of the Bishop to oversee and administer the call process. This means that the Bishop is entrusted to provide the names of suitable candidates to the congregation, to ensure that proper procedures are followed, and to certify the legality of the call.
 - d. **“Call Packet”** The envelope sent by the Office of the Bishop to the congregation for the Call Vote. The Call Packet contains the following: A letter with instructions (if the Assistant to the Bishop cannot be present for the Call Vote); the Letter of Call; the Tally Sheet to document the details of the voting; and the Compensation Worksheet.

- e. **"Call Vote"** The final congregational phase of the call process, where at a special meeting, the congregation votes on whether to issue a Letter of Call to the pastor. The call of the pastor/deacon and the compensation package must be the only items on the agenda of the meeting.
- f. **"Candidate"** The term for any person who has been nominated for the position of pastor or deacon at the congregation. The person must be a rostered minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a Full-Communion Partner, or an approved seminary graduate awaiting their first call.
- g. **"Church"** In the ELCA, God's Church has three interdependent expressions: Congregation, Synod, and Churchwide Organization. In the call process, the congregation calls its pastor/deacon; the Synod - through its Bishop and staff, serves as the call process administrator; and the Churchwide Organization maintains the list ("roster") of available pastoral candidates, and where they are serving.
- h. **"Compensation Package"** The financial agreement reached between the primary pastoral Candidate and the congregation council. The compensation package consists of salary, housing allowance or parsonage, health and other insurance, retirement, social security allowance (if provided), professional expenses, and vacation, continuing education, and family leave. The congregation votes to approve the compensation package. The call committee does **not** discuss compensation with pastoral/diaconal candidates, and plays no role in compensation negotiations.
- i. **"Confidentiality"** The strict requirement that the name, gender, background, location, history, or any other information about a potential pastor/deacon **must not** under any circumstances be revealed by any member of the call committee to any person whatsoever (including family members) unless and until that person has been approved for a congregational vote by the congregation council. This also means that emails, Rostered Minister Profiles (RMPs) which have been printed out, or any other information about candidates must be kept from view of any non-member of the call committee. Violation of this confidence could result in the call process falling apart and having to start over again.
- j. **"Full Communion Partner"** The ELCA has "full communion" agreements with the following denominations: The Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, the United Church of Christ, the Reformed Church in America, and the Moravian Church. An ordained pastor/priest in any of these denominations may serve as the pastor in an ELCA congregation under an "Invitation to Extended Service", which functions like a Letter of Call. In order for a Full Communion Partner pastor or priest to be a Candidate in a congregation, their denomination authorities must agree, and the Bishop of the Southern Ohio Synod must interview and approve the Candidate for service in the congregation. The Candidate would have to agree to teach and preach in accordance with the Lutheran Confessions, and would have a local ELCA mentor pastor.

- k. **“Letter of Call”** Pastors/deacons serve under a unique document called, in the ELCA, a Letter of Call. This document is issued by the whole congregation to the pastor after the completion of the call process. If the pastor/deacon accepts the call, they will come to serve the congregation. The Letter of Call is signed by the congregational president and council secretary, and acknowledged by the Bishop. The ELCA maintains a list of which pastors/deacons are serving under call, and where they are serving.
- l. **“Match”** The way the gifts, interests, and passions of a pastor/deacon fit with the needs, mission, and personality of the congregation. It is difficult to define or pinpoint, but ultimately is sensed inside each member of the call committee and by the pastor/deacon to be called. A “match” is the goal of the call process, and is provided by the Holy Spirit. A call committee member knows there’s a match when they sense that “this is the one.”
- m. **“Meet and Greet”** The time set by the council, on a day before the call vote, for the candidate to mingle with the meet members of the congregation. It should be conversational, informal, hospitable, and designed to familiarize the congregation with the Candidate and vice versa. It is not a “congregational interview” of the candidate in the formal sense.
- n. **“Ministry Site Profile” (MSP)** The document, filled out by the congregation on the ELCA online database, which honestly and faithfully describes the congregation, its demographics, its history, its characteristics, and its ministry to potential pastoral/diaconal Candidates. It is the first document shared in the call process, and is given to potential pastors/deacons by the Bishop’s office to see if the pastor is open to a conversation with a call committee.
- o. **“Mobility”** The process by which pastors/deacons move between congregations or calls, or receive their first call by a congregation.
- p. **“Nomination”** The process by which the names of potential pastors/deacons are provided to the Call Committee. In the Southern Ohio Synod, there are three ways in which pastors/deacons may be nominated:
 - 1. Nomination by the Bishop. This is the primary means by which a Call Committee receives the names and paperwork of pastoral/diaconal Candidates. The Bishop makes nominations based upon a possible match, using background, gifts, style, commitment to the Gospel, and other relevant information.
 - 2. Nomination by the Congregation. When the name of any eligible pastor/deacon is given to the call committee by a member of the committee, or of the congregation, and the Call Committee votes to request that the candidate be interviewed. This request is made to the Bishop’s Office, which then follows appropriate protocols in approaching that pastor/deacon. A congregation or Call Committee may not directly contact any pastor/deacon.
 - 3. Self-Nomination. When an eligible pastor/deacon requests that their name be given to a Call Committee. If the Bishop agrees

that there might be a match, the Bishop may submit the name as a Bishop-nominated candidate. If the Bishop does not agree, the name is submitted “without recommendation” as a self-nomination.

