

SECTION B: CONGREGATION MISSION AND MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

Past – Present – Future Ministry

Conduct a History of our Church Sunday (recommended)

Invite the congregation to a **History Event following Sunday morning worship**. Plan for a two-hour event. Invite everyone; provide drinks, food, and a comfortable space to gather.

What you'll need:

- Hospitality: food and drinks
- Cups, plates, napkins, utensils
- Tables, preferably circular, marked by decade, with three sheets of large poster paper at each table
- Large poster board (Post-its works really well), markers, dark bold colors

Welcome and devotions (10 minutes)

Sample:

Today we explore who we've been to better understand who God wants and needs us to be. We'll explore each decade from the perspective of the people who joined the congregation during that time. This is not an exercise in details or facts. It is an exercise in perspective and remembrance.

(Explanation)

Sample:

Please help yourself to the meal. When you return, you'll find that each table will have three sheets of paper (there will be more information about these later). Each table will explore a decade of time. Sit at the table marked by the decade when you joined the congregation. Please note, you will be sitting at the table marked with the period when you JOINED, not when you were born. If you are a child or a youth, please sit at the table marked by the time when your first memories begin.

Appoint a recorder to write, and a reporter to share your findings as you begin.

Discovering the Decades

- On the first sheet of paper, as a group, list: What, of significance, was happening in the WORLD?
- On the second sheet of paper, as a group, list: What was happening in RELIGION?
- On the third sheet of paper, as a group, list: What was happening with THIS CONGREGATION? For this particular question, consider building/construction dates, struggles, new leadership, neighborhood connections, etc.—all aspects of your story.

Sharing the Story

- Post each of the decades results around the room
- Share each of the decades with the whole group
- Questions to think about:
 - Are there any significant events missing?
 - What are common themes?
 - What strikes you?
 - Do you see any particular impact of leadership?
 - What influence did personalities have on the community?
 - What impact did the community needs or culture have on the congregation?
 - What impact did the congregation have on the community?
 - What role has the congregation taken on for the community and for individuals?

Introduce the **CONGREGATION ASSESSMENT SURVEY (CAS)**

The **Congregation Assessment Survey**, or CAS for short, is a congregation-wide survey that provides an in-depth look at the experiences, perceptions and aspirations of a congregation. The CAS will provide a meaningful picture of your congregation and is an assessment instrument that can help your congregation:

- Measure the level of satisfaction and energy in the church.
- Identify the critical success factors for improving organizational climate.
- Discover what the congregation hopes to do and accomplish in the future.
- Gauge readiness for change.
- Uncover potential resources you may be missing.
- Prepare for a search for your next pastor.

Sample:

Our history tells us a lot about ourselves. However, it is still viewed through story and perspective, influenced by hindsight, and missing voices of the past. Our congregation has an opportunity to gain insight into where we stand as a congregation today, using the CAS (Congregation Assessment Survey). We're asking that as many participants as possible complete this survey. Please help us encourage as many people as possible to take this survey in the next two weeks. (For the following two Sundays, provide computers and information about the survey, to enable you to fully participate).

Review the results of the CAS during a gathering of both the Council and the Transition Team. The CAS provides support for the team preparing the Ministry Site Profile, as well as providing invaluable perspective to your Call Committee as they seek your next pastor.

Give a **summary report** to the congregation on the results of the CAS.

CONGREGATION ASSESSMENT SURVEY (CAS)

HOLY
BIBLE

Define and Research the Demographics of the Community

There are numerous sources available to conduct this research. The ELCA provides the following resources, at no charge to you and included in your congregation's Mission Support. **This tool is designed to help ELCA congregations gain a general understanding of their community and to plan their mission using that information.**

The website link is: www.elca.org/research

There is a box "**Demographic Reports**" on the lower right side margin. Click on "**View Now.**"

You will need the synod code, which is **7C**, and your congregational ID number. This number can be obtained by finding your congregation's parochial report (Form A) in your church files. If you still cannot find it, call the Metropolitan New York Synod Office and ask for assistance.

Conduct a **COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PROBE (CAP)**

Two members of the Transition Team or the Council make two separate appointments with two local town officials. In our experience, two of the following persons are best: a local school principal, a local chief of police, a local town mayor or supervisor, a council member, or the leader of the local chamber of commerce.

