Northeastern Minnesota Synod
1111 London Road
Duluth, Minnesota 55802-2240

(218) 724-4424
www.nemnsynod.org
info@nemnsynod.org

Northeastern Minnesota Synod Call Committee Handbook

Thank you for serving on your congregation's Call Committee! This committee was formed for the purpose of calling a new pastor, as specified in your congregation's constitution (in or near Chapter 13). The call committee's responsibilities are generally divided into two parts:

1. Congregational Assessment and Creation of the Ministry Site Profile (MSP)
2. Interview Process

The Ministry Site Profile is used throughout the ELCA by congregations that are seeking a new rostered minister. Although this document is usually completed by the call committee, it is recommended that feedback and input from the congregation be included throughout the MSP completion process. It should also be presented to the congregational council before submission.

Congregational Assessment

1. A Call Committee Small Group Curriculum will lead your call committee through the process of assessment and creation of the Ministry Site Profile. -OR-
2. If a Transition Team has been utilized by the congregation or council, you will use the information they have assembled as a resource.
3. Another helpful tool is this free Congregational Vitality Assessment from FaithX.
4. Your Call Committee Chairperson will create an online profile for your congregation through the ELCA portal: Ministry Sites. Please write down your login name and password, as your synod staff will not have access to it! In order to set up your account, you will need your congregational ID number, which can be provided by your synod staff.
5. Complete your congregation's Ministry Site Profile (MSP). This document is the primary tool used to describe your congregation, its mission and ministry needs. This document will introduce your congregation to the candidate. In order to present your congregation in the best light, it is important to take plenty of time and prayer as you work on this document. Resources for creating your MSP can be found online at ELCA MSP resources.
6. It is recommended that the call committee use a google or Word doc to prepare the different parts of the MSP until they are ready to be entered into the portal. Save your work frequently as you copy and paste from your working document into the online form.
7. Another tool for thinking about your MSP is the Seven Reflections questionnaire from the ELCA. This is not required, but can be helpful in sharing more about your congregation with a potential candidate.
8. Once your MSP is complete, make sure you click on the link to send your reference recommendation request, as well as submit your MSP to the synod staff.

Starting the Interview Process

1. Prior to beginning the interview process, a practice interview is recommended. Contact the Synod Minister for Leadership Support for more information.
2. Before any names can be brought to the call committee, check with the congregational council to make sure the compensation package is correct.
3. The Call Committee receives Rostered Minister Profiles (RMP's) from the Synod. Where do the names of the Rostered Ministers originate?
    a. Bishops, Synod Offices, and Synod ministries
    b. Pastors or Deacons seeking a call will be in contact with the synod office
    c. Your congregation should not contact candidates directly, suggestions should come from the call committee chairperson to the synod office.
4. The candidate profiles are sent from the Synod Office to the Call Committee chairperson. The Call Committee receives and reviews the RMPs. *Names of candidates and any personal information must be kept confidential throughout the process.*
5. The Call Committee chairperson arranges a time for the candidates to be interviewed by the committee. Interviews can take place in person, via phone, or video call. Often the first interview is via zoom, and the second interview is in person.
6. References should be checked after the first interview with permission from the candidate, especially the Congregational Reference!
7. It is the duty of the Call Committee chairperson to communicate clearly and promptly with the candidates of the timeline and progress made by the committee. Please keep the synod office updated as well!
8. If the call committee feels the candidate is a good fit for the congregation, the call chairperson invites them to be the "Candidate of Choice." Interviews with others stop, and the candidate and call committee move forward together.
9. Resources for conducting the interviews can be found further in this document.