- q. **“Portal”** The informal name of the ELCA database (formally called the “Mobility Database”) which contains the RMPs of pastors/deacons who are open to changing where they are serving. Used by the Bishop’s Office only, the portal also informs the Assistant to the Bishop where, geographically, a pastor/deacon is open to serving, as well as provides a limited amount of confidential information which is used only within the Bishop’s office as part of the process for nominating pastors/deacons to congregations. The Portal is, by definition, a national database, therefore every search by an Assistant to the Bishop for a congregation is a national search.
- r. **“Primary Candidate”** The pastor/deacon who has been chosen by the Call Committee as the one who is the right match for the congregation, and accepts the Call Committee’s invitation to become the only pastor/deacon who proceeds to the next phase. The Primary Candidate’s name is sent to the congregation council and, if the council agrees, to the congregation. When a Primary Candidate is named, the Call Committee is obligated to release from the process any other Candidates it is considering, and the Primary Candidate must withdraw his or her name from any other congregation in which he or she is being considered.
- s. **“Release a Candidate”** means that the Call Committee has determined that the Candidate should not proceed further in the Call Process, and informs the Candidate of that fact. A Call Committee is not permitted to consider again a candidate once that candidate has been released. A pastor/deacon should be released promptly if the Call Committee decides that they are not the right match for the congregation.
- t. **“Rostered Minister Profile” (RMP)** The autobiographical and professional profile filled out on the ELCA database by pastoral/diaconal candidates to provide to Call Committees. RMPs serve as the resume/CV of a pastoral/diaconal Candidate, and are used by Call Committees as their first resource in evaluating a nomination. They are the pastoral/diaconal equivalent of the “MSP”. An RMP is provided to the Call Committee by the Bishop’s office. Call Committees should only receive RMPs from the Bishop’s office.
- u. **“Synod Guidelines”** The compensation standards for pastors and deacons, adopted by the Southern Ohio Synod Assembly when it meets, which are, in this context, used by congregational councils when negotiating compensation with Primary Candidate during the Call Process. The Ministry Site Profile (MSP) discloses to candidates whether the congregation will pay in accordance with guidelines, and pastors use this information in determining whether or not to interview. (The guidelines are found on the synod website: www.southernohiosynod.org under the “Congregations” tab).

- v. **“Transitional (formerly “interim”) Pastor”** The pastor, appointed by the Bishop, and contracted by the congregation, to provide Word and Sacrament ministry in the congregation during a pastoral vacancy. Under the ELCA Constitution, a Transitional Pastor may not influence or be involved in the Call Process.
- w. **“Turn back a call”** The right of a Candidate, before accepting a call to a congregation, to decide whether he or she does feels called to serve there. A Candidate has 30 days after receiving a Letter of Call to make this decision. Although turning back a Call is rare, it does happen in some circumstances. If a call is turned back, the Call Process starts over with new candidates.
- x. **“Vice Pastor”** Because the Bishop is constitutionally responsible for any congregation where there is a pastoral vacancy, in circumstances where no Transitional Pastor is available, a nearby pastor serving a congregation or institution is appointed by the Bishop as “Vice Pastor” of the vacant congregation to handle pastoral emergencies and to attend congregational council meetings. Vice Pastors are compensated by the congregation.

CALL PROCESS FLOWCHART



Who does
what in a
Call
Process

2. Roles in the Call Process

a. Bishop/Assistant to the Bishop:

- i. to pray for God's guidance;
- ii. to provide oversight of the process;
- iii. to diligently search for and review RMP's for consideration by the Call Committee and speak with potential pastors/deacons;
- iv. to screen and interview pastors/deacons from outside the Synod if the pastor is not previously interviewed or known to the Bishop or staff;
- v. to receive permission from other Synod Bishops before speaking with or interviewing candidates serving in their Synods;
- vi. to answer questions of the Council President/Call Chair promptly, and to keep the chair informed of progress;
- vii. to provide the necessary documents (including the Letter of Call) for the Call Vote;
- viii. (Bishop) to sign the Letter of Call.
- ix. (Assistant to the Bishop) to install a newly called pastor/deacon in public worship in the congregation.

b. Call Committee:

- i. to pray for God's guidance;
- ii. to maintain confidentiality strictly - including the number of candidates being considered or any information regarding such candidates;
- iii. to lift up candidate names to the Assistant to the Bishop if it feels led to do so;
- iv. to meet promptly and to regularly to review RMPs and to conduct candidate interviews;
- v. to assess preaching;
- vi. to provide a general update on a regular basis on the general status of the process to the congregation;
- vii. to inform the Congregation Council of its selection as Primary Candidate, and what it saw in the candidate that led to the decision.

c. Congregation Council:

- i. to pray for God's guidance;
- ii. to complete, or provide for the completion, of the Ministry Site Profile;
- iii. to set, prior to the Call Process, the budget of the Call Committee to bring in pastors/deacons to interview (including travel costs/mileage, hotel, and food);
- iv. to maintain confidentiality unless and until the Primary Candidate is approved by the council;
- v. to interview the Primary Candidate, and if appropriate, to approve the nomination;
- vi. to negotiate the Compensation Package;
- vii. to conduct a background check at the congregation's cost;
- viii. to set a date for the congregation to meet the candidate;

- ix. to call a special congregational meeting for the Call Vote;
- x. To inform the Assistant to the Bishop of the date and time of the Call Vote.

d. **Congregation:**

- i. Pray, pray, pray for God's guidance – in worship, and at home, often;
- ii. To trust the Call Committee;
- iii. To respect the Confidentiality of the Call Process;
- iv. To attend the Call Vote and vote on the nomination and compensation;
- v. To pray for and warmly welcome a new pastor.

3. **The Call Process – General Requirements**

a. Three Phases – Call Committee, Council, Congregation

- i. The Call Committee phase is the longest. It is the only phase at which more than one candidate may be considered. The Call committee's role is to identify a Primary Candidate.
- ii. The Council Phase only considers one candidate (the Primary Candidate), approves a Compensation Package (negotiated with the candidate), sets the date of a Meet and Greet with the Congregation, and sets the date of the Call Vote by the Congregation.
- iii. The Congregation Phase: the congregation meets in a special meeting, votes on the candidate, and if that vote passes, votes on the Compensation Package.

b. A pastoral/diaconal candidate must receive at least **two-thirds (2/3) of the vote at each phase** of the process, or the candidacy of that pastor/deacon ends and the process begins again. However, the closer to unanimous the vote is, the clearer it may be that this person is the one whom God has sent to you. If the congregation votes to approve the nomination, a Letter of Call is issued. The candidate has 30 days to respond to a Letter of Call.

c. The Assistant to the Bishop must be notified of any of the following:

- i. The release of any candidate by the Call Committee;
- ii. A decision to hold a second interview with any candidate by the Call Committee;
- iii. **Prior** to the invitation by the Call Committee to make a candidate the Primary Candidate;
- iv. When a candidate accepts Primary Candidate status;
- v. The date of a council interview and the result;
- vi. Possible dates of a call vote prior to setting the date, and providing the actual date of the call vote when set;
- vii. The contents of the compensation package prior to a call vote.

d. The Council should adopt a budget for mileage/travel, hotel, and food for candidate interviews prior to the call process beginning.

4. The Call Committee's Work

- a. Overview
 - i. The goal of the Call Committee is to find the **Primary Candidate**, that is, the pastor/deacon whom God has sent to be the next pastor of the congregation.
 - ii. This is done through prayer, reading the RMPs, interviews, watching sermons, and deliberation among the Call Committee members.
- b. The Chair of the Call Committee has the following duties:
 1. To call and chair meetings;
 2. To communicate with the Assistant to the Bishop on behalf of the Call Committee;
 3. To distribute RMPs to the members of the Call Committee when they are received;
 4. To communicate with candidates, including introductory calls/emails, and all issues of scheduling and status of the candidacy of the pastor/deacon;
 5. Unless there is another liaison, communicate the status of the Call Process to the Council (while maintaining confidentiality), as well as regarding use of the Call Committee budget for interviews;
 6. Ensure that candidates receive mileage or travel reimbursement, have a hotel to stay in, and receive reimbursement for meals (or have the meals provided).
 - ii. The Chair is a "first among equals", meaning, they have the same vote as other members of the Call Committee. The Chair does not have a "veto" over candidates, and must present all RMPs sent by the Assistant to the Bishop to the whole Call Committee.
- c. The Chair should NOT be a member of Council, or a rostered minister, active or retired, in the ELCA or any other denomination. Retired rostered ministers may otherwise serve as members of the Call Committee.