Call to ask for an appointment, indicating you are from a local church and are in the process of searching for a new pastor, and seeking their input about the greatest needs in the community. You would like 15 minutes of the person's time.

Two of you go to the meeting, and at least one of you takes notes. During the conversation, you ask the following questions:

- In your experience, what do you see as the top two or three problems in our community?
- Whom do you see working on those issues?
- Do you have any concerns about our community as you look into the future, and if so, what are they?
- What could our church do to help improve the quality of life in our community?
- When we call a new pastor to our church, could we bring them in to meet you?

Immediately following the conversation, do the following:

- Write and mail a handwritten note thanking the official for their time and input.
- Write up your notes of the conversation and review them with your partner, in order to determine if you both heard the same information.
- After you have conducted both conversations, provide a verbal update to the congregation on the following Sunday, and make your written notes available to the congregation, especially the MSP team.

In our experience, every congregation that has engaged in this kind of Community Assessment Probe, reports that it is one of the most eye-opening experiences. The rewards of this exercise cannot be adequately expressed.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PROBE (CAP)

Conduct a “Play It Forward” Sunday (recommended)

Invite the congregation to a “Play It Forward” event following Sunday morning worship. Plan for a two-hour event. Invite everyone; provide drinks, food, and a comfortable space to gather.

What you’ll need:

- Hospitality: food and drinks
- Cups, plates, napkins, utensils
- Tables and chairs
- Large, open wall space
- Large pieces of paper
- Markers, dark/bold colors
- Half-sheet pieces of paper
- Pens for everyone
- Post-it flags

Welcome, Meal, and Devotions (10 minutes)

Sample:

Today we’ll begin to “Play It Forward.” We’ll think about what kind of congregation we are today and we’ll dream about what God wants and expects from this congregation in the future. In each exercise, we encourage you to consider what you’ve learned about our congregation from the CAS (Congregation Assessment Survey).

Share in devotions.

With God, All Things Are Possible

- Give each individual a half sheet of paper, with the words: *“If this congregation truly believes that with God, all things are possible, in the next three years I would see...”*
- Have each person write an answer, post their answers on a wall, and then share their vision with everyone gathered
- Give everyone five “post-it flags,” instructing them to choose their top five priorities or preferences
- Tally the responses and review the top five priorities that have emerged
- Reflect on these questions:
 - How do the priorities fit with critical success factors?
 - How do the priorities fit with the community needs assessment?
 - What kind of opportunities do these provide?
 - What threats are there to making these happen?

Wrap-Up/Draft of Mission Site Profile (MSP)

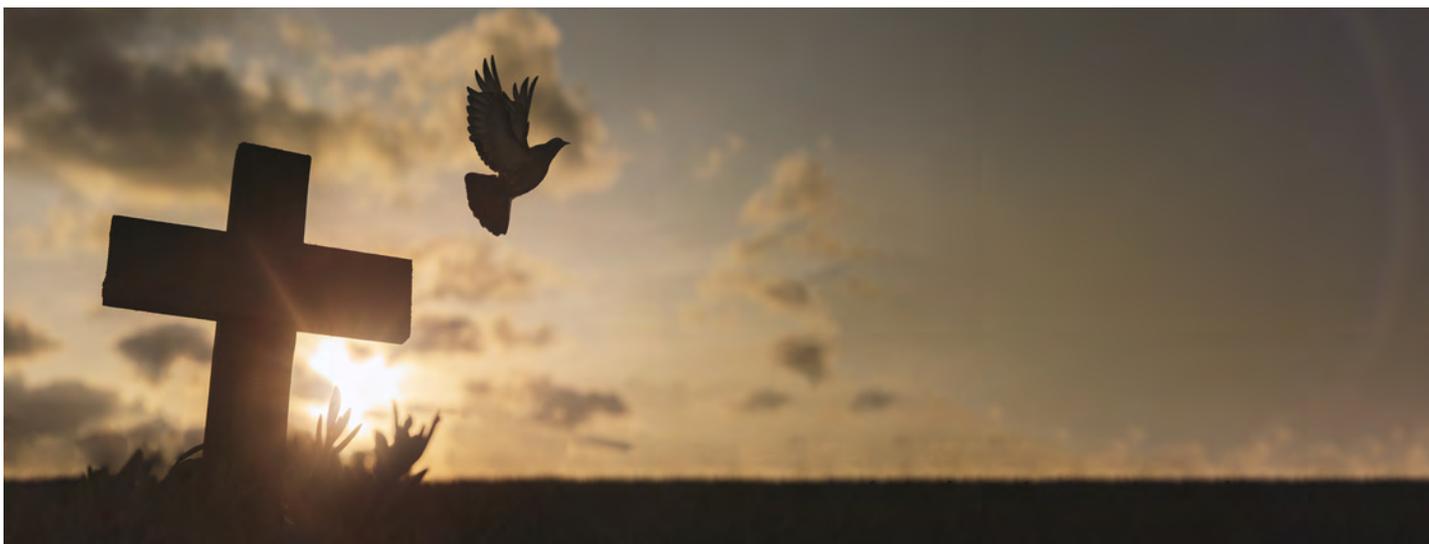
- Explain that the Transition Team will create the profile, based on the information gathered
- Establish the date of MSP draft review with congregation
- Thank everyone for their time. Close with Prayer.

