

**THE SELC DISTRICT
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH – MISSOURI SYNOD
Call and Vacancy Guidelines
2005**

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SELC District*

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SECTION I: DISTRICT SUPPORT

THE DISTRICT PRESIDENT

- ... assists the congregation in continuing the Gospel Ministry of Word and Sacrament,
- ... supervises the calling of the new Pastor
- ...provides the Call List from which a Call is extended
- ...authorizes and participates in all ordinations and installations (personally or through designated representatives)

The Rev. Carl Krueger, President

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THE VICE-PRESIDENTS

- ... are available in the remaining circuits of the SELC District to assist the Circuit Counselors and the District President in the call process.

IN THE EASTERN CIRCUIT ...

Rev. Andrew Dzurovcik, 1st Vice President

The SELC District
Zion Lutheran Church
559 Raritan Road
Clark, New Jersey 07066
Office 1-732-382-7320
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IN THE CENTRAL CIRCUIT ...

Rev. Dr. Chris Cahill, 2nd Vice President

The SELC District
Christ the King Lutheran Church
PO Box 183
Lodi, Ohio 44254
Office 1-330-948-3000
Home 1-330-948-2458
Email revcahill@aol.com

NOTE: ALWAYS SEND COPIES OF PERTINENT COMMUNICATIONS TO THE DISTRICT PRESIDENT, THE VICE-PRESIDENT IN YOUR CIRCUIT, AND CIRCUIT COUNSELOR.

THE CIRCUIT COUNSELORS

- ... have been elected by the congregations of our Circuits. Some of their responsibilities include assisting your congregation in the Calling process and helping you carry on your ministry in the time of pastoral vacancy.
- ... help the Call Committee to assess the needs and opportunities of the parish.
- ... assist in the selection of the vacancy pastor.
- ... secure assistance for preaching, Holy Communion, Confirmation instruction, weddings, funerals, baptisms, visitation, etc.
- ... may attend all meetings relating to the calling of a pastor as the representative of the District President.
- ... assist in the arrival and installation of the new pastor.

IN THE EASTERN CIRCUIT

Rev. James Douthwaite
St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Mail to: 703 Mansfield St
Alexandria, VA 22304
Office 1-703-455-4003
Home: 1-703-455-2461
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IN THE CENTRAL CIRCUIT

Rev. Kenneth Ballas
12965 W. Linden Lane
Parma, OH 44130
Home 1-440-886-6462
Cell: 1-440-554-2307
Email: KenLoB4455@aol.com

IN THE WESTERN CIRCUIT

Rev. Kevin Bergmann
St. Paul Lutheran Church
1801 Atchison Avenue
Whiting, Indiana 46394
Office 1-219-659-0303
Home 1-219-838-5177
Email KevKo13berg@msn.com

THE DEMOGRAPHICS CONSULTANT

- ... is the pastor of a church in your circuit who has been trained by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to assist your congregation in obtaining and interpreting demographics information for your area.
- ... can help your congregation examine population trends and figures in your area with a view to possible future ministry together with your new pastor.
- ... is assigned by the District on an availability basis. 2nd Vice President Cahill is the contact person for Demographics Consultants.
- ...Demographic services are provided by The Lutheran Church Extension Fund and are available by contacting our LCEF SELC Vice President—Robert Lange (847) 678-0482

OUR DEMOGRAPHICS CONSULTANT IS

Name: _____

Church: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

Office Phone: _____

Home Phone: _____

Fax: _____

Email: _____

THE FACILITATOR FOR “*Natural Church Development*”

- ... is the pastor of a church in your circuit who has been trained by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to assist your congregation in conducting a self-study and evaluation of the various programs and activities of the congregation.
- ... can help the leadership of your congregation to establish an on-going program of evaluation and strategic planning for the long-term growth and health of the congregation.
- ... is assigned by the District on an availability basis. District President Carl Krueger is the initial contact person for “*Natural Church Development*”.
- ...In 2005, Our trained faciliators are (Eastern) Rev. Jeffrey Skopak, (Central) Rev. Chris Cahill, and (Western) Rev. Paul Biber.

OUR FACILITATOR FOR “Natural Church Development”

Name: _____

Church: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

Office Phone: _____

Home Phone: _____

Fax: _____

Email: _____

NOTE: IN ORDER FOR THE DISTRICT PRESIDENT AND YOUR CONGREGATION TO CONSIDER ADEQUATELY AS MANY FACTORS AS POSSIBLE IN THE CALLING PROCESS, AND TO HAVE AN ACCURATE PICTURE OF YOUR OWN SITUATION, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOUR CONGREGATION EXAMINE THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF YOUR AREA AND CONDUCT A SELF-STUDY BEFORE A CALL IS SENT TO A PASTOR-ELECT.

SECTION 2: DEFINITIONS

Vacant Congregation – a popular way of describing a congregation, which is without the services of a full-time pastor ... also an intervening time between pastors or other leadership for ministry.

Remember: The Congregation is NOT vacant, nor does it lack any spiritual gifts necessary for the congregation's continued existence. A Congregation may be "pastorally vacant" but ministry, including pastoral ministry continues—and the congregation is NEVER "vacant"

Call Committee – A committee of the parish, usually appointed by and responsible to the Voters Assembly, charged with locally supervising the calling process. In our Lutheran terminology, the term "Pulpit Committee" (as used in other denominations) is inadequate to describe the responsibilities of the Call Committee. See checklist section for responsibilities.