5. Call Committee Phase

- a. This phase is ***entirely confidential***. There is no time when the name or personal information of a candidate may be revealed by the Call Committee to anyone (unless checking references with the candidate's permission), except when transmitting the name of the Primary Candidate to the Council President.
- b. The Call Committee receives names of pastors/deacons (or seminary graduates seeking their first call) in nomination in one of **three ways**:

- i. **Nomination by the Bishop.** This is the most common way. The Bishop, through her Assistant, reviews the RMPs of candidates available in the Portal, interviews those outside of the Southern Ohio Synod, and assesses whether there may be a Match.
- ii. **Nomination by the Congregation.** Someone on the Call Committee, or a member of the congregation, may ask for a pastor/deacon (any pastor or deacon is eligible to serve, anywhere in the country) to be considered. If this happens, the Call Committee must vote whether to request this candidate. If a majority approves, the following happens:
 - 1. The Call Chair contacts the Assistant to the Bishop with the name.
 - 2. The Assistant to the Bishop follows appropriate protocols to contact that pastor/deacon to inform them of the nomination by the Congregation.
 - 3. The nominated pastor/deacon discerns whether to interview with the Call Committee.
 - 4. If the nominated person agrees to be considered, that person will prepare an RMP, which will be submitted to the Call Committee when completed.
 - 5. **It is never appropriate for a member of the Call Committee or a member of the Congregation to contact a pastor/deacon directly.**
- iii. **Self-Nomination.** Because the Synod posts a list of vacant congregations on its website, as well as because of word-of-mouth conversation among pastors/deacons, it is possible that a pastor/deacon will contact the Assistant to the Bishop to request that their name be given to the Call Committee.
 - 1. If this happens, the Assistant to the Bishop will review that pastor/deacon's RMP, and after conversation with the Bishop, will talk to the pastor/deacon about whether it might be a Match.
 - 2. If the Bishop agrees that it might be a Match, the name will be submitted to the Call Committee as a Bishop-nominated candidate.
 - 3. If the Bishop does not agree that it might be a Match, and the pastor/deacon still wishes their name to be submitted, it will be submitted as a self-nomination.
 - 4. **It is never appropriate for an interested pastor/deacon to contact the Call Committee or other member of the congregation directly. If this happens, the pastor/deacon should be referred to the Assistant to the Bishop.**
- c. First interviews with candidates should be scheduled promptly after receiving and reviewing RMPs. (Candidates should be interviewed at least once unless it seems very clear that there will be no Match. Err on the side of conversation!).



Candidates will assume that the committee is not interested if scheduling and interviews don't take place within a prompt, but reasonable, amount of time – usually within two weeks.

- i. ***The Call Chair should contact every candidate whose name is submitted within 24 hours after receiving the RMP. The contact should be to acknowledge receipt, thank the person for his or her interest, and to inform the candidate that you will be in touch soon.***
- d. It is appropriate, if the candidate lives a distance way or for other reasons, to conduct the first interview electronically.
- e. The **FIRST INTERVIEW** should be a “get to know you” session. It should have the following characteristics:
 - i. Conversational. This is not a police interrogation! Talk as pastor/deacon and people. Ask questions. Listen to the answers. Answer the pastor/deacon's questions. Be natural.
 - ii. Hospitable. Make the candidate feel welcome. If interviewing in person, have refreshments and beverages available.
 - iii. Mutual. Remember, the candidate is also interviewing the congregation. If they don't get a chance to ask questions, they may come away with less than positive feelings about the encounter.
 - iv. Exploratory: your goal is to find out whether this pastor/deacon would be a good match for the congregation, and vice versa. What is their style? How do they interact? Do they seem like they might be a good fit for the congregation?
 - v. Faithful. Open and close all interviews with prayer. Ask the candidate to do one of those prayers.
 - vi. ******ASK THIS QUESTION**: “Have you ever been *accused* of sexual misconduct?” If the answer is yes, ask about it. Then notify the Assistant to the Bishop immediately.
- f. If it seems like a Match might exist, a **SECOND INTERVIEW** should be scheduled. The second interview should focus on exploring the specific gifts, style, experience, and ministry passions of the pastor/deacon. This interview should have the following characteristics:
 - i. In person. If possible, the pastor/deacon should be invited to the church for this interview – at a time when other members are not scheduled to be there (for confidentiality reasons).
 1. All costs of travel, lodging, and meals are borne by the congregation.
 2. It is **not appropriate** to ask the candidate to stay in a member's home. A moderately-priced hotel is the expectation.
 3. If the Call Committee hosts a meal at the church, the candidate should be asked in advance about food allergies/restrictions.
 - ii. Deeper than the first interview. Relevant details regarding the candidate and his/her ministry gifts should be discussed and explored.