Release the draft version of the MSP on a Sunday and seek feedback from the congregation.

Also, begin to collect suggestions for questions that the Call Committee might ask a potential candidate, based on the MSP.

The Transition Team will meet throughout the Transition process and will spend time filling out the MSP form. Following the “Play It Forward Event,” the team releases a first draft copy of the MSP to the entire congregation, requesting feedback. The congregation is given one week to respond with their suggestions, thoughts, or reflections.

After the week of input, the Transition Team can make revisions to the document. The final report should be submitted to the entire council for its review and possible revision, and also be made available to members of the Call Committee. After the MSP has been approved by the congregation council, a copy shall be sent to the Assistant to the Bishop and submitted to the ELCA database. The Assistant to the Bishop may consult with the Call Committee to review the completed MSP, discuss the hopes and vision of the congregation, and answer any remaining questions about the process.



SECTION C: THE CALL PROCESS

Appoint a Call Committee

It is not uncommon for members of the congregation to offer their services as members of the Call Committee. However, due to the tremendous responsibility entrusted to this group, **it is recommended that the Call Committee be appointed by the Congregation Council.**

If the congregation's constitution requires congregational election of the Call Committee members, nominations should be made by the Council. It is recommended that the chair of the committee be a member of the Council.

The Call Committee shall be composed of **six regular members** and, if desired, **one alternate**, the majority of who do not currently serve on the congregation council. The composition of the Call Committee should intentionally reflect the make-up of the congregation, assuring that all the different categories of age, gender, ethnic group, and differing lengths of membership in the congregation are represented. It is good to consider a youth or young adult (age 16-30) for this committee, assuming they will be able to attend the meetings. It is recommended that members of the same family not serve on the Call Committee. **Committee members should not be paid employees of the congregation or their family members.**

The Council should appoint persons carefully, asking itself these questions about potential members of the committee:

- Is this person firmly grounded in a relationship with Jesus Christ and committed to the search process as a prayerful journey under the guidance of the Holy Spirit?
- Does this person have the respect and trust of members of the congregation?
- Is this person able to respect confidentiality?
- Is this person open to future mission possibilities for the congregation and not simply eager to maintain the status quo?
- Is this person able to listen to others' opinions, and participate in an open and respectful discussion with other members of the committee?
- Is this person a confirmed and communing member of the congregation who attends worship regularly and participates in the life of the community of faith?
- Will this person be able to attend all meetings and interviews and be able to attend worship in another setting, to experience the candidate's worship leadership?

In addition, consider adding an additional non-voting member to the Call Committee. This should be a person from your community who does not attend a church. In other words, they have no religious affiliation. We now live in a time when, in our region, 75% of the population does not attend a church or synagogue. It is important that the Call Committee, as well as the candidates, hear this perspective.

An ideal non-church-going person for the Call Committee would have these characteristics:

- They live in the community in which the church building is located.
- Although not a participant in another church, they are not hostile or angry regarding religion in general.
- They have a desire to make the community a better place to live.