A note about checking references:

Immediately after the first interview and before making a final determination, members of the call committee should contact the candidate's references. While some call committees seek to do this before the first interview, that is not recommended. It is best for committee members to form their own impressions of the candidate(s) before contacting references. It also allows for committee members to discuss questions with the references that might have come up in the interviews. It also saves the committee members time because they don't have to check references for candidates whom they have eliminated from consideration. *Under no circumstances is the call committee to check the congregational reference listed in the candidates' RMPs until after a candidate has been invited back for a second interview and they have received permission from the Candidate.*

Recommendation Process (a snapshot)

10. With the candidate's approval, the Call Committee presents a Candidate of Choice to the Church Council. ***The Council also keeps the name in confidence.***
11. The Church Council does not re-interview the candidate. Items for discussion generally concern compensation, the mission and ministry of the congregation, ministry responsibilities and mutual ministry expectations. The council also negotiates compensation, housing, etc. and motions for a congregational meeting for a vote to call the candidate. Prior to the meeting, a short biography of the candidate can be sent to all voting members***, along with the reminder to the voting members to keep their name in confidence.*** A Meet and Greet may be held a few days prior to the meeting. The Call Committee may be asked to help host this event.
12. Congregational Meeting: The candidate's profile is presented to the congregation. No other business may happen at this meeting. The congregation votes by ballot to call a candidate. Two-thirds majority is required. The compensation and benefits package is voted on. Majority is required.
13. If the congregational vote does not meet the two-thirds majority, the call committee returns to interviewing candidates.
14. The Council President informs the candidate of the congregation's decision.

Candidate Discerns the Call

15. A congregation will typically hear from the called candidate within 30 days of the vote. The candidate may request a meeting with the church council for purposes of further information and clarification on the Letter of Call, moving arrangements, and start date.
16. If the response is "yes " then the synod office will generate a Letter of Call upon notification by the council president. The congregation may proceed with plans for the candidate's moving, start date, and installation. If the response is "no," the call committee returns to interviewing candidates.

Installation

17. The installation is arranged by the Council President and new pastor in consultation with the Synod Office, generally within the first 4-6 weeks of the start date. The Call Committee may be asked to help host this event.
18. The Bishop or Synod Minister participates in the Service of Installation.
19. Welcome your new minister and family. Visit this article for ideas from churchleadership.com: 50 Ways to Welcome your New Pastor

Tips for the Call Committee

The Call Committee

1. The first business of the call committee will be to name a chairperson or a contact person and provide the Synod Office with their contact information.
2. Members should pledge themselves to conduct their work within the following ethical guidelines:
    a. Discussions held within the committee stay within the committee. Names of potential candidates will not be given to members of the congregation until the name is presented for a congregation-wide interview or a meeting is held to vote on extending a call.
    b. The committee will exercise due diligence in contacting the references provided by the candidate after the first interview.
    c. The committee will contact the congregational reference after receiving permission from the candidate.
    d. The committee will ensure the congregation pays the expenses of candidates it invites for interviews. Sample vouchers are included.
    e. The committee chairperson will keep the candidate informed of all decisions made by the committee, and the congregation concerning the process.
    f. The chairperson will keep the synod staff updated with all interviews and decisions.

Contacting Candidates:

3. Prior to receiving RMPs, the call committee should identify several potential interview dates.
4. As soon as the committee receives an RMP, the chairperson makes contact with the candidate by phone and/or email, informing the candidate that their name and RMP have been received. The chair will arrange a time for the first interview. Arrangements are usually confirmed through email.
5. *Call committees are expected to give a first interview to all candidates* for whom the office of the bishop has forwarded. The call committee chair or secretary should inform the Synod Minister for Leadership Support of the scheduled interviews.

Before the interviews:

6. It is important to read the RMP that each candidate has provided (at least) twice.
7. Identify anything in the candidates' RMPs that might need to be clarified.
8. Note any information the candidate offers that you may want to explore more deeply.
9. Create questions that help you come to know the candidate as a spiritual leader.

Conducting the Interview

1. Prior to beginning the interview process, a practice interview is recommended. Contact the Synod Minister for Leadership Support for more information.

2. The call committee designates a call committee member to host the candidate. Be certain that this committee member is on hand well before the candidate's anticipated arrival at the interview location. If the interview is to take place in the church building and if time permits, the host might consider providing a guided tour of the church facilities before the interview.