- iii. Conversational. The second interview should be a dialogue between the committee and the candidate about the ministry of your congregation, and how this candidate might join in and provide leadership in your ministry.
 - iv. More specific. The ministry experience of the candidate, successes, failures, and growth are all topics to explore. The ministry successes and failures of the congregation, its challenges, and its opportunities should also be explored.
 - v. Discerning. Can I see this person as my pastor/deacon? What makes this person “tick” in everyday ministry? Does that match the personality of this congregation? Will this person challenge us enough? Could I imagine myself seeking pastoral/diaconal care from them? Are they a leader I could get behind? Does this “feel right” in my gut?
 - vi. Practical/Logistical. Give the candidate a tour of the church facilities and the community. Have written information available about the community, the schools (if appropriate), and cultural/sports events nearby. Be prepared to answer these types of questions.
 - vii. Informative. Have a copy of the congregation’s annual report (if you have one) to give to the pastor/deacon, or at a minimum, a statement showing current finances.
- g. A **THIRD INTERVIEW** is permissible, but should probably be conducted only if there is specific information you need that cannot be obtained by requesting it from the candidate in another way.
- i. Before asking for a third interview, ask yourselves these questions: what can we learn that we have not learned in two interviews? Is there another way we can get that information?
 - ii. However, if you believe another interview is necessary, you are free to request one from the candidate.
- h. **References** should be checked prior to naming a Primary Candidate.
- i. The Call Chair should, as a courtesy, have a conversation with the candidate to inform him or her of your intent to contact references before making any contacts.
- i. **Preaching should be assessed by the Call Committee prior to naming a Primary Candidate.** It is primarily assessed through watching sermons, provided by the candidate, online or electronically.
- i. If a candidate cannot provide video sermons, request audio sermons.
 - ii. If the Call Committee wishes to see a live sermon, **DO NOT GO TO THE PASTOR/DEACON’S CONGREGATION ON A SUNDAY.** This unnecessarily creates anxiety in their current congregation. (Your incognito “we’re just visiting” will not work).
 - iii. Instead, contact the Assistant to the Bishop, who will arrange a “Neutral Site” sermon at a congregation near yours. The costs of travel, accommodations, and food must be paid by the congregation.

Naming a
Primary
Candidate

- j. The question the Call Committee is seeking to answer in these interviews is, should we invite this pastor to become our **Primary Candidate**?
- i. A vote with at least a **2/3 majority** of the committee is required to approve.
 - ii. Pray on it first. Both individually, and as a Committee.
 - iii. If you determine that the answer is “no”, then the committee should vote to release the candidate, and the Call Chair would need to communicate that decision to the candidate.
 - iv. If you decide that you would, in fact, like the candidate to become your Primary Candidate, the next steps are as follows:
 1. FIRST – the Chair should *call the Assistant to the Bishop* to inform them of this decision.
 2. Then communicate to the candidate the Call Committee’s offer to become the Primary candidate for your congregation.
 3. It is normal for the candidate to ask for time to think and pray for a few days before you are given an answer. So, don’t worry if that happens!
 - v. If the candidate accepts your offer, please:
 1. Inform the Assistant to the Bishop immediately.
 2. Call or write (email is appropriate) any other candidates you are considering to politely inform them that you have selected a different Primary Candidate, and that you are releasing them from the process at your congregation.
 3. Contact the president of your congregation council to inform her or him that the Call Committee has a Primary Candidate!
 4. Send the candidate’s RMP to the Council President.
 5. The Call Chair should be prepared to attend a council meeting to share what the Call Committee sees in this candidate.
 6. Pray for the remainder of the process, and see where the Spirit leads!

Council
takes the
next steps

6. **The Council Phase**

a. Overview

The role of the Council is to do the following:

- i. Interview and approve (or disapprove) the nomination of the Primary Candidate. A **2/3 majority** or more of Council members present is required for approval;
- ii. Perform a background check at the congregation’s expense. (See below).
- iii. Negotiate a Compensation Package. In the Southern Ohio Synod, we recommend that this be done by the President/Treasurer before the council interview.

- iv. Set the date of a “Meet and Greet” for the congregation with the candidate
 - v. Call a special congregational meeting to vote on the nomination and compensation package.
 - vi. If the Council rejects the nomination, the process for that candidate ends, and the Call Committee begins its work again with new candidates.
- b. The Council Phase is confidential unless and until the Council approves the nomination, and formally calls a special congregational meeting to hold a Call Vote.

c. **First Steps – Council Phase**

- i. After speaking with the Call Chair, the Council President should call the Assistant to the Bishop to discuss the process.
- ii. The Council President should call the candidate to introduce themselves, and to let the candidate know that you will be in touch soon to schedule a council interview.
- iii. The Council President should invite the Call Chair to meet with the council to share what the Call Committee sees in this candidate. This should be done separately from, and prior to, the interview with the Council.