Intentional Interim Pastor – An Ordained, specially trained Pastor who is contracted for a limited term to confront problems and/or to promote healing following a difficult Pastoral/Congregational situation

Vacancy Pastor – Usually a local pastor who agrees to provide pastoral services during the vacancy. Specific responsibilities and compensation should be clearly defined. *Notes:* The Circuit Counselor may or may not serve as the vacancy pastor. The former pastor of the congregation, whether retired or not, should not serve as the vacancy pastor. The vacancy pastor should not be a local pastor who intends (or whom the congregation intends) to be put on the call list. It is to be understood that the Vacancy Pastor may not and will not be considered as a Candidate for the Call List. If a Pastor has the potential for being nominated to the Call List he should not be considered as a potential vacancy pastor.

Call List – The list of Pastoral Candidates provided by the District President, from which the congregation will Call a pastor-elect. The congregation may suggest names for the Call list, but only those names on the Call list from the District President are to be considered at Call meetings. Names may not be added to the Call list without District President approval.

Divine Call – The agreement between a pastor and a congregation, which describes the responsibilities of each. The call, issued through election by the congregation, is not a mere "contract" but an agreement prayerfully entered into by God's people acknowledging the work of God the Holy Spirit in the choice and the acceptance.

Call Meeting – The Congregational Meeting at which the pastor-elect is chosen by majority vote of those eligible to vote. Sufficient notice of the Call Meeting should be given, as provided by the Congregation's Constitution and By-Laws. The District President, Circuit Vice President and the Circuit Counselor should be notified in advance so that the district can have representation at the Call meeting.

Call Documents – The Document, which states the responsibilities which the congregation is asking the pastor-elect to assume. Supporting documents express the congregation's responsibility toward the pastor-elect. Call Documents, when properly issued by the congregation, signed by the congregational officers (and in the case of subsidized congregations, by the representative of the SELC District Mission Board), and accepted by the pastor, are binding.

Pastor-Elect – The pastor who is prayerfully considering the Call issued by the congregation. He is referred to by this term until the Call is accepted or returned.

Candidate – A pastor who is 1) a seminary graduate who has not yet been installed in the pastoral office in a parish, or 2) a pastor who is on a call list but has not yet been called.

Installation – The festival worship celebrating the pastor’s arrival and publicly affirming his acceptance of the Call. The District President or his representative is responsible for all pastoral installations which take place within the SELC District. Generally in our non-geographic SELC, installations are scheduled for late morning or early afternoon on a Saturday to facilitate participation of District Officials and other clergy.

Ordained Pastor – A pastor who has been certified for parish ministry by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and has been called to the ministry of Word and Sacrament by a congregation or agency of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. “Ordination” takes place during the festival worship which publicly affirms the Church’s certification of the man for the pastoral ministry. This festival worship may take place in the candidate’s home congregation, or in the congregation which has called him.

Calling from the field – Describes the process of issuing a Call to a pastor who is serving another congregation or position in the Missouri Synod. When a pastor possesses two Calls (the one to the church he currently serves, and the other to the church that has extended the call), he must prayerfully consider the challenges and opportunities of each. He asks, “Where does the Lord want me to serve in His church?”

Seminary Graduate – A man who has recently graduated from the seminary and is eligible for placement. The congregation through the District President must submit the request for placement of a seminary graduate. The Council of Presidents serves as the Placement Board.

Circuit Counselor- A Pastor nominated by their respective Circuit Congregations and elected at the District Convention by the Circuit Representatives to serve in a leadership role of encouraging Pastors and Congregations. A first point-of-contact for information or help by Congregations or Pastors. He also serves as the District President’s conduit of information for the circuit meetings and often is the District President’s personal representative at Call or other official congregational meetings.

Colloquy Candidate –Most often, one who has served in the Pastoral Ministry of another denomination, but has joined the LCMS and who has undergone a theological evaluation. He has been certified as eligible for placement into the LCMS Pastoral Ministry, and his first Call would be by the Council of Presidents.

CRM (“Candidatus Reverendi Ministerii”) – An ordained pastor of our Church who is not presently serving a congregation but IS eligible for a call.

Chaplain – An ordained pastor who serves an institution (hospital, prison, college campus, etc.), rather than a parish.

Pastor Emeritus – An honorary title given by a congregation to a retired pastor who may or may not assume part-time pastoral responsibilities.

Vicar – A non-ordained seminary student who serves one year of internship under the supervision of a local pastor. The Vicarage year is considered part of the seminary education training.

Assistant Pastor – An ordained pastor who accepts specific responsibilities in a parish under the supervision of the head pastor.

Associate Pastor – An ordained pastor who shares with another pastor equal responsibility for the pastoral office in a congregation, often with specific or designated areas of ministry.

SECTION 3: OUR LUTHERAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CALL AND THE PASTORAL OFFICE

“It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-13

- ✘ The Office of Pastor is a gift (Calling) of God.
- ✘ Note the nature of a pastor’s work, *“to prepare God’s people for works of service.”*

“So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.’” Acts 6:2-4

- ✘ Congregational members volunteer, are elected or appointed to serve in a variety of activities in support of the Congregation, and the Church at Large. The Pastor’s primary responsibility is to give his attention to “prayer and the ministry of the Word”

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless--not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.
Titus 1:5-9

- ✘ Note the qualities which an “elder” (pastor) should possess.
- ✘ The purpose of a pastor is to give instruction in “Sound Doctrine.”

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. Acts 20:28

- ✘ Note that the Holy Spirit calls a pastor to a “flock” (congregation).
- ✘ The congregation acts as God’s agent in extending the Call.
- ✘ A pastor realizes that his ministry is not merely a job but a Calling to care for the Church of God.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. 1 Peter 5:1-4

- ✘ Note the “pastoral” nature of God’s Call to serve in His Church.