3. Hospitality is key. Name tags are helpful, as is offering a beverage and location of the restrooms upon arrival. Following brief, informal introductions, a member of the Call Committee may conduct an opening prayer or devotion. Following devotions, committee members may again introduce themselves to the candidate, identifying their vocations and roles played in the congregation.

4. The committee should then outline for the candidate the anticipated procedure for the interview, indicating the time allotted for the interview, the "question and answer" format, and an invitation to the candidate to ask questions of the Call Committee. A suggested appropriate length of time for a first interview is 1 1/2 hours, if electronically, one hour is more advisable.

5. It is appropriate for the Call Committee Chair to ask the candidate to tell the committee something about themself. The invitation, "tell us something about yourself," is purposefully general and open-ended. A time limit of 5 to 7 minutes is suggested for this opening self-introduction by the candidate. Another question might be, "Tell us how you discerned a call to ministry."

6. The formal questioning with prepared questions now begins, remembering that it is very important that the same questions are asked to each candidate for later comparison. Questions may be assigned ahead of time to various members of the Call Committee, thereby ensuring that all present actively participate.

7. If the response from the candidate seems incomplete or unclear, the person asking the question may pose a follow-up question, asking for elaboration, clarification, or examples. The committee should not expect finely polished, textbook-accurate answers to spur-of-the-moment questions. If committee members are not satisfied with the answer, clarification can be requested before the next question is asked.

8. Note-taking should be done as unobtrusively as possible, and, if note-taking is to occur, the committee chair should explain the purpose of the note-taking to the candidate. Some committees might consider recording the interview. Recording should take place only with the advance consent of the candidate and with assurances of confidentiality.

9. In formulating questions, carefully avoid ones which can be answered with the response of "yes" or "no." For example, the questioner should not ask, "Do you think you are effective in your ministry to youth?" The candidate will almost surely answer, "Yes." Rather, ask, "Describe how you minister to youth. Give us some examples of how you have worked effectively with youth in your current or former parish."

10. When formulating your questions, it is important to stay away from inappropriate questions, including anything related to gender stereotypes, spousal expectations, etc.

11. When the committee has completed its list of pre-selected questions, the committee chair may invite additional questions. Though the call committee is "in charge" of the interview, it is helpful to remember that the interview is intended to be a dialog and not an inquisition! *This is intended to be a "mutual" interview*. Invite the candidate to ask questions and provide additional comments during the interview.

12. The committee member leading the interview is responsible for keeping the interview within the anticipated time previously established. Prolonged interviews are usually counter-productive. If all is not accomplished in the first interview, a second interview can be scheduled.

13. In concluding the interview, the candidate may be invited to "answer questions not asked" or make any other comments he or she would like to make. The candidate may be invited to lead a closing prayer. The candidate should be thanked for coming and encouraged to be in phone contact with the designated member of the Call Committee if there are additional questions which occur to the candidate in the days following the interview.

14. If possible, at the conclusion of the interview, the committee should reimburse the candidate for any expenses incurred, such as travel costs, overnight accommodations, and meals. If the reimbursement cannot occur at the time of the interview, it should be completed within the following week and an appropriate explanation given to the candidate. A sample voucher is provided. Please remind your bookkeeper that the name on the reimbursement check is to remain confidential.

15. While the interview is still fresh in the minds of committee members, it might be useful to reconvene the Call Committee upon the candidate's departure for sharing initial impressions. It is important that these shared impressions are recorded for later reference. A sample worksheet is provided.

16. After an interview has been completed, both the Call Committee and the candidate are asked to submit corresponding reports of interview to the synod office. The responses will be helpful in the synod's work with rostered leaders and congregations in the Call Process, particularly as experiences and suggestions are shared.

