

CO-TERMINUS CALLS

Northern Texas – Northern Louisiana Mission Area

August, 2011

(References to *associate pastor* below apply equally to assistant pastors, associates in ministry, diaconal ministers, and deaconesses.)

The Office of Bishop of the NT-NL Mission Area recommends that congregations calling an associate pastor or other lay rostered staff note on the Letter of Call that the call is *co-terminus* with the call of the senior pastor. This recommendation is made for two reasons: to ensure that the congregation will have an orderly call process if ever it may need to seek a new senior pastor, and to resolve the impasse and conflict that can be created if a new senior pastor determines that it is not possible to form a workable ministry team with the current staff.

Co-Terminus Process: Upon the resignation of the senior pastor, the associate pastor will verbally and/or in writing offer to the Congregation Council an undated letter of resignation. In some instances (e.g. because of congregational conflict), the Council may need to accept the resignation effective immediately. More likely, the Council will defer action on the resignation and, instead, encourage the associate pastor to continue in his/her present call throughout the time of vacancy, search, and up to six months of time in which a new senior pastor is on site. By the end of six months, the Council in consultation with the new senior pastor should act to finally reject or accept the letter of resignation. If rejecting, the Council and/or congregation can act to reaffirm the continuing call of the associate pastor. If accepting, the Council should work with the bishop and the associate pastor on the terms for an acceptable severance package.

Election to Senior Process: In some instances, the associate pastor will wish to be considered for election to the position of senior pastor. In this case, the associate pastor should indicate their interest to the Congregation Council when the Call Committee has completed the Ministry Site Profile and is ready to receive names. The Council must agree by a two-thirds vote that “the bishop of the NT-NL Synod be asked to submit only the name of Pastor _____ to this congregation for call consideration at this time...” If the vote for the variance passes, the bishop will agree to the request and the pastor will then interview with the Call Committee. Following the traditional process, the Call Committee would recommend the pastor to the Council by a vote of 2/3. The Council would recommend the pastor to the Congregation by a vote of 2/3. A congregational meeting would be called to vote on issuing a Letter of Call according to the regular constitutional provisions. The vote to call should be nearly unanimous.

If the Council vote on the request for a variance does not pass, the Call Committee will move forward with a candidate list which does not include the associate pastor. The associate pastor may, however, request to continue as the associate pastor as outlined in the second paragraph. In the event that the associate pastor is serving as the interim, they may continue to serve as the interim during the call process with Council approval. When the senior pastor arrives, the senior pastor, associate or interim pastor and Council will mutually make a decision about rejecting or accepting the letter of resignation.

Being Sensitive: The Congregation Council is urged to be highly sensitive to the needs and dilemma that that associate pastor feels in such times, as well as the confusion that the membership may feel. Assure the associate pastor (1) that their help, good will, and clear communication will be appreciated, (2) that it will be important that they continue to function in their current role during the vacancy and not allow others to assume they are the “temporary senior pastor,” and (3) that the Council is willing to provide whatever support (counseling, gift assessment, ministry review, vocational guidance) that might be helpful to the associate. If the associate pastor is asked to serve as the interim, the Council should assist the congregation in recognizing that transition and provide needed support as requested.

Assure the membership that (1) there is a process in place to consider the continuation of the call of the associate pastor as well as a process to use if there is a desire to consider her/him for the position of senior pastor, (2) that the associate pastor is being cared for personally, spiritually, and professionally, and (3) that the membership will be kept informed about the process and the decisions that are made.

As in all things, pray for one another, support one another, and do what promotes the health and welfare of the other. Seek the counsel and wisdom of the Spirit so that your leadership may be caring and careful.