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism. Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure. 1 Timothy 5:17-22

Note the following concerning those who serve as pastor:

- ✘ They should be cared for, encouraged, and adequately paid.
- ✘ They should not be subject to gossip or unfounded charges.
- ✘ The giving of the pastoral office should not be hasty.

Also read The Augsburg Confession, Articles V and XXVIII, and Luther's Small Catechism, "Confession and Absolution."

SECTION 4: WHEN THERE IS NO PASTOR

THE NATURE OF THE VACANCY PERIOD

Negative elements involved in the process of Calling a Pastor:

- ✘ “Why did our pastor leave? Didn’t he like us? How could he ever leave us? We can’t blame the pastor for accepting a promotion!”
- ✘ “We don’t have a pastor! Who will take care of my family if someone dies? Who will teach Confirmation? Conduct Sunday services? Etc., Etc., Etc.!”
- ✘ “How well will the new pastor work out? How long will it take?”

Positive elements involved in the process of Calling a Pastor:

- ✘ Both the congregation and the pastor receive a fresh start.
- ✘ The congregation has an opportunity to evaluate its ministry, begin new emphases, identify needs, etc.
- ✘ The congregation gains an appreciation for the work a Pastor is Called to and recognizes the main areas of discipleship that may be handled by members.

Note: A period of grief AND anticipation has to be recognized and worked through. The positive elements need constant explanation and development.

DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS DURING THE VACANCY

The District (President, Vice President, Circuit Counselor, Demographic Consultant, “Natural Church Development” Facilitator, or others) will help the congregation look at its ministry, goals, and purpose.

- ✘ *The congregation needs to come to terms with its history.* To be free for the future, the congregation needs to understand where it has come from and how it got to where it is, including the ministry of the pastor who has just left.
- ✘ *The congregation needs to be realistic in its goals and evaluations.* Assumptions about the community, the church, and the ministry need to be squared with reality so that a clearer understanding of its own potential might develop. The Demographics Consultation and “Natural Church Development” process will help the congregation develop a sense of what it is and what its community is like.
- ✘ *The congregation needs to develop and utilize its leadership.* During a vacancy, potential leaders emerge and are willing to assume more active roles in the life of the parish. At the same time, shifts of leadership need to be recognized and dealt with. Remember that ministry to congregation members and the community continues during the Pastoral vacancy!
- ✘ *The congregation needs to build commitment to new leadership and a new future.* Remembering that through the Call, God is at work to give the Congregation a different Undershepherd to equip the congregation for its God intended future
- ✘ The “Pastoral Office” is vacant, the congregation is not vacant.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CALL COMMITTEE

Structure: The Call Committee ...

- ✘ Needs people who have a personal stake in the future of the congregation.
- ✘ Should represent a wide cross-section of parish life.
- ✘ Normally should not be the same as the Church Council, but appointed by the Council or Voter Assembly and be responsible to the entire congregation.
- ✘ Might include 5-9 gifted people (men, women, youth, young, old, new and long-time members) who understand the purpose of the congregation, the nature of the ministry and the pastoral office, and represent the diversity of the congregation as it looks ahead to reach out to others in the Name of Christ.

Communication to the entire parish concerning the Call process is extremely important!

HOW THE CALL LIST IS DEVELOPED

- ✘ The Call list of pastoral candidates develops from the congregation and from consultation between the District President, Area Vice-President, and Circuit Counselor.
- ✘ All names of candidates must be submitted to the District President who will obtain information about the candidate and determine eligibility. Note: This process can take several weeks to complete.
- ✘ The District President will submit the completed list to the Circuit Counselor and the Call Committee.
- ✘ The Call Committee will review the list WITH the Circuit Counselor.
- ✘ Due notice (at least two weeks) is given for the Call Meeting at which a Call to serve is extended.
- ✘ The pastor-elect acknowledges the Call and usually arranges a meeting with the congregation and Circuit Counselor in order to identify the challenges and needs of the ministry.
- ✘ The pastor-elect accepts or declines the Call. Note: This process can also take some time

PREPARING FOR THE ARRIVAL OF A NEW PASTOR

- ✘ A special committee should handle living arrangements, housing, parsonage, moving, schools, and employment for wife, etc..
- ✘ A special committee should handle Service of Installation and reception of the new pastor and family with the assistance of the Circuit Counselor and or Vacancy Pastor.
- ✘ Don't abandon the pastor once he is installed!

WHY YOUR CONGREGATION NEEDS A VACANCY PASTOR

Your congregation is now without a full-time pastor. There may be many reasons why he left, and you may be in a period of grief and questioning for a time. You want to get another pastor quickly; but the reality is that it may be more likely over a year before the pastor the Lord wants to send you is able to be with you. In the meantime, what happens to the ministry in your congregation?

Certainly, the people of your congregation will need to pitch in more than at any other time and help to do the work that needs to be done. Some of it will be work that you are already used to doing in your boards and committees. But some of the work was done by the pastor, and it still needs to be done even when you don't have a full-time pastor with you.

These are some of the more obvious things a pastor does:

- Study/prepare/deliver messages based on God's Word / lead worship services
- Prepare / lead Bible studies
- Teach the Confirmation classes, of both youth and adults
- Visit the sick and shut-ins in their home, hospital nursing home, and take Holy Communion to them
- Administer the Sacrament of Holy Baptism
- Perform weddings and funerals
- Counsel with those desiring to be members, those having spiritual difficulties or facing difficult decisions in life.