(Sample Expense Voucher)

Call Committee Interview Expense Voucher

Name of rostered leader:

Mailing Address:

Date of Interview:

Place of Interview:

Car round trip _____ miles @IRS guidelines/mile $_____

Lodging Expenses: _____

Meals: _____

Total expenses to be reimbursed from the congregation to the rostered leader _____

Sample Interview Questions

This list of possible questions is not comprehensive, but suggests issues you might want to raise with the candidate in areas connected with parish life. Select 8 to 10 questions that will shape the primary part of the interview.

Preaching/Worship Leadership

1. Describe how you go about preparing for the worship service on Sunday morning.
2. Think back in your ministry and tell me about the most difficult sermon you ever preached.
3. Share some of your thoughts about the worship life of a congregation.

Social Ministry

1. Tell me how you evaluate community needs and community strengths.
2. Describe how you have contributed to the quality of life in your community.
3. Describe how you go about motivating members of your congregation to respond to community needs.

Administration

1. Describe the steps you normally take when working with groups to achieve consensus or cohesiveness.
2. How would you describe your style of leadership in overseeing the work of the congregation?
3. Tell me about a period in your life when you had to manage multiple demands in your work and how you determined priorities.

Teaching

1. How do you evaluate the faith development of others?
2. Describe your approach to helping adults grow in their faith.
3. Describe your approach to teaching children and young people about the Christian faith.

Stewardship

1. Describe how you have helped others grow in their personal stewardship.
2. In what ways have you helped members understand the management of their money and their responsibilities as Christian stewards?
3. Describe the development of your personal sense of Christian stewardship.

Evangelism/Mission

1. Describe ways in which you typically become acquainted and associate with unchurched people in your community.
2. What kind of guidance and training do you provide members of your congregation for reaching unchurched persons in the community?
3. Describe how you have achieved a multicultural approach to your ministry.

Interpersonal Climate

1. What steps do you take in helping others feel secure, trusted, and open with you?
2. When pressure mounts, how do you maintain your cool in ministry?
3. Describe an experience where conflict arose between you and another person and how a resolution was finally achieved.

Ministry in Crisis

1. Describe your style of ministry to persons in crisis.
2. Describe how you have used the establishment of boundaries to strengthen your ministry.
3. How do you assess your own professional limitations when ministering to persons in crisis?

Interpret Theology

1. Describe ways in which you communicate the faith.
2. Describe your skills as teacher and preacher.
3. What resources do you use to remain theologically and biblically fresh and current?

Innovation/Creativity

1. Describe your approach to introducing new ideas in the congregation.
2. Describe your current vision for ministry and how you would help others in the congregation to capture that vision.
3. Think back in your ministry and describe a situation that was stagnant or failing and describe how you stepped in to revitalize it.

Participant in the Larger Church

1. Describe how you have guided your congregation into understanding their relationship to the greater church.
2. Describe your participation in the work of the church beyond the congregation, including ecumenical relationships, church agencies, and institutions.
3. Describe what your congregation believes to be their role as a congregation of the ELCA.

Personal Growth

1. Describe some of your most important accomplishments and how you went about reaching those goals.
2. How do you work at making yourself more effective in your work?
3. Briefly describe ways in which you care for yourself physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

Call to Ministry

1. Briefly describe the events which led you to prepare for the ministry.
2. Describe the process of deliberation which helps you determine God's call.
3. In what ways has your call to ministry changed over the years?

Questions Candidates May Ask

An effective interview is a two-way street, with a candidate also bringing questions and concerns. Allowed time and opportunity for the candidate to ask questions and be prepared to address them.

1. What is the focus of your congregation? Describe your mission.
2. What is the role of staff and what is the role of the laity in your congregation?
3. How many people are involved in leadership roles? How are lay people involved in worship?
4. In your opinion, how are decisions made in this congregation?
5. What long- and short-term goals has the congregation adopted? When was the last time an in-depth self-study was conducted?
6. What is the congregation's commitment to support and ministry partnership with the Synod and ELCA?
7. How does the congregation respond to change and how are changes made?
8. What would you display on a highway billboard regarding your congregation?
9. Why did the previous rostered leader leave?
10. Is there any history that I should know about in the congregation, good or bad?
11. How do you encourage your rostered minister to stay healthy physically, emotionally and spiritually?