Preparation

The Call Committee works **in partnership** with the Office of the Bishop, through the call process. The chair of this committee will be in regular communication with the Assistant to the Bishop and will be the primary contact during the initial stages of the call process.

The first responsibility of the chair shall be to **arrange a time for orientation of the committee**. This orientation, which will prepare the committee to receive names of candidates, can take place at any time after the Ministry Site Profile (MSP) has been submitted, and prior to the first interview with a candidate. An ideal time for this meeting is immediately following the joint meeting of the Council, Call Committee, and Transition Team. The Assistant to the Bishop will meet with the Call Committee to provide the orientation and answer questions about the process.



Anti-bias/Anti-racism Training

The Call Committee and Congregation Council are required to participate in anti-bias/anti-racism training prior to interviewing candidates. The Office of the Bishop will provide the contact information for organizations that provide training/workshops. The congregation is responsible for the cost of the workshop and will provide written certification of the date of the training and the names of the participants to the Office of the Bishop.

Once the orientation and the anti-bias/anti-racism training have taken place, the congregation is ready to receive the name(s) of the candidate(s). The Call Committee should begin preparing themselves to interview the candidate(s). Potential questions could be requested of the congregation. While all the questions need not be used, they give the congregation a chance to assume more ownership of the process, a process which, out of necessity, will become less public. The [Called to Be Among Us](#) document is a helpful resource in preparation for interviewing candidates. If requested, a neighboring or retired pastor may be able to participate in a mock interview.

Candidate's Compensation Package

Prior to meeting with the candidate, the Congregation Council—in conjunction with the financial officers of the congregation and the compensation guidelines adopted by the Synod Council—shall develop a suggested compensation package to be sent to the candidate and to the Council. Helpful forms used in this process are: [MNYS Compensation Guidelines](#) and **Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities of the Pastor**⁵.

A copy of the form is also sent to the Assistant to the Bishop for review prior to being shared with the candidate. If there are any concerns regarding compensation, these should be addressed during the meeting with the Council. The Assistant to the Bishop is available for consultation and will suggest adjustments to the compensation package, if needed.

⁵ <https://www.mnys.org/assets/1/6/compensataionbenefitsandresponsibilities1.pdf>



CANDIDATE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Choosing the Number of Candidates to Interview

When the Council and Call Committee meet with the Assistant to the Bishop to review the completed MSP, the Council will decide, with input from the Call Committee, the number of candidates to be interviewed. Two options are available:

OPTION ONE: One candidate's name and Rostered Minister Profile (RMP) is given to the Call Committee by the Office of the Bishop. The Call Committee follows the interview process outlined below.

OPTION TWO: The Call Committee is given the names and Rostered Minister Profiles (RMP) of two or three candidates recommended by the Office of the Bishop.

***Note: The total number of candidates given to the Call Committee is determined by several factors, which include the availability of candidates and proper match of candidates to the congregation, along with other factors.*

The Call Committee interviews all the candidates within six weeks of receiving the names.

The purpose of this six-week time frame is to ensure that the Call Committee proceeds in an efficient manner. This also provides the candidates with flexibility, as they are now able to participate in multiple call processes at the same time.

The interview process includes a time for questions and answers, as described below, as well as an experience of the candidates' worship leadership. Once the Call Committee has decided on one candidate, the other two candidates are notified, and the recommended candidate's name is forwarded on to the Council.

In both options, the Call Committee must emphasize the need for **confidentiality**. In processes involving multiple candidates, the candidates do not know each other's identities.

To congregations seeking to interview "first call" candidates (those just graduating from seminary and open to their first call to a congregation), only one name will be given. This decision has been made for several reasons, including a limited number of first call candidates, and the expectation of the ELCA churchwide organization that first call candidates will not be assigned to a synod without a reasonable expectation of a call. In addition, it is our experience that forcing first call candidates into a comparative process is not helpful to the long-term ministry of the broader Church.

There may be times when circumstances do not allow for multiple candidates. This could be due to the timing of the call process, a limited number of appropriate candidates for call, and situations requiring special attention. This determination will be made by the Bishop, in consultation with the congregation's leadership.