- d. Prior to the Council interview, the Council President and/or Treasurer should do the following:
- i. Go to www.southernhiosynod.org, under the “Congregations” tab, and download the “Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament”/“Ministers of Word and Service”. (For pastors, you will download for either “no parsonage” or “parsonage provided” based upon your situation).
 - ii. Please note that deacons are not, under IRS regulations, entitled to a housing allowance. Therefore, the salary guidelines for “Ministers of Word and Service” reflect this rule.
 - iii. Using information from the RMP, determine the years of experience of the candidate, and the **salary** portion of the compensation package.
 - iv. Based upon the salary *and local conditions in your community*, if there is no parsonage, determine the **housing allowance**. (If there is a parsonage, use the guidelines section: “Minister of Word and Sacrament: Parsonage Provided”).
 - v. Determine what amount (if offered) the congregation will pay as **Social Security Offset** to the pastor. (Deacons are treated differently under IRS rules, and should check with their accountant about whether they are entitled to this benefit).
 - vi. These three things are known as “DEFINED COMPENSATION.”
 - vii. Contact Portico Benefit Services at 800.352.2876 to determine the combined cost of retirement and health/other insurance. (You will

How to put together the compensation package

need to speak with the candidate about what their family needs prior to calling Portico. You will also likely need a birth date to provide to the customer service agent).

1. *Please note that the Synod Guidelines establish the "Gold+" package as the basic health insurance package for pastors/deacons in this synod.
- viii. The Defined Compensation plus the Portico costs will become the basis of the Compensation Package.
- ix. In addition to the Defined Compensation and Portico portions, you will need to include the following, using Synod Guidelines:
 1. 4 weeks of vacation, including Sundays (maybe more for more experienced pastors/deacons);
 2. Cell phone (with data) allowance;
 3. Professional Expenses, including Continuing Education costs and time;
 4. Mileage allowance;
 5. Paid Family leave.
- x. Once this information has been assembled, prepare a written offer to the candidate **prior to the council interview**, and send it by email to both the candidate *and the Assistant to the Bishop*. Please use the Compensation Worksheet provided on page 21.
- xi. An agreement on the Compensation Package prior to the Council interview should be obtained.
- xii. **With the candidate's knowledge and information provided, obtain a background check using whatever service you use to check church workers.** (You are free to run an FBI/BCI check, but those take 4-6 weeks to receive results). This is done at the congregation's expense. Please note that because the Southern Ohio Synod is not the calling authority for congregational pastors and deacons, it does not perform background checks in the call process.
- e. **Council Interview with the Primary Candidate**
 - i. The interview should ordinarily be in-person, but in some circumstances, it may be permissible to conduct it electronically.
 - ii. The purpose of the interview is for the council members to answer this question: "do I see in this candidate what the Call Committee saw?"
 - iii. The Council's role is NOT to re-do the work of the Call Committee, but instead, to "be a second set of eyes."
 - iv. The Council Interview should have the following characteristics:
 1. Conversational. Be at ease with the candidate. Talk as pastor/deacon and people. Ask questions. Answer questions.
 2. Hospitable. Have water and or other snacks and beverages available. Greet the candidate. Show them where the restrooms are.

Council meets the primary candidate

3. Mutual. Allow the candidate plenty of time to ask questions. Be prepared to answer specific questions about ministries and finances.
 4. Faithful. Ask the candidate to open with prayer. Have someone on council close with prayer. Or vice versa. If you plan ahead on time, possibly ask the candidate to open the meeting with a short Bible study.
 5. Exploratory. Try to imagine what it would be like to have this candidate as your pastor/deacon. Ask about what their passions are in ministry, what areas they would need more congregational support, and how they would be involved in your community.
- v. After the interview, the candidate should be excused, and the council should vote (if it feels ready) on the nomination. If 2/3 or more of the members present agree that it should go to the congregation, then the council should proceed to vote on the proposed Compensation Package. A simple majority is required to approve the Compensation Package.
- vi. The Council has two more duties: to 1) call a special congregational meeting for the Call Vote, and 2) before that occurs, to set the date of a Meet and Greet with the pastor/deacon and (if appropriate) the pastor/deacon's family.
1. The congregation's constitution should be followed strictly regarding the timing of the Call Vote by the congregation, as well as the way that members are given notice.
 2. Because the candidate is not present for that meeting, it is not necessary to clear that date with them.
 3. The Assistant to the Bishop must be informed of the date of the Call Vote so that the proper paperwork (the Letter of Call and other documents) may be prepared.
 - a. If possible the Assistant to the Bishop will be present for the Call Vote.
 - b. If that is not possible, a Call Packet will be sent with detailed instructions and the necessary documents.
 4. Once you know the date of the special congregational meeting, work with the candidate to establish a time for him or her, and their family (if appropriate) to meet the congregation prior to the Call Vote.
 5. The Meet and Greet, which takes place before the Call Vote, should be informal, conversational, and include hospitality (punch and cookies, etc.). It is not a congregational interview – just a time to mingle.
 6. The congregation bears the costs of travel, hotel, and food for both the Council Interview and the Meet and Greet.