Some of the less obvious things a pastor does are:

- Counsel people in various ways, from grief counseling to pre-marital counseling to simply listening, advising and praying
- He is familiar with all the procedures of the congregation, from borrowing chairs to becoming a member
- Leads devotions in Nursing homes, in private homes at meetings
- Represents the congregation in the community and to the District
- Represents the District and the Synod to the congregation
- Attends many meetings, especially Voters' Assembly ,Council , Boards and Committees
- Encourages all the members of the congregation in their various ministry activities
- Coordinates the entire range of activities of the congregation
- Prepares and supervises calendar

While you may think that having someone preach on Sunday mornings takes care of things, it is apparent from these lists that there is much more that a pastor does in your congregation. Nor is it sufficient to say "we have covered the worship times and the sick - we don't have to worry about anything else." Without a pastor, you will soon experience the feeling that "we could do this better with a pastor here." And when the pastor whom the Lord of the Church is sending you does come, you and he will find that if you can take care of more of these items during the vacancy, the transition into your new phase of ministry together will be less stressful and more enjoyable for you all .

This is why our Synod has developed the "vacancy pastor" system. The election of a Vacancy Pastor for your congregation should be your first priority. Your District Representative will help you in that process. While the details of how you may work with a vacancy pastor are outlined elsewhere in the "Call Procedures" document, let it be sufficient to say here that a vacancy pastor will help your congregation to function better in these areas and many others during the time you are waiting for that next pastor the Lord will send you. Your ministry among your people will be more fulfilling and less frustrating for you all.

TEN STRATEGIES OF SATAN THAT WILL SABOTAGE THE MINISTRY OF YOUR CONGREGATION WHEN YOUR PASTOR LEAVES

1. Some members decide that there is no pastor in the world that can hold a candle to your former pastor, and they will let everyone know it given the slightest provocation. *There's nothing like the leaven of denial to infect the whole congregation with strife and division.*
2. Request the former pastor to return to perform official acts (weddings, baptisms, funerals, etc.), of members of your congregation. *This sends a clear message to everyone that the person making the request does not really accept the current man as the pastor of the congregation.* Exception: The Church Council may properly request a former pastor to return to preach or speak at an anniversary celebration of the congregation.
3. The former pastor continues to take an active (but “reduced” or “advisory”) role in congregational life throughout the vacancy, and even after the new pastor comes. *Who really is the pastor of this congregation when this happens?*
4. Church members are often in communication with the former pastor, especially when they don't like something about the new pastor or his style of ministry; the former pastor is often solicited for his opinions, no matter where he lives or how involved he is. *Doesn't this sound like the way children of divorced parents might behave? So who is surprised when the pastors involved feel toward each other and the congregation like victims of divorce?*
5. The Call Committee or the Congregation is so anxious to get a new pastor as soon as possible that they seek for ways to shortcut the District Call Procedures and Guidelines. *Even though the Procedures and Guidelines are not necessarily part of anyone's Bylaws, they arise from the wisdom of thousands of congregations calling pastors over decades of experience. Don't be too quick to shortcut them!*
6. “The Vacancy Pastor is taking such good care of the congregation that we think we might extend him the call; and when we have explored the possibility with him, he has been receptive to the idea”. *Someone should ask, “Why is a man so anxious to take a call but not leave the area? Is he taking better care of us than the congregation he is called to serve? Have we examined his Self-Evaluation Tool and Personal Information Form answers as closely as we have some of the others on the Call List the District President has given us?”*
7. “We don't think we need to go through a Demographic study during this vacancy – we know our area well”. *And when you go to the doctor and he wants to do some tests to help him in his evaluation of your physical condition, sometimes you refuse him, too – but he still needs that information to discuss your health intelligently with you.*
8. “We'd like to wait until the new pastor gets here to do the Demographic and the self-study in Natural Church Development”. *There is something to be said for including the new pastor as part of the process; but if it takes you a year to get him and another year to get used to him, two years have passed in which you have done nothing to examine your current situation and your future possibilities.*
9. “Our pastor left under such a cloud that lots of people are hurting and we need a lot of healing – therefore we need a new pastor right away”. *It may be that your congregation would be better served by a short-term pastor whose main task would be healing; once that is well underway, you can begin to look into the more distant future with a pastor who can lead you that way. Please speak to the District President about these possibilities.*
10. “We don't need a vacancy pastor. If someone preaches on Sunday mornings and the Elders make the visits and the Trustees keep up the property and the Treasurer pays the bills, we'll get by until the new pastor comes”. *And if you shift the car into neutral but leave the motor running, you can play the radio and keep the air conditioner going but you'll never reach your destination!*

SECTION 5: SELC DISTRICT GUIDELINES FOR CALLING PASTORS

DEFINITION AND SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Definition.

A vacancy occurs when a pastor ceases to serve a congregation. This may occur through his death, resignation or rightful removal, or his acceptance of a call to another congregation.

Scriptural background.

