



Guide for the Congregation Council

When you are on the Congregation Council and the pastor resigns you are thrust into a whole new set of responsibilities. The leadership role and the work of the Council change. Leadership throughout the congregation has to make adjustments. While traumatic, this becomes an opportunity for the best of leadership to blossom and for the Council to experience teamwork in a new way.

The task of the Council is to give solid, inspired leadership during three phases of change: separation from the previous pastor's leadership, an interim time of regrouping and looking forward, and a welcoming time for a new pastor.

Separation symptoms first emerged when your pastor first considered leaving. Usually they go unrecognized until the pastor submits a letter of resignation. Anger, anxiety and bewilderment are common. Use your leadership to ensure that the feelings are worked through so they do not inhibit the members' ability to transition to a new pastor. A new pastor will begin well to the degree that the former pastor ended well.

It is a time of grieving. Denial, blaming others, and feeling abandonment are commonly experienced by members and by the congregation as a family. After a pastor has left, this separation phase should continue without interruption by the pastor's return to do pastoral acts!

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Transition Team

Upon receiving a letter of resignation, the Council's first task is to appoint a Transition Team to assist the congregation with four important tasks:

- To facilitate the closure activities for the ministry of the departing pastor, including special events, gifts, conversations and pastoral care concerns,
- To help determine the congregation's readiness to begin the Call Process,
- To monitor the pastoral needs of the congregation during the interim and advise the Interim Pastor, and
- To facilitate the beginning of the new pastor's ministry, including welcoming activities, installation service and introduction to the congregation and community.

This Team consists of four to six trusted and talented members of the congregation, at least one of which is a member of the Council.

The bishop will plan to visit the departing pastor and Congregation Council soon after the announcement of resignation. The visit is an exit interview to encourage feedback, gratitude and good closure to the ministry. During the visit with the Council, the bishop will discuss the work of the Transition Team and the Interim Pastor in meeting the needs of the congregation in the months ahead.

Interim Ministry

The most immediate need of the congregation is provision for the Sunday ministry of Word and Sacrament and emergency pastoral care. It is important that religious instruction of youth be maintained. Provision for marriages, funerals and Sacraments must be made. Continuing pastoral care for those in special need is important. Spiritual guidance in the midst of these confusing times is particularly needed. Pastoral counsel for the Council is essential, especially if conflict or turmoil have been evident.

There are many critical reasons to have good pastoral leadership right at the time of pastoral vacancy, which typically lasts at least eight to ten months.

To meet these needs, ***the mission area bishop appoints an interim pastor***, with the consent of the Council. The interim pastor carries the *responsibilities* of being pastor for the interim and is a member of the Congregation Council. Some *tasks* are sometimes delegated to lay persons or a visiting pastor. When pastoral ministry is needed before an interim pastor can be appointed, the Council makes these arrangements. The bishop's office maintains a list of pastors who can do pulpit supply on a Sunday.

The interim period is a time for growth: coming to terms with the congregation's history, defining the church's identity and mission, allowing needed leadership change, renewing linkages with the synod, and commitment to new directions.

The Call Committee

When the Transition Team determines with the Council that progress has been made in these areas of growth, the Council will need to form a Call Committee, usually six persons. The committee ought to be representative of age groups, gender balance, long time members and recently joining members, "conservative" and "liberal," extroverted and introverted. Be sure to select persons with healthy spiritual grounding. Don't include the

previous pastor's closest friends or constant critics. Be careful about hidden agendas by persons who volunteer to be on the committee. Not more than one member of the Congregation Council should be on the committee (as a liaison back to the Council). Members must be able to commit significant amounts of time to the task. Usually Call Committees meet weekly!

The president needs to telephone the mission area office with the name, address and telephone number of the Call Committee chairperson as soon as it is known. The bishop assistant and the dean of the conference are coaches and resources for the Call Committee as it goes about its work. The bishop assistant will conduct a Call Process Orientation Session for the Council and Committee as soon as is feasible.

*“Christ’s gifts...were that some should be...
pastors for the equipment of the saints,
for the work of ministry
for the building up of the body of Christ.”*
Ephesians 4:7-12

The Call Committee will find that calling a pastor is very different from hiring an employee! It is a holy task. As a group the committee needs to have great credibility of judgment and be worthy of the highest trust of the congregation.

Financially, the Council needs to provide the Call Committee with a budget to do its work. Likely expenses are travel costs to host candidates (and spouses) for interviews. The Call Committee also needs to know the financial limitations of compensation for a new pastor, the status of housing allowance or parsonage (and its maintenance), and provision for moving expenses. The mission area requires that compensation meet minimum compensation guidelines. It is important that finances be fully agreed upon to avoid misunderstandings with each other and with candidates who will be considered.

Maintaining the Ministry

As the Call Committee does its work on behalf

of the congregation, the Council and Transition Team work hard at the task of maintaining and strengthening the ministry and mission of the congregation. In this regard, major changes should not be made without pastoral participation by the interim pastor or, if necessary, the dean of the conference.

The interim pastor helps the Council strengthen weak links of congregational leadership, works on identified problems, helps the congregation anticipate the new future to which it is moving, and helps prepare for the leadership of the new pastor.