Receiving a Candidate

The Call Committee chair will be sent the name(s) and Rostered Minister Profile(s) (RMP) of the candidate(s) recommended by the Bishop and staff. The Bishop and staff spend a great deal of time communicating with pastors within this synod who seek a change of call, interviewing potential candidates for the synod (or, occasionally, contacting one who might be open to considering a new call), and communicating with persons across the country to discover excellent candidates. There is also time spent in prayer, reflection and staff discussion, to determine a good match between candidate(s) and congregation(s).

Names of candidates can arise and be considered by the Bishop and the Assistants to the Bishop from various sources. Any member of the congregation may suggest the name of a pastor to be considered as a candidate. The chair of the Call Committee shall submit to the Bishop any names that arise in this fashion and are considered by the Call Committee to be reasonable suggestions.

If the pastor is rostered in another synod, the Bishop of that synod must be consulted by the Bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod before the pastor can be approached. The Bishop and staff take these suggestions seriously and pursue each one to determine if that pastor is an appropriate candidate for the congregation.

Once the staff has agreed that a candidate has the gifts and skills needed, that candidate is sent the congregation's Ministry Site Profile. After a pastor has given consent to be nominated, the Bishop will propose that person for the consideration of the Call Committee.

Upon receipt of the candidate's Rostered Minister Profile, the Call Committee chair shall distribute the profile to the rest of the committee, keeping in mind the need and high importance of confidentiality.

On the Sunday following the meeting with the Assistant to the Bishop, the Council President or designee announces the beginning of the call process to the congregation, and explains the need for confidentiality while the Call Committee performs its work.

Information: What to Share, What Not to Share

As noted, **the call process must observe a high degree of confidentiality.** There are two reasons for this. One is to protect the candidate, whose congregation may not know they are considering a call to another congregation.

Members of the Call Committee and Council are requested to take care that the candidate's documents are kept secure and to discuss information only with those who are involved in the present stage of the process. Difficult as it may seem, not even spouses should be informed of the details of the process. Also, friends and relatives who live far away should not be given confidential information. True stories abound of confidential information that traveled across the country and back again, to trouble the congregation of an unsuspecting candidate.

The second important reason for confidentiality is to **protect the process.** If the name should become known throughout the congregation, modern communication technology enables people to find out about the candidate's background in ways that were not possible before. This could also result in members of the congregation second-guessing or trying to influence the Call Committee decision, and in that way jeopardize the mutual trust necessary within this process.



Communication in the Congregation

While highly confidential, the call process is not to be perceived as secretive. To this end, regular communication with the congregation is essential. Newsletter updates, announcements at worship, judicious use of the congregation's website, and the posting of a chart noting the congregation's progress through the steps in the process will all help the congregation remain apprised of how the process is proceeding. **All such notices need to focus only on the process, with no mention of anything that could identify the candidate.**

The Call Committee establishes a list of questions, plans the process, and determines the location they will use to conduct the interview, while awaiting the profile(s) of the candidate(s).

On a weekly basis, the work of the Call Committee is lifted up in the prayers of the people during Sunday worship.

Sample Prayers (feel free to compose your own):

Gracious God, we give thanks for those who have been appointed to serve on the call committee and entrusted with the work of discerning a new pastor to guide this congregation. Grant to these men and women wisdom, patience, and the direction of your Holy Spirit, that they may exercise right judgment, and so serve you and the mission of your people here. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

OR

God of wisdom, in your goodness you continue to raise up faithful shepherds to serve your Church. Direct the members of our call committee as they seek to discern, on our behalf, a new leader to guide us in our mission in this place, that we may move forward together in mission.

Once every three weeks, the chair of the Call Committee provides the congregation with a **brief update** on the process, to date.

Interviewing the Candidate: A Two-step Process

Conversation with the Candidate

Upon receipt of the candidate's Rostered Minister Profile (RMP), the call chair should contact the candidate(s) within six weeks, to arrange for the interview(s). *An initial interview may be conducted via Zoom or another similar digital platform, if the candidate resides outside of the synod.* The congregation is responsible for covering expenses incurred by a candidate traveling for an interview with the committee, and for any subsequent visits at the invitation of the congregation. The congregation's budget should also include all the costs incurred by the Call Committee, such as phone, travel, meals, duplicating, and postage.