While Scripture does not speak specifically of pastoral vacancies, the passages of God's Word are to be applied that deal with the congregation and its ministry, as well as those in which the Lord's will as to the conduct of Christians toward one another is laid down in more general terms. On the basis of these Scripture passages, it is clearly God's will that:

- ✘ A congregation should have a pastor at all times, also during the period between permanent pastorates. Titus 1:5.
- ✘ The vacancy pastor is to be regarded as the pastor of the congregation in the full sense of the term, though his tenure of office is only temporary. 1 Cor. 4:1; 9:14; 1 Timothy 5:17.
- ✘ The congregation is to function as a true Christian congregation also under the guidance of the vacancy pastor. Acts 2:42; 8:4; Romans 12:11.
- ✘ All things are to be done in an orderly fashion before, during, and at the conclusion of a vacancy. 1 Cor. 14:40; 1 Peter 4:15.
- ✘ The law of Christian love is binding also upon congregations having a vacancy and should regulate all decisions and actions in permanently solving their particular problem (Romans 12:10; 1 Cor. 10:32; 13:4,5), whether this requires calling a permanent pastor, sharing a pastor with another congregation, or adopting a more radical solution such as amalgamation or dissolution.
- ✘ The welfare of the Church-at-large dare never be forgotten in the congregation's deliberations during a vacancy. Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:19.
- ✘ A vacancy should be borne with patience, since it is the Lord Jesus who rules His Church and gives pastors and teachers at His good pleasure. Rom. 8:28; Eph. 4:11.
- ✘ A vacancy may offer the congregation an excellent opportunity to grow and develop spiritually, especially in applying one of the great truths of Scripture – the universal priesthood of all believers. 1 Peter 2:9.

PROVISIONS OF THE SYNODICAL HANDBOOK

Congregations that have joined Synod have thereby also agreed to permit the officers of the Synod, specifically the District President and his representatives on the circuit level, and the Circuit Counselor, to guide them in their vacancy and calling procedure, so that the interests of the entire work of the Kingdom may be served in accordance with the objectives of Synod (Constitution of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Article III 1,2,6,7,8,9,10; (pg 11,12) and Bylaws 4.4.3; 4.4.5; 4.4.6; 5.2.3 (Pg 190, 192, 197)

Congregations that are not voting members of Synod but are served by pastors trained through the common efforts of all sister congregations, are morally obligated to follow the same practice as voting congregations in this matter.

In pursuance of the “Objectives of Synod,” Constitution Article III, 7: “Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith

PROCEDURE WHEN A VACANCY OCCURS

As soon as the pastoral office is vacant in a congregation,

- ✘ The chairman of the congregation is to notify the District President and the Circuit Counselor of the vacancy. In the case of a subsidized congregation, the executive secretary of the Mission Board is also to be notified at once.
- ✘ Through its chairman, the congregation is to arrange for a meeting with the District President or his representative, to discuss vacancy procedures and the choosing of a vacancy pastor.
- ✘ Ordinarily, the pastor leaving the congregation will continue to serve until his farewell service. However, all arrangements for serving the congregation during the vacancy, as well as all church council and congregational meetings, are to be handled by the District Representative or vacancy pastor. In emergency situations, emergency measures should be taken by the congregation in consultation with the District Representative.
- ✘ In the event that the vacancy is due to the death of the pastor, the congregation should be encouraged to exercise Christian sympathy and love to address immediate needs of the pastor’s widow and family.

THE VACANCY PASTOR

At a meeting of the congregation, attended by the District Representative (District President, Vice President, or Circuit Counselor), a pastor of a sister congregation or other minister of the Gospel in fraternal relation with the congregation is to be elected as vacancy pastor in the manner in which elections are conducted in that congregation. He becomes vacancy pastor upon his acceptance of this limited Call and the approval of his congregation or supervising board.

The vacancy pastor is to be regarded as pastor of the vacant congregation until a new pastor has been installed.

- ✘ It is the duty of the vacancy pastor to have the general oversight of the congregation in accordance with God’s Word.
- ✘ The congregation, in consultation with the vacancy pastor, should assign of the work of the congregation as possible to its own member. This includes clerical work (bulletins, records), visitation (sick and shut-ins, prospective and delinquent members), instruction (Bible Class, Confirmation instruction, Sunday School teacher training), youth counseling, and Communion announcement. The congregation is encouraged to make full use of all its resources in carrying on the church’s full program to the best of their abilities.

- ✘ The pastorally vacant congregation is to adjust its schedule to the situation of the vacancy pastor. If he is unable to preach in every service, he may, with the consent of the congregation, use substitute preachers. Taped sermons or prepared sermons to be read by an elder or teacher in reading services are other possibilities in emergency situations. No essential meetings are to be dropped. Every attempt should be made to arrange those meetings which the vacancy pastor must attend in such a way that he can be present at a number of meetings on one trip to the congregation. He is in charge of the solemnization of the official acts of the congregation (baptisms, weddings, funerals, etc.), either personally or through a representative.
- ✘ The congregation is to give the vacancy pastor a salary as well as remuneration for expenses incurred in serving the parish. Remuneration will depend upon the scope of the duties. If the Vacancy Pastor is conducting all worship services, attending major meetings and handling the basic pastoral needs, then he should receive at least one half of the salary and housing allowance according to District Guidelines. If he is handling basic supervision then a “retaining fee” should be negotiated (e.g. \$25.00/day plus and extra \$50.00 for each ½ day of involvement in the congregation) The normal remuneration is \$125 per worship service. The Circuit Counselor should also be reimbursed for the expenses he incurs in attending the various meetings of the congregation, and rendering other service during the vacancy.
- ✘ During the pastoral vacancy a copy of the minutes of all official Church Council, congregational Voters’ Assembly, or Call meetings should be sent to the District President and the Circuit Counselor.

THE CALLING OF A NEW PASTOR

The list of candidates.

All Pastors of the LC-MS in good standing are hypothetically available for each congregation’s Call List. All communicant members of the vacant congregation have the right to suggest possible candidates. The names of all such candidates suggested by the members shall be sent to the District President and to the Circuit Counselor, together with any details as to the special needs of the parish. It is suggested that two to three weeks should be allotted within the parish for the gathering of these names.