At the monthly meetings of the Council, the Call Committee chairperson reports the status of the work of the committee. *You are not given confidential information* or clues about candidates being considered. You need to help the rest of the congregation accept the limitations placed on the desire to know about pastoral candidates. For many reasons, personnel matters must be kept *confidential*.

On the other hand, the Council and the Call Committee must continually reassure the congregation that progress is being made toward the calling of a pastor and that the other work of the congregation is continuing under competent leadership.

During the interim it is helpful to have some outside help, such as a consultant, the dean of the conference, or the mission area's Director for Evangelical Mission, to lead a "visioning retreat" to search out what is authentic in the soul of the congregation: the meaning of its history, an honest assessment of the community in which the congregation witnesses to God, and a sense of the congregation's call to ministry.

Recommending a Pastor

The Call Committee must reach a 2/3 majority

vote to send a recommendation to the Council. As a part of the committee's deliberations, background checks (criminal, credit, drug) may have been completed. If not, the Council may request this of the recommended candidate. You may also elect to conduct your own interview with the candidate. Ultimately you must vote by a 2/3 majority to forward the recommendation to the congregation.

Before the congregation would meet to vote on calling the pastor, plan a day when the candidate can meet the whole congregation and its leadership. As a Council you will probably spend an evening in conversation with the candidate, asking questions and responding to questions. You are exchanging expectations. This should be in a relaxed atmosphere. It is a good time to see how this pastor's leadership could lead you forward and what kind of "chemistry" you discover.

You will be, of course, included in other events during the candidate's visit. There will likely be a meal event that includes the whole congregation. There may be a worship time when you will hear the pastor lead worship and give a meditation. You will be able to observe the pastor's responses to and interaction with the gathered congregation. You will probably have time for private conversation. The president of the congregation and the chair of the Call Committee should talk with the pastor about compensation.

After the visit – if the compensation issues seem to be resolved, the candidate is willing to continue, and the Council is ready to move forward with the nomination – a special Congregational Meeting is held. The Council presents the recommendation for call and the budget information on compensation.

Authority to call a pastor resides with the whole congregation at a meeting called for that purpose. The vote must be at least a two-thirds majority ballot of members present and voting.

HOW CANDIDATES ARE IDENTIFIED

1. MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION MAY WISH TO AND ARE ENCOURAGED TO NOMINATE PASTORS.
2. PASTORS MAY CONTACT THE BISHOP ASSISTANT TO EXPRESS INTEREST IN THE VACANCY.
3. THE BISHOP'S OFFICE MAINTAINS PROFILE INFORMATION FROM PASTORS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF OUR AREA WHO ARE AVAILABLE FOR CALL.
4. THE BISHOP ASSISTANT PARTICIPATES IN NETWORKS OF PERSONS WHO DO PERSONNEL WORK IN THE CHURCH.

Proxy voting is not allowed. The ballot on the compensation package must be by a simple majority vote.

Following the congregational meeting, the president telephones the candidate with the results of the meeting. If the vote is affirmative, the *Letter of Call* and the *Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities of the Pastor* are completed by the congregation's secretary, signed by the congregation's president, and sent to the bishop for review and signature. It is then sent to the called pastor.

The pastor whom you call has thirty days from receipt of the *Letter of Call* to respond to the president of the congregation in writing. During this time the pastor is not just weighing *pro* and *con*, but is seeking to discern where and with whom God, at this point, wills for her/him to be pastor and spiritual leader.

Being Turned Down

If the pastor you call chooses to not accept, it is a disheartening thing. Members have formed high hopes. Some people, especially Call Committee members, have invested themselves in the success of that person's new pastorate in your congregation. There is plenty of disappointment and maybe anger.

A strategy session is held, at least on the telephone, between the president of the congregation, the Call Committee chairperson, and the bishop assistant. Together they review what is happening and prepare some recommendation for the Congregation Council.

The congregation needs to be informed about the turn of events quickly. They should be assured that progress is resuming in the selection of another candidate for consideration of call to this ministry.

Preparing for the Pastor

When a pastor hears and accepts the call to be your pastor, the Transition Team and the Council have the important ministry of preparing the way.

After the emotional time of separation from the current place of ministry, your new pastor comes with wonderful hopes and maybe a few fears. The pastor also is busy helping his/her family, if there is one, cope with all the changes that are happening in the family as they settle into a "new to them" environment.

Professionally, the pastor will be trying to get to know everybody and everyone's name. People will ask questions and the pastor has to respond without benefit of knowing the history of the question or its hidden meaning. The pastor will be trying to figure out "how things work" and may be surprised by some things you take for granted. Your job is to assist the pastor become integrated into the life, "culture" and mission of the congregation. You can count on it; the new pastor wants to be an effective pastor for and with you!

Thanking the Committees

When the new pastor has accepted your call and comes to be your pastor, the Call Committee's work is done. When the new pastor and Council have selected a Mutual Ministry Committee to support the pastor and the pastor's ministry, the Transition Team's work is done. Be sure to publicly thank both the Call Committee and Transition Team.

The Council, the new pastor, the Conference Dean, and the bishop's office arrange for a *Service of Installation*. This service marks the official taking up of responsibilities by the pastor. Make it a festive event which is a clear sign of a new chapter in the congregation's life.

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