It is equally important to stay in **regular conversation** with the candidate. Members of the Call Committee and Council should remember that this is a time of nervousness and anxiety for the candidate, as well as for the congregation. Both sides should take responsibility for ongoing communication and should be sensitive to the needs of the other. If the planning of meetings or the communication of decisions is not shared promptly, there will be unnecessary anxiety and unpleasant feelings regarding the process.

Once the Call Committee receives a name, **two activities with the candidate constitute the interview process.**

First, the candidate meets with the entire Call Committee for an initial interview (in person or via Zoom/Skype). This meeting provides the first opportunity for conversation with the candidate, and normally will take place at the church, unless the candidate lives outside the synod. Following the initial interview, the Call Committee will discern whether to continue with the candidate and schedule a second interview. A second interview can be conducted in-person (if the first was digital) or via Zoom (if the first was in-person). Members of the Call Committee are not to visit the candidate's present congregation without the candidate's permission.

The second activity of the interview process is a visit to observe the candidate preach and lead worship. Arrangements will be made in mutual consultation and should take place as soon as possible after the initial interview. Normally, the Call Committee should try to observe the candidate in their own congregational setting. However, it is also possible to choose a neutral site, especially if the candidate has come from a significant distance or is not yet ordained. At this stage, the candidate does not preach at the congregation in which a call is being considered. The Call Committee will discern whether to release or move forward with a candidate. Once a candidate is released, they cannot be reconsidered.

Following the two parts of the interview process, the committee should share the responsibility of **contacting the candidate's references.** This offers the committee members the opportunity to ask any questions that may have come up during the interview.

It is suggested that the preferred candidate(s) **meet earlier with the chair of the committee**, possibly including a meal, and spend time touring the church, parsonage (if one is provided by the congregation), and community. If there is no walkthrough of the parsonage at this time (if indeed there is a parsonage), provisions should be made for a tour prior to the interview with the Congregation Council.

This is a good time **to review the aspects of the community that are likely to be factors in the candidate's decision:** housing, schools, shopping facilities, medical resources, employment possibilities for the spouse, recreation facilities, parks, etc. The candidate shall be reimbursed by the congregation for the expenses of this and any subsequent visits.



Recommending the Candidate

After prayerful deliberation, the Call Committee shall determine whether to recommend a candidate for consideration by the Congregation Council. In many cases, the committee will reach consensus that the person should be recommended to the congregation to be the new pastor. If the committee cannot reach a unanimous decision, then a two-thirds affirmative vote will be sufficient to recommend the candidate to the Council. The chair of the Call Committee shall inform the Assistant to the Bishop of the decision and request a special meeting of the Congregation Council to present the candidate. **The Assistant to the Bishop will request that the candidate give authorization for a background check. The findings will be sent to the Office of the Bishop.**

Not Recommending the Candidate

If the Call Committee decides not to continue working with the candidate, the chair shall immediately inform the candidate, in writing, of the decision, providing the reason(s) and relevant feedback to the candidate, and send a copy of the letter to the Assistant to the Bishop. Although it is difficult to write such a letter, it is important information for the candidate and helpful guidance for the Office of the Bishop in determining the qualities of the next candidate. The Office of the Bishop will be fully supportive of a Call Committee that has faithfully considered a candidate, participated in both steps of the interview process, and then decided not to continue with that person. The Bishop and staff shall provide the name of another candidate as soon as possible after being informed of the committee's decision.

If the candidate does not sense a call to the congregation, after initial steps, they shall likewise inform the Call Committee chairperson, as well as the Assistant to the Bishop, outlining the reasons for the withdrawal.

Once a candidate is chosen by the Call Committee, a report is shared with the Council.

The Work of the Congregational Council

The chair of the Call Committee shall communicate with the congregation President/Vice President to arrange a meeting with the Congregation Council for the purpose of presenting the recommendation of the Call Committee. There should be a written recommendation prepared by the Call Committee, giving the committee's rationale for the decision and outlining the qualities of the pastor that are particularly outstanding and important to the leadership of the congregation. The congregation President/Vice President shall preside. The pastor serving during the transition does not attend this meeting. Members of the Call Committee may be invited to attend.