Post-Interview Reflections

Candidate: _____ Interview Date: _____

Rate the candidate on a scale of 1 to 5 in each of the areas below with 1 being extremely low and 5 being extremely high/strong. Include comments as needed.

1. Key characteristic #1:

   _____

   1 2 3 4 5

2. Key characteristic #1:

   _____

   1 2 3 4 5

3. **What gifts/strengths for ministry** exhibited by this candidate bring the most excitement/hope that would match the needs of this congregation?

4. General observations of this rostered minister's **strengths**.

5. General observations of key areas where this candidate might **need to grow**.

6. Other observations

What is your recommendation?

_____Proceed with the candidate.

_____Hold for consideration until after other interviews are completed.

_____Thank the candidate for their time and release them.

Sample letters: Release of candidate following the interview

Sample #1

Date

The Rev. or Deacon J. H. Doe
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Pastor/Deacon Doe,

On behalf of the call committee at _____ Lutheran Church, I express our sincere appreciation for the opportunity to visit with you on _____. I thought it was a very helpful and informative interview. It certainly allowed us to gain a clearer perspective regarding your many gifts as a pastor/deacon and we thank you for that. (make reference to some of those gifts.)

After careful and prayerful discernment, it is our conclusion to release you from further consideration. I hope you will not interpret this decision as a personal reflection on your skills as a pastor/deacon. It is really intended to be a reflection on our assessment of the current leadership needs of this congregation and our effort to find the person who best meets those criteria.

If you have questions or concerns about the interview, I would be happy to discuss them with you. You may contact me at _____.

I wish God's richest blessings on your continued ministry.

Sincerely yours,

Your Name

Cc: The Rev. Amy J. Odgren, Bishop
Northeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA

Sample #2

Dear Pastor/Deacon _____,

On behalf of the call committee, I want to thank you for visiting with us as a beginning step toward consideration of a call to _____ Lutheran Church. We appreciate your responses to our questions and were glad that you shared your concerns with us.

After prayerful consideration of the challenges and needs of our congregation in light of your strengths and interests, we feel that it would be best not to continue conversation toward a call.

Again, we thank you for your time and interest. Our prayers are with you in your ministry and may God continue to richly bless you.

In Christ,

_____, Call Committee Chair

Sample #3

Dear Pastor/Deacon _____,

On behalf of the call committee, I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to visit with us. We appreciate your participation in our interview.

The call committee met and prayerfully discerned that we will not be continuing a conversation with you in regard to a call. Such a decision is painful for all parties. Please be assured that this decision was not made lightly nor does it reflect in any way on your gifts for ministry.

Again, we thank you for your time and interest. May the Holy Spirit continue to lead you in your ministry.

God's grace and peace be with you,

_____, Call Committee Chair

Next Steps: Candidate of Choice

Once the call committee has chosen a Candidate of Choice and that candidate has accepted, members of the call committee meet with the council and share why they are excited to have named this rostered minister as Candidate of Choice, what gifts for ministry they might bring to the congregation, how the interview went, etc. They can share the name of the candidate but the council needs to follow the appropriate confidentiality until the appropriate time. The council treasurer will also need to know the level of experience, birthdate and family status for figuring out the potential Salary, Benefits & Compensation Package. Synod guidelines can be found on the synod website: www.nemnsynod.org

Council conducts a background check with the Candidate of Choice's permission. The Northeastern Minnesota Synod currently uses www.protectmyministry.com. Another option is www.securesearchpro.com. The ELCA recommends www.safegatherings.com as they do work well, but are much more expensive since their checks come with training as well. Proof of a completed background check must be sent to the Synod Office before a Letter of Call is signed by the Bishop.

The council prepares a proposed Salary, Benefits & Compensation Package and sends it to the candidate to look over prior to meeting together. If you have questions, please feel free to contact the Synod Minister for Leadership Support.