Calling the congregational meeting

Congregational Phase Begins

7. It is helpful to ask the candidate to write a short bio to give to members prior to the Meet and Greet and the Call Vote of the congregation.

The Call
Vote

7. **Congregational Meeting**

- a. The congregation has two roles:
 - i. To meet and **vote on whether to call the candidate.**
 - ii. If the call is approved, to **vote on the compensation package.**
- b. Basic requirements.
 - i. A quorum must be established, and the total number of persons in the room must be established.
 - ii. The meeting should open with prayer.
 - iii. The Call Chair and the Council President should introduce the name of the candidate, and share their impressions with the congregation, i.e., what they saw in this person, etc.
 - iv. A Letter of Call may not be issued unless **2/3 or more of the voting members of the congregation who are present vote in favor of calling the candidate as their pastor/deacon.**
 1. This vote must be by secret written ballot.
 2. There CANNOT BE MORE BALLOTS THAN PERSONS PRESENT IN THE ROOM. Proxy votes are **not permissible**. If there are more ballots than persons in the room, there must be a re-vote.
 3. The ballots should be counted twice, and the results told to the congregation (including actual numbers and percentages) prior to the vote on compensation.
 4. The Tally Sheet provided in the Call Packet must be filled out and signed.
 - v. The vote on the Compensation Package may be by voice or hand vote, and only requires a majority of the voting members present.
 - vi. **The Letter of Call must be signed by both the Council President and the Council Secretary.**
 - vii. **The Compensation worksheet must be filled out and signed, and enclosed with the Letter of Call and the Tally Sheet to return to the Synod Office.**
- c. **After the meeting closes, if the Assistant to the Bishop is not present, the Council President should call him or her with the specific results of the vote.**
- d. Once the Assistant to the Bishop is informed of the results (and through him or her, the Bishop), the Council President will call the candidate to inform them of the results of both votes. The candidate should be informed of the actual vote tallies, as well as percentages.

The
Candidate
responds

8. After the Call Vote

- a. If the Assistant to the Bishop is not present, the Call Packet should be mailed ***the next morning*** to the Synod Office. The return envelope should include: the signed Letter of Call, the completed Compensation Worksheet, and the completed Tally Sheet.
- b. The Bishop will sign the Letter of Call, and mail it to the candidate.
- c. The candidate has **thirty (30) days** after receipt of the Letter of Call to accept it or turn it back. Acceptance must be in writing. A document attached to an email will suffice, which should be sent to the Council President and the Assistant to the Bishop.
- d. The candidate may, prior to receiving the Letter of Call, accept the call *provisionally*. Once the candidate actually receives the Letter of Call, the acceptance becomes completed without any further action.
- e. The candidate and the Council President will discuss a start date. Please remember that under ELCA rules, a candidate must give at least 30 days' notice to the congregation he or she currently serves.
- f. The start date should be communicated to the Assistant to the Bishop so that ELCA records may be updated.

Installing
your new
pastor

9. Installation

- a. The Assistant to the Bishop will work with the Council President and the new pastor/deacon to establish a date for installing the new pastor.
- b. Installations are performed by an Assistant to the Bishop, and take place during regular Sunday worship.
- c. If possible, there should be one service to celebrate the installation on that Sunday morning.

**Keep us informed, ask questions, and pray!
You are not alone!**

COMPENSATION WORKSHEET

Term of Agreement

1. When does this compensation start? _____
2. When does the following congregational budget period take effect?

3. Length of time this compensation agreement is in effect: (number of months until next budget period): _____

Cash Compensation ("Defined Compensation" for Portico)

4. Salary _____
 5. Housing Allowance (if no parsonage) _____
 6. SECA Offset Allowance _____
 7. If there is a parsonage, do NOT include a housing allowance, and do the following:
 - a. Utilities Allowance _____
 - b. Furnishings Allowance _____
 - c. Housing Equity (to Portico) _____
- Total Cash Comp. _____

Retirement and other Portico Benefits

8. Retirement Contribution (10 or 11% possible; but recommended 12% or higher) _____
9. Health Insurance (Gold+ Plan is Guideline) *Please check one*
 - a. Member
 - b. Member and Spouse
 - c. Member and Children
 - d. Member, Spouse and Children
 - e. Coverage waived
10. Other Insurance or Benefits provided _____

Professional Expenses

11. Auto/Travel Allowance _____
12. Professional Expenses _____
13. Continuing Education _____
14. Costs of Move (Maximum) _____

Vacation, Leave, Continuing Education Time

- 15. Vacation weeks (at least 4 weeks including Sundays) _____
- 16. Continuing Education _____
- 17. Disability Gap Coverage (2 mos. Plus Portico costs) _____
- 18. Maternity/Paternity/Adoptive Leave _____
(recommended 6 weeks; 4 minimum)

In Addition to duties in Letter of Call, Other Responsibilities/Agreements

Location of Pastoral Residence

It is the general expectation that the Pastor shall live in area or community served by the congregation. If there is agreement otherwise, and with the consent of the Bishop of the Southern Ohio Synod, it is agreed that the Pastor will live within _____ minutes of an average drive from the congregation. It is also agreed that the congregation as a whole will notified of this agreement PRIOR to the Call Vote.