From this point in the process, the communication with the candidate will be conducted by the congregation President/Vice President. **It will be important for the Council to observe the same guidelines for confidentiality and timely communication that have been observed by the Call Committee.**

Candidate's Spouse and Family

If the candidate has a spouse, that person might be included in a visit to the area at this time, but will not participate in the initial meeting with the Council. The spouse is not being considered for call, and members of the committee and Council are advised against having any expectations of the spouse in relation to the congregation. However, the spouse is highly regarded as the pastor's partner in life, and it is appropriate to ask questions related to the needs and role of that person in the life of the community of faith.

If the congregation owns a parsonage, the Council and candidate should discuss its upkeep, plans for any remodeling or redecorating, and any other concerns regarding it.

A time of social interaction may be planned with the candidate and Council, and the spouse and family could be introduced to the Council at this time. Plans should be made for the comfort of the spouse and family during this meeting.



The Council Meeting

The role of the Congregation Council, at this point in the process, is to receive and assume the recommendation of the Call Committee, trusting that the Call Committee is satisfied that the candidate's theology, practice of ministry, worship leadership, and preaching will provide the leadership the congregation requires.

The Council builds upon the Call Committee's recommendation by seeking to discern if there is any reason that the recommendation should not proceed to the congregation. This involves discussions of the mission of the congregation, compensation, living arrangements, starting date, and other practical considerations. The back page of the [*Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities of the Pastor*](#) document from the ELCA provides the starting point for this conversation.

After the Council and candidate have had a sufficient opportunity to get to know one another and discuss the possibility of ministry together, the candidate shall be excused. The Call Committee may stay for broader discussion or may be excused. The vote of the Council may be taken immediately or may be postponed, providing time for further prayer and reflection.

A two-thirds affirmative vote of the council is required to approve the recommendation of the Call Committee. The candidate should be informed immediately of the result of the vote. As soon as a vote is taken, the council president should inform the candidate and the Assistant to the Bishop to schedule a congregational call meeting.

The Finance Committee of the council should prepare a compensation package and send it to the Assistant to the Bishop for review. Note: Please review the MNYS Compensation guidelines beforehand. The Council shall meet with the candidate to discuss compensation, start date, moving concerns, and other details related to the call. Complete the [*Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities of the Pastor*](#) form when an agreement is reached between the council and candidate.

Introducing the Candidate to the Congregation

Once the Council has voted affirmatively to recommend the candidate to the congregation, and the candidate has indicated their desire to continue in the process, **plans should be finalized for a meeting between the candidate and members of the congregation. At this point, the candidate's name is NOT to appear in the announcement to the congregation of the plans.** In fact, the candidate's name shall not appear in any mailed or internet publication until the candidate has accepted the call.

There should be **two types of events planned**: members should have an opportunity to meet with the pastor (and family) informally, and the congregation should also be able to experience the pastor leading worship and preaching. The congregational vote is held on the day the candidate preaches.

A plan should be made for the candidate to meet with members of the congregation on a Saturday at an informal reception, and then lead worship in the congregation on the following morning. The candidate shall prepare a one-page biography to be available at the reception. **Normally, the congregation will hold only one service that day, at which the candidate will preach and lead worship.** It would be helpful to provide a time for brief questions and answers following the worship service at which the pastor has presided. Members of the Call Committee and Congregation Council should be prepared to respond.



Essentials of a Call Meeting

A congregational meeting date is determined with the congregation, candidate, and the synod representative who will preside over the vote. A congregation call meeting packet will be prepared and provided to the congregation President/Vice President by the Office of the Bishop. **It is important to consult closely with the candidate in order that clarity and transparency are included in the discussions.** This is vital, as there are tax implications to clergy compensation that are unique.

Congregation Council President...

- receives a call meeting packet from the Office of the Bishop and consults the constitution of the congregation regarding the requirements for a quorum and voting membership. New York State Religious Corporation Law provides that if the constitution of the congregation does not specify an age, the eligible voting age shall be 18.

Candidate...

- preaches and, if ordained, or licensed by the Bishop, presides. If you typically have more than one worship service that day, combine them into one, if at all possible.

Congregation President/Vice President

- convenes the call meeting following worship, introducing the Synod Representative who will conduct the meeting. If desired, the candidate can make a statement before leaving the sanctuary, after which the voting will take place.

Congregation Council...