In conformity with the Divine regulation that all things be done “decently and in order”, and complying with the provisions of the Synodical Handbook, Bylaw 2.5, the congregation shall request a list of candidates from the District President. The District President will seek to have a full picture of the church’s needs and the qualifications of the various pastors, and then he will present a list of Candidates that he feels meets the desired qualifications for the Congregation.

The District President shall give due consideration to all names submitted by the congregation. From this list, as well as from those whom he feels would best serve the Lord as pastor of the parish in question, he shall, as soon as he is able, select at least five names of pastors which he will submit to the congregation, together with a characterization, biographical materials, qualifications, etc. This is the list from which the congregation is to call. No names are to be added to this list without permission of the District President. The time between submitting of names from the Congregation to the time of the Call List, depends greatly on the availability of information that needs to be requested and received from other LC-MS Districts.

Upon receipt, the Call Committee will diligently study the information on each Candidate, the Call Committee may contact the Candidates to clarify or add to information received from the District President.

The calling of the pastor.

At a meeting of the congregations Voters' Assembly properly announced as a "Call Meeting" and convened in accordance with the regulations of the congregation, the list of candidates received from the District President, together with a brief characterization, will be presented by the Call Committee.. The District President or his representative will attend this meeting. No candidate is to be called unless the name has been cleared by the District President. After a discussion of the candidates, ballot votes are to be taken until one candidate has an absolute majority of all votes. The Chairman will seek to make the man chosen to be declared the unanimous choice of the congregation.

The congregation must also decide on the terms of the call, both what will be expected of the pastor and what the congregation will furnish in salary, housing or housing allowance, utilities, pension, mileage, car replacement, and the like. The congregation should also designate monies to enable the pastor to attend District and Circuit Pastor's Conferences, Circuit Convocations and Forums, as well as for the pastor's continuing education. None of these items should be left undesignated, with the comment "we'll negotiate this when the pastor comes." Arrangements should be made to have sufficient funds on hand to cover the cost of the transportation of the pastor's family and personal effects. In the case of subsidized congregations, the Mission Board makes the decisions in these matters.

Only one Call may be issued at the Voters' Assembly. It is not appropriate for the Voter's Assembly to designate an "order in Calling, just in case one declines our Call." Many conditions and circumstances can change in a matter of weeks. Should the Called Candidate return the Call. The above procedure should begin anew.

The Call Documents should be prepared by the Call Committee in Cooperation with the District Representative and signed by the designated officers of the congregation. An accompanying letter shall be drawn up by the congregation and vacancy pastor, giving the pastor-elect information on the congregation, its growth, program, special needs, mission challenge, housing facilities, and the like. All this information should be strictly factual. A copy of the Supplement to the Diploma of Vocation, the Information Sheet, and the accompanying letter should be sent to the District President.

The congregation may offer the pastor-elect the opportunity to visit with the call committee and members of the church council at the congregation's expense before deciding whether or not he will accept the call.

If the call is not accepted, the congregation should inform the Circuit Counselor and the District President, and proceed as before to call another pastor from their list. If he also declines, they should ask the District President for additional names and he shall proceed as above. Since the choice of a pastor is always a matter of far-reaching importance, the congregation will proceed prayerfully and deliberately, patiently submitting to the delays which the selection of the pastor entails and remembering that the Lord of the Church will bring them the pastor He has in mind when His time is right.

In the event that the congregation decides to extend a call to a seminary graduate or pastoral candidate accepted by colloquy, the Diploma of Call should be filled in and signed, leaving blank the line indicating the name of the man to be called. This, together, with the Information Sheet required by the Board of Assignments, and the accompanying letter, should be sent to the District President who will represent them before the Board of Assignments. In calling candidates, certain definite deadlines must be observed. The District President will supply this information on request

CHECK LIST FOR THE CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS

- Inform the Circuit Counselor and the District President that the Pastor has accepted another Call, resigned or retired.
- With the District President, make arrangements for a preliminary meeting with an official of the SELC District to discuss these “Guidelines” and call procedures.
- Read and discuss these “Guidelines” in a meeting of the congregation and / or Call Committee so that all may understand the normal District procedures.
- Check the Constitution of the congregation to find out the congregational procedures for calling a pastor.
- Seek with District assistance a Vacancy Pastor
- Make arrangements for a vacancy pastor and his compensation. Together with the Vacancy Pastor, decide how you will reimburse him for mileage and other expenses. (For example, some congregations arrange a retainer of \$100 per week, plus mileage, plus \$50 for each half-day of work at the congregation, plus a stipend on a per-event basis.)
- When you have reached an agreement together with the Vacancy Pastor, write the details in a Letter of Agreement signed by the Vacancy Pastor and Congregational Chairman; send a copy of the letter to the District President and Circuit Counselor.
- Send a copy of the current budget a complete balance sheet and a copy of the congregation’s Constitution and Bylaws to the District President.
- Work through the Demographic Study of the community with the assigned Demographics Consultant.
- Work through the Congregational Self-Study and preliminary “Natural Church Development” material with the assigned Facilitator.
- After the completion of the Demographics phase, and after the results of the Self-Study have been shared with and discussed by the congregation, ask the members to suggest names of pastors who may fit the needs of the congregation that have surfaced in these studies. Members should be given several weeks to suggest names of qualified pastors. This can be publicized through bulletin and public announcements.
- Send the names of suggested pastors, along with the completed Self-Study results, to the District President.

