



A Time of Transition

Things to Know and Do When a Pastor or Other Rostered Leader Resigns

This Information Bulletin is being sent to you because word has reached the mission area office about the resignation of your pastor or your lay rostered minister (associate in ministry, diaconal minister, or deaconess). This is the first of several bulletins that will help you during the next few months as you experience the farewells, the vacancy, the search, and the excitement of a new beginning.

The Call Process

The Northern Texas - Northern Louisiana Mission Area has a detailed and helpful procedure for assisting congregations during times of vacancy and searching. We refer to it as the "Call Process." The process moves in a step-by-step way, helping you—the congregation's leadership—bring closure to your present ministry, reflect on the congregation's future, and then initiate a search for a new pastor. The *Call Process Handbook* that you will receive describes the steps in a clear and orderly way.

Bishop's Visit and Exit Interview

As soon after the announcement of resignation as possible, the bishop will ask for an appointment to visit with the departing pastor and to meet with the Congregation Council. The purpose is to begin the process of closure and transition as well as to answer the questions and concerns of the congregation.

The Transition Team

The Congregation Council's very first task, however, is to appoint a Transition Team that

will help the congregation bring closure to the ministry of the departing pastor, assist the Interim Pastor meet the pastoral needs of the congregation, and plan welcoming activities to help the new pastor make a strong beginning in your ministry.

A Transition Team is a ministry team. It cares for the experience of change, anxiety and grief in the congregation. It is not a governing body, management group or Call Committee. The Team consists of four to six trusted and talented members of the congregation, at least one of whom is also a member of the Council. The president of the congregation is an *ex officio* member of the Transition Team. The Team is accountable to Council and makes regular reports to the Council. The Team can make decisions only insofar as it is empowered to do so by the Council. It is encouraged to call on the Conference Dean and Bishop's Office for guidance and support.

The Work of the Transition Team

It is said that "the degree to which a pastor ends well is the degree to which a new pastor will be able to begin well." This is true, and it is the first area of responsibility for the Transition Team. The Team is to facilitate the closure activities for the ministry of the departing pastor.

- Help the pastor to end well: plan events, gifts, remembrances and thanksgivings.
- Encourage closure conversations between the pastor and shut-ins, children and the various groups in the congregation.

- Invite the pastor's verbal and written observations or concerns about the ministry.
- Determine the unfinished pastoral care responsibilities that the pastor needs to place in the committee's and Interim Pastor's care.
- Ensure that Council and pastor have signed off on the Statements regarding Finances and the Parochial Record.

Second, the Team is to determine the congregation's readiness for Call Process.

- Farewell activities are completed and the pastor has left the community.
- Interim pastor is in place, installed and situated to the ministry of the congregation.
- Congregation has stabilized in its organization and pastoral tasks.
- Conflict, grief and financial issues are deemed not to be a barrier to Call Process.
- Initiate a consultation among Council, Bishop, and Team to determine that it is time to appoint the Call Committee.

Third, the Team is to monitor the pastoral needs of the congregation during the interim and advise the Interim Pastor.

- Welcome and help situate the Interim Pastor.
- Attend to grief, loss and pastoral care issues that arise.
- Address ministry tasks that have fallen in the cracks.
- Monitor the general health and needs of the congregation.

Fourth, the Team is to facilitate the beginning of the new pastor's ministry.

- Plan welcoming events and the Service of Installation.
- Prepare the "Survival Tool Kit" for the pastor.
- Help the pastor connect with members and with the community.

Once the Congregation Council and pastor have agreed on the appointment of a Mutual Ministry Committee and the committee has begun meeting with the pastor, the work of the Transition Team is complete.

Final Documents to Complete

Attached you will find some matters of business that are required by the constitution. (1) The *Certification of Completion of All Financial Obligations* is to be filled out and signed by the pastor and the congregational treasurer. It attests to the fact that there are no outstanding financial matters unresolved between the pastor and the congregation. (2) The certification of the *Church Records* is to be completed by the pastor and the congregational secretary verifying the transfer of the *Parish Register* in good order to the secretary and the completion of the most recent *Parochial Report*. These must be on file with the mission office in order for your next pastor to be installed as pastor

Interim Ministry

The constitution also refers to the way pastoral needs are cared for during a vacancy. If you need an interim pastor, the bishop will appoint—with your agreement—a pastor to serve you during this interim period. Also, a neighboring Lutheran pastor can be contacted to ask if he/she would be willing to be available in emergencies.

Orientation Session

Once the Transition Team has determined that the congregation is ready to begin the Call Process, the mission area's Bishop Assistant will visit to offer an orientation session. The orientation is open to all in the congregation who are interested, especially the members of the Congregation Council and Call Committee. The session will outline all the steps of the process and answer all your questions. At your convenience, please call Pastor Jane Mar to set up a suitable time for this Orientation.

Selecting a Call Committee

The congregation's constitution will specify whether the committee is appointed by the Council or elected by the congregation, as well as the number and distribution of the members. Please read the relevant sections and follow them carefully. Selection of the Call Committee should be regarded as a crucial step in the Call Process. Here are some suggestions.

Call Committee members should be...

- persons of stature, who enjoy the trust and respect of the whole membership of the congregation,
- able to think and decide with the good of the whole congregation in mind rather than their own personal desires or wants,
- about six in number (it is difficult for larger committees to get the work done efficiently and to consistently hit 100% attendance for meetings which is so crucial),
- able to meet often,
- as diverse in age, gender, ethnicity, and interests as the congregation is at-large,
- a group that "looks like the congregation in miniature,"
- a group that does not include employed staff, past pastors or their spouses,
- persons not serving on the current Congregation Council (except that one person—preferably not the congregational president—may serve on both),
- persons who do not have personal agendas, grievances, or power issues within the congregation, and
- people who begin, end, and act in faith.

If the Call Committee is selected by the Congregation Council...

- The Council may wish to solicit "suggestions" from the congregation in order to have everyone's ideas. Do this in a way that makes it clear that you are inviting suggestions and not staging an election.
- Please avoid asking for volunteers; the committee needs to be a balanced group of talented and diverse people that can only be selected through careful deliberation on the part of the Council.
- After these persons accept the Council's appointment, announce their names, demonstrate pride and confidence in them, pray and support them.
- Use the "Installation" service as a way of gathering the whole congregation around them and their work.

If the Call Committee is to be elected by the congregation at large, the Council can act as a

nominating committee using the guidance above.

Access to Resources

The Bishop Assistant is your coach in the work of Call Process. The Interim Pastor, while not to be involved in the work of the Call Committee, is nevertheless a source of pastoral care for the Council, committee and congregation. The mission office makes available a number of documents related to Call Process at www.NTNL.org (under "Downloads"). The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has a Library of Resources at www.ELCA.org/call.

A Partnership

You are not alone in the work that is ahead. The work is shared between committee and Council, congregation and mission area office, the people and the Spirit of God. Your every effort to carefully listen, plan, communicate, and rest in prayer will bear good fruit. Your mission area staff, in particular, stands ready to journey with you through all that is ahead. Blessings to you.

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Information Bulletin #1a

To the Congregational President

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Also enclosed:

Rite of Farewell

The Transition Team

Installation of a Call Committee

Financial Statement

Church Records Statement