- provides the congregation with a description of the candidate, the mutual ministry covenant, and the compensation package. These are the only items to be voted on.

Voters...

- sign in and must be members in good standing. Vote by written ballot—yes or no. There are no abstentions. Absentee ballots are not permitted.

Counters...

- chosen prior to the meeting, collect and count the ballots. A 2/3 majority is needed to call. Results are announced to the congregation immediately following the completion of the count.

Candidate...

- returns to gathered assembly—to acclamation, one hopes! If the vote is affirmative, congregation officers prepare the Letter of Call received from the Bishop's office and return it to the Bishop for attestation. The Bishop signs and forwards the attested call to the pastor-elect. Constitutionally, candidate has 30 days to accept or decline the call. The candidate writes a letter of acceptance or decline to the council president—and sends a copy to the Bishop. A letter of acceptance must include the start date.
- If declined, the process begins again with a new nomination. If accepted, plans for this new partnership in ministry begin! Pray. Get to know one another. Listen to one another. Laugh together. Celebrate.



Announcing the Congregational Call Meeting

The congregation President/Vice President will arrange for the announcement of the Congregational Call Meeting in accordance with the requirements of the congregation's constitution. These normally include notification by first-class mail at least ten days, including two Sundays, in advance of the meeting (including the Sunday on which the vote is held). It is important that the chief lay leader consult the congregation's constitution for any other stipulations.

There will be only **one item of business at the meeting**: A vote to call the candidate to be pastor, which includes the compensation package for the pastor. A synod representative authorized by the Bishop will conduct the meeting.

The announcement, in writing, pertaining to the special congregational meeting to call a pastor shall not include the name of the candidate or any identifying information.

SAMPLE LETTER OF NOTIFICATION TO CONGREGATION OF CALL MEETING



The Work of the Congregation

There is only **one item on the agenda at the special meeting**: The call vote, which includes the compensation package. A synod representative (*assigned by the Office of the Bishop*) will conduct the special congregational meeting to extend a call to a pastor.

The congregation President/Vice president shall be in communication with the synod representative in order to confirm that the meeting has been announced according to the constitution and that everything is in order for the day. A copy of the membership roll/roster and a copy of the congregation constitution should be provided to the synod representative. There should be ballots, writing utensils, tellers, and an adequate number of copies of the compensation package available for distribution. Plans should be made to greet the candidate and provide the necessary information for conducting the worship service.

The meeting should take place immediately after the service. The candidate may address the congregation if they desire to do so. The candidate (and family) may leave the room. A brief period of discussion regarding the candidate may be addressed to the call committee/congregation council members.

The synod representative announces the results of the written ballot. The congregation President/Vice President shall inform the candidate, as soon as possible, with the number of affirmative and negative votes. Assuming the candidate has remained at the church, it would be appropriate to call them back into the meeting to announce a positive vote, with acclamation.

A favorable vote indicates that a call has been extended by the congregation to the candidate. The pastor-elect has thirty days in which to respond to the call. In many cases, the person will respond immediately, but there are times when a pastor-elect might want to take additional time for prayerful consideration.

Letter of Call

The congregation call meeting packet will include the **Letter of Call** and the [**Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities of the Pastor**](#) form. The congregation President/Vice President should have the completed **Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities of the Pastor** form prepared on the day of the call meeting.

Following an affirmative call vote, these documents (*Letter of Call and Definition of Compensation, Benefits and Responsibilities of the Pastor*) are signed by the council President /Vice President and congregation secretary, and returned to the synod office by the synod representative. Assuming that the documents are in good order, and consistent with the understanding that has been reached by all parties, the Bishop will attest to the call by signing the forms. The originals will be given to the newly-called pastor, and copies kept at the synod office for filing, and sent to the congregation.

Consult with the pastor-elect regarding the timeline for public announcement of the call. Remember that in many cases, the called pastor will need to make the announcement of the new call to their present congregation. The newly called pastor will need to take an appropriate amount of time to conclude that ministry and plan the move to a new location. It is recommended that a pastor take a minimum of two weeks transition time between calls, not including the time that the move requires. **Although both the pastor and congregation will be eager to begin the new relationship, it is wise to allow time for rest and renewal before the demands of the new ministry begin.**