NOTES ON EXPENSES:

Please be aware that the District Representative should be reimbursed for his mileage and expenses by the congregation if he is asked/required by the congregation to attend a meeting or event that is outside the scope of District functions that the Circuit Counselor would normally fulfill. His mileage and expenses for the normal functions of his office will be reimbursed by the SELC District

Also be aware that the congregation is responsible for all costs involving the Demographics study and the Natural Church Development consultation. Please consult with our district facilitators in those areas to work out the details.

CHECKLIST FOR THE CONGREGATIONAL CALL COMMITTEE

- ❑ Fill out the Information Sheets that will accompany the Call Document.
- ❑ Prepare a letter or other information to be sent with the Call Document to the Pastor-Elect. Describe the congregation, the facilities, the community, the schools, housing , and challenges and opportunities in your area
- ❑ Make nomination forms available to the congregation. Solicit and collect the forms from congregation members and send them to the District Representative to give to the District President.
- ❑ Receive Call List; study, evaluate, investigate, report objectively. It is inappropriate for the Call Committee to eliminate names from the Call List or to present a scaled down listing as received from the District President. Each Candidate is to be given equal consideration.
- ❑ After you have sent all necessary information to the District Representative, contact him and the District President to set a mutually agreeable date for the first call meeting
- ❑ After each call meeting, send the District President copies of:
 - The “supplement to Diploma of Vacation”
 - The “Information Sheets”
 - All correspondence with the Pastor-elect
- ❑ After the Call has been sent, it is permissible to make arrangements for a visit from the Pastor-elect and his wife, if he is married
- ❑ After the call is accepted, contact the District President and the Circuit Counselor to make arrangements for the service of installation.

NOTE: After the District President has supplied the Call Committee with names of candidates, the Call Committee may contact these candidates to clarify responses on the candidates “Self-Evaluation Tool” forms. We suggest that this contact may best be done by telephone.

CHECKLIST FOR DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVES

- In tandem with the District President, contact the President of the congregation with a view to calling a congregational meeting. At this meeting,
 - Discuss arrangements for a Demographics Consultant and “Natural Church Development” Facilitator.
 - Review the entire situation in the congregation so that you may discover all of the special needs of the congregation and the type of pastor that may be needed. Lead the people through an overview of the Calling Procedures and Guidelines documents.
 - Review the doctrine of the Holy Ministry with the congregation so that they might know what to expect of a pastor.
 - Explain the duties of a Vacancy Pastor and work with Congregational leaders to discover local Pastors who may be qualified and willing to serve.
 - Receive the names of any candidates that the congregation may want to suggest. Every member should be encouraged to express his ideas if he has any before the names are sent to the District President.
 - Encourage Congregational participation., Use the District nomination form filling it out completely especially how the name came to be known and what qualities make the man suited to be Pastor of this particular congregation.
- Send the name of the Vacancy Pastor to the District President.
- Instruct the Call Committee to send a list of any proposed names together with any information you may have to the District President. You ought to allow at least three weeks for him to get the necessary information. He will study the list, add or subtract names, and send you a list of at least five candidates from which the congregation should call. Explain to the congregational president and the committee that no names are to be added to the call list after it comes from the District President without his approval and that of the congregation.
- The Call Committee should study all materials (PIF/SET) received and encourage full study by the whole congregation. It is appropriate for the Call Committee to contact the Candidates for clarification or further information. Remember, the Congregation is depending on the Holy Spirit working through the Church to Call a Pastor, not hire a preacher.
- Instruct the Call Committee to send the name of the person called to the District President together with a copy of the “Supplement to the Call” and the “Information Sheet.” NOTE: The call documents are now obtained on line. Hopefully the church will have a good computer and printer or at least one of the call committee members should have access to one. The website is: <http://calls.cph.org> our User name is: LCMSselc our Password is: det7up9c This will install the documents into the computer. The district president will supply you with the parchment paper that is to be used for the first page of the document.
- Instruct the Call Committee to send the call, Registered Mail, to the pastor-elect, together with a letter telling him about the congregation, the field, the challenges, etc.
- As soon as you receive word that he has either accepted or declined the call, be certain that the District President is notified.

- ❑ If the pastor-elect declines the call, have the congregation call again from the same call list unless they insist on a new one, in which case contact the District President. If there are only three names on the list, the District President will construct a new list.
- ❑ If the pastor-elect accepts the call, plan the installation with the congregational officers, the District President, and the area Vice-President.

Note: If any of these steps are delegated to the vacancy pastor, be sure that he follows through. He is acting as YOUR representative. Be sure that the District President is kept informed.

SUGGESTION OF NAME OF PASTOR FOR CONGREGATIONAL CALL LIST

For _____ Lutheran Church

City _____ State _____

Members of a congregation who wish to suggest names of pastors to be considered by the SELC District President for our Call List are asked to complete this form. When it is completed, please give it to the President of the Congregation. It will be forwarded to our District President along with any other suggestions for candidates. Be sure to sign it – no anonymous suggestions will be received.

Please note that item #2 below is very important. If you provide no answer to #2, this may decrease the consideration that can be given to your suggestion.

The District President makes the final decision about which names of pastors will be on the Call List for our congregation.