It is so agreed.

Pastor

Council President

Date

Date

Appendix 1

Sample Questions for Candidates

These questions introduce themes for you to explore in your interviews – they might open doors for conversation. You may use them as starting points, and in whatever order you wish. Please feel free to change them as you see fit.

First Interview

1. Tell us a little bit about yourself – what do you think we should know about you as we begin our conversation?
2. Where did you grow up?
3. Why did you become a pastor (deacon)? What is your call story?
4. Tell us about the congregation (or other setting) where you are currently serving. How long have you been there?
 - a. How has it gone?
 - b. How did you come to serve there?
5. Why are you seeking to leave your current call?
6. What are you looking for in your next congregation? What are you looking for in the local community where you will live and serve?
7. What would an ideal call look like for you?
8. What kind of administrative support do you currently have? What do you think you'll need in your next call?
9. What about our paperwork made you interested in interviewing with us?
10. Is there anything in particular in our MSP that made you curious? Is there anything we can tell you about our congregation?
11. Tell us about a success you've had in your ministry. Tell us about a challenge you've had in ministry, and how you responded to that challenge.
12. What do you do to unwind? How do you decompress from your work and ministry?
13. How would you describe your personality? How would you hope most congregants would experience you?
14. What are you like when you are under stress?
15. What are your passions in ministry? Things you are less passionate about?
16. What is your preaching style? How do you approach writing a sermon?
17. What is your favorite book of the Bible? Why?
18. Do you have a favorite Bible verse? Why?
19. Who is Jesus to you?
20. What questions do you have of us?

Second Interview

1. What have you been thinking about this process since we last spoke? Anything you'd like to share?
2. Tell us about your faith. Is prayer important to you? Reading the Bible? Is God important to you in your private life?
3. Now that we've already had a conversation, is there anything about the ministry of this congregation that excites you?
4. Did your last conversation give you any ideas about ministry that might happen here?
5. What would you think about living in this community?
6. Part of what we are called to do here is decide whether you would be a good match for this congregation. Do you think you might be? Why?
7. Do you have any questions about the annual/financial reports we gave you?
8. What is your approach to leading worship? How do you plan?
9. How strong are your administration skills? What support would you need from the congregation?
10. How do you handle it if someone has a problem with you? What do you do?
11. How do you handle conflict?
12. Would you be active in our youth ministry? How?
13. How do you approach teaching catechism?
14. How do you approach visitation of shut-ins and people in nursing homes? Hospital visits?
15. How would you help this congregation develop a congregational vision and plan?
16. What is leadership to you? How do you lead?
17. What do you think of connecting with other pastors (ELCA and otherwise) in the area?
18. What is your relationship like with the synod you serve in now? Would you be active in the larger church?
19. How do you see your role in relation to the church council? The lay leadership of the congregation?
20. What questions do you have of us?

Appendix 2 Sample Prayers

For use in Call Committee meetings:

"Lord Jesus, Lord of the Church, we thank you for your presence right now in our meeting. Bless our conversation. Open our hearts to your will. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear where you are leading us as we search for our next pastor (deacon). Help us to work well together as a committee. And send the right person to this congregation, in your perfect timing. In your name we pray, Amen."

"Holy Spirit, rest upon us now. Stir up in us the ability to know who it is you are sending. Give us wisdom, courage, and discernment as we discuss where you are leading, and who you are sending to serve among us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen."

For use in Sunday worship as part of the Prayers of Intercession/of the People:

"Raise up and send to us our next pastor (deacon). We pray for our call committee, that your wisdom will rest upon them, that they may know and recognize the person you are sending. Grant us patience and faith as we wait. Amen."

"We pray for our call committee as they continue their work, that they may know your will, and have the faith and courage to follow your leading."

"Grant that your Holy Spirit may rest upon our call committee as they listen for your will. Grant us the patience and hope that comes by faith in you."

Appendix 3 Hymns

Some congregations will wish to sing a hymn(s) while the votes are being tallied. The following hymns call upon the Holy Spirit during this important time.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 1. Creator Spirit, heavenly dove | ELW 577 |
| 2. Veni Sancte Spiritus, Holy Spirit, come to us | ELW 406 |
| 3. Come, Gracious Spirit, Heav'nly Dove | ELW 404 |
| 4. Holy Spirit, Truth Divine | ELW 398 |
| 5. Now to the Holy Spirit let us pray | ELW 743 |