Council sets up the time to meet with the Candidate of Choice. This is not for the purpose of "interviewing" the recommended candidate, but for the purpose of having conversation about mutual ministry expectations, areas of ministry focus, negotiating the salary package and getting acquainted.

Meet & Greet: Council and Call Committee should work together to set up a Meet & Greet between the congregation and the Candidate of Choice. This is often scheduled on a Friday evening or Saturday prior to the congregational meeting. If the Candidate of Choice resides out of state and a return trip for the Meet & Greet would be difficult, a zoom introduction or recorded video can also be used.

The council checks the congregation's constitution for directions on calling a special congregational meeting for the sole purpose of voting to extend the call and to approve the proposed salary, benefits and compensation package for the rostered minister. No other business is allowed per Robert's Rules of Order. *Per the constitution, absentee ballots and voting by proxy are not allowed.* Some congregation's constitutions require a public announcement two Sundays in a row plus attend a written notice. Other constitutions require a public announcement three Sundays in a row plus attend a written notice. **Please note: confidentiality must still be maintained!** The written notice should be mailed (or emailed) to *voting members only* reminding them to keep the candidate's name and information confidential until notified otherwise. The candidate of choice may be asked to provide a brief bio that could be included in the 10 day written notification. Announcements of the upcoming special congregational meeting should not include the candidate's name or information especially over social media, live streaming of the service, etc. Other than notification of the purpose, date,

time for this meeting and ballot language, no posting of personal information is allowed on social media at this time. The candidate is not present for this meeting.

Special congregational meeting: two motions/ballots are used:

1. Vote to extend the call to Pastor/Deacon to serve as pastor/deacon of _____ Lutheran Church. Yes _____ No _____
2. Vote to accept the Pastor/Deacon's Salary, Benefits & Compensation Package as proposed by the congregational council. Yes _____ No _____

These ballots come as a motion by the congregational council and only need to be seconded. The first ballot requires more than a 2/3 majority vote to extend the call. The second motion needs only a simple majority to pass. Council president calls the pastor/deacon candidate with the results of the votes. The minister-elect has up to 30 days to accept or decline. If it is accepted, a start date is worked out and agreed upon, usually within 45 days. Please keep your Synod Minister for Leadership Support apprised of the voting results.

Formal Letter of Call: Upon notification that the call has been extended and accepted as well as proof that the background check has been completed and passed, the Synod Office will generate the formal Letter of Call. This document is to be signed by the congregational council's president and secretary. Once signed and the appropriate Salary, Benefits & Compensation Package document has also been signed, the two documents should be returned to the Synod Office for the Bishop to look over and sign. No call is official until the Bishop's signature is on the actual Letter of Call. Once both documents have the appropriate signatures, the original copies will be sent to the newly called rostered minister and the congregation for their files.

The mailing address is:

Bishop Amy Odgren
Northeastern Minnesota Synod
1111 London Road
Duluth, Minnesota 55802

Public announcement of newly-elected Pastor/Deacon:

It is an exciting time to call a new rostered minister and the temptation is there to announce it to everyone. <u>Please do not make the name of the newly-called rostered minister public until the rostered minister gives your council permission to do so.</u> The newly called rostered minister must give a 30 day notice to their current congregation. It is professional protocol and courtesy to allow the newly elected minister to notify their people first, rather than having their current congregation find out on someone else's social media or the calling congregation's social media platforms.

Installation: Once the pastor/deacon is "in place" and has a chance to settle into the new congregation, the pastor/deacon and council would contact the Synod Office to set a date for the pastor/deacon's installation during a worship service.

Your Northeastern Minnesota Synod Minister for Leadership Support is willing to assist you at all stages of the Call Process. Please contact: Deacon Susan Williams via email susan.williams@nemnsynod.org or via phone at 218-724-4424.

May the Holy Spirit continue to lead, guide and bless all involved in the Call Process.