1. Having carefully and prayerfully considered the total ministry needs of our congregation and the are in which we serve, I wish to suggest the following pastor for consideration by the SELC District President in preparing the Call List for our congregation:

Name: _____

Now living/serving in: _____

2. I think he will assist us in our ministry for the following reasons:

3. I have known this pastor personally, from this place, and for this long:

4. I do not know this pastor personally, but I am using the following source for the information on which I am basing this suggestion:

Signature: _____ Phone: _____

Date submitted: _____

PROCEDURE AT CONGREGATIONAL CALL MEETINGS

- ❑ The District Representative begins with prayer, Scripture, and a devotion that stress trust in the Holy Spirit's guidance, the work of the church and the office of the pastoral ministry.
- ❑ Review procedure – how we got to this point.
- ❑ The Call Committee presents names of candidates from the Call List along with any additional information from the Call Committee's investigation and evaluation..
- ❑ Ask for discussion of these names *in the light of the self-study and congregational needs*.
- ❑ Elect by secret ballot, asking each voting member present to write one name. If no majority* is reached, drop the name with the lowest number of votes and repeat process until an election is achieved. **An absolute (51%) of voting members present is sufficient for election, unless the constitution or bylaws of the congregation specify otherwise.*
- ❑ Ask that the election be made unanimous.
- ❑ The Call Committee should have prepared recommended salary packages for each of the candidates, based on the SELC District Guidelines for Pastoral Compensation. They should present the appropriate package for approval by the congregation at this time.
- ❑ Ask the congregation if the Call Committee is authorized to invite the Pastor-elect and his wife to make a personal visit.
- ❑ If at all possible before the meeting adjourns, the District Representative phones the pastor-elect to inform him of his election and to ask if there is any reason why he cannot consider the Call at this time. If there is no reason, proceed with the business of the congregation. If he cannot consider the call, ask the congregation to reconsider its vote and proceed with another election.
- ❑ Instruct the call committee to proceed with issuing the formal call (the District Representative may assist in this).
 - A. Fill out Diploma of Vocation (obtained on line, parchment supplied by District President— directions in checklist for District Representatives), and get necessary signatures.
 - B. Fill out Supplement to the Call document, listing details, compensation, etc., and get necessary signatures.
 - C. Fill out Information Sheet (in advance of meeting) and get necessary signatures.
 - D. Write a letter to the pastor-elect explaining the situation in the congregation setting forth challenges, needs, etc., as discussed during the self-study process. It is helpful to suggest to the pastor-elect that he should feel free to discuss this call with the District President or the Circuit Counselor.
 - E. Send copies of the Supplement to the Call and the Information Sheet, as well as the call letter, to the District President.

CHECKLIST FOR THE PASTOR-ELECT

- I have acknowledged receipt of the Call to the Calling congregation, and to the SELC President
- I have notified the District President and Circuit Counselor of the District I am now serving
- (if in a subsidized congregation) I have notified the Executive Secretary of the Mission Board I am now serving
- I have notified the congregation I am currently serving
- I have discussed the Call with my wife and family
- I have given this congregation opportunities to respond and express their opinions
- I have sought the counsel and advice of brothers in the ministry
- I have prayed fervently for God's direction in this matter
- I have given my two Calls an objective evaluation; taken sufficient time to consider all aspects
- I have not kept the new Call an unduly long time; but have given this priority in time and consideration
- When I accept or decline the call, I have notified the following people
 - The congregation I serve now
 - The Calling Congregation, with a brief explanation for my decision
 - My current circuit counselor
 - My current District President
 - The President of the SELC District

CHECKLIST FOR THE PASTOR ACCEPTING A CALL:

- I have asked my current congregation for a peaceful release.
- I have planned a timely departure from this Congregation and a timely arrival in my new field of ministry.
- I have asked my current District President for a transfer to my new district or I have asked my District President to authorize my installation in my new charge.
- I have left arrangements for vacancy ministry in my current congregation in the hands of their Circuit Counselor.
- I have attended meetings in my current charge only to discuss my leaving and give a final report of my ministry.
- I have made sure that all records and congregational lists, etc., are complete and up to date.
- I have settled all personal matters, including outstanding debts; I have returned everything I have borrowed.
- I have written a “farewell” sermon that is a gospel sermon, encouraging to the people of the congregation I am leaving.
- I have spoken with my new Circuit Counselor and District President to talk about my new congregation.

Installations in the SELC are normally held midday Saturdays to facilitate attendance of those who must travel, and for the Pastors who have responsibilities for their own Congregations on Sunday.

PLANNING SHEET FOR THE PASTOR'S ARRIVAL AND INSTALLATION
THE WORSHIP SERVICE

- Date and Time _____
- Preacher _____
- Liturgist _____
- Lectors _____
- Installer _____
- Acolytes _____
- Crucifer _____
- Organist _____
- Choirs _____
- Service Folder _____
- Publicity
 - Home congregation _____
 - Other congregations _____
 - Pastors _____
 - Special Invitations _____
 - Local Paper _____
- Photographer _____
- Paraments (red) _____
- Altar Flowers _____
- Flowers for Pastor-elect's wife, children, etc. _____
- Recognitions, introductions _____
- Ushers _____
- Reserved seats (Pastor's family, Church Officers, Clergy) _____
- Chair(s) _____
- Procession _____
- Special requests _____
- Robing Room _____

THE RECEPTION

- Reception Line _____
- Head Table – Decorations _____
- Clergy _____
- Welcome Cake _____
- Refreshments _____
- Program _____
- Shower _____
- Food / Parsonage _____

THE PARSONAGE

- Painting / redecorating _____
- Cleaning _____
- Appliances _____
- Repairs _____

THE CHURCH

- Office _____
- Vestments _____
- Desk / Chair _____
- Filing Cabinet(s) _____
- Bookcases _____
- Equipment _____

MISCELLANEOUS

- Starting date of Pastor's Salary _____
- Travel and moving expenses _____
- Service Participants _____
- Circuit Counselor's expense and honorarium _____

INTEGRATING THE NEW PASTOR

- Into the congregation _____
- Into the community _____
- With other pastors _____
- Integrating his wife and family _____

