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## SECTION 3

# *The Call Committee is Selected*

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### **Readiness to Enter the Call Process**

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The decision that a congregation is ready to move forward into the call process is a mutual decision of the bishop and the congregation council. The decision will be based upon the sense of health and strength of the congregation. Often this will involve the completion of a ministry assessment and/or a conflict resolution process, plus the checklist. When the bishop and the council agree that the congregation is ready to move into the call process, a representative of the Office of the Bishop will meet with the council to review the process for forming a call committee.

### **The Role of the Call Committee**

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The role of a call committee is of critical importance as it leads the congregation through the process of discerning God's will for this congregation and its mission. The committee is given the responsibility and privilege of interviewing the potential pastoral candidates and selecting a pastor to present to the council for recommendation to the congregation. This is a holy task that is to be done prayerfully and carefully. It recognizes that the church's call to a pastor to serve as its shepherd is much different than a hiring process.

The foremost question for the call committee in its beginning is: What is the mission, ministry and future to which God is beckoning this congregation? In other words, what is God's will for this congregation? The call committee leads the congregation in the development of a mission profile described more fully in Section 5 of this manual.

When the profile is complete and a call list is prepared by the Office of the Bishop, the call committee's focus becomes: Is this the person God desires to shepherd this congregation in its particular mission and setting?

### **Process for Forming a Call Committee**

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The congregation's constitution provides a process for electing or appointing a call committee of usually six to eight persons. Sometimes there are provisions for selecting alternates to serve should a member of the call committee become unable to serve. The congregation council will carefully review procedures for selecting members to serve on the call committee.

Forming a call committee is a task of discernment. The call committee should be as representative of the whole congregation as is possible, giving consideration to the inclusion of newer members and longer term members, older and younger members (perhaps a youth), ethnic diversity, and a balance of female and male members. Persons who represent various ministries and programs of the congregation would be an important factor in the selection process.

Included at the end of this Section 3 is a most important resource entitled ***Guidelines for Choosing Call Committee Members***. The council will want to review it carefully and share this information with all who are involved in the selection of nominees for the call committee. This is an important selection process and it is never wise to simply ask for volunteers to serve on a call committee. It should also be noted that if the call process is for an associate or assistant pastor, the senior pastor serves as a member of the call committee.

When the call committee has been appointed or elected, the council notifies the Office of the Bishop and provides the name and contact information for the committee's chairperson, or, an initial contact person on the call committee until the committee selects its chairperson. A copy of a service for the ***Installation of a Call Committee with Prayers for a Shepherd*** is included at the end of this Section 3.

The first meeting of the call committee is scheduled with the Assistant to the Bishop for Leadership and the dean, who attend to provide overview to the call committee about their role, privilege, expectations and process ahead.

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*Resource A*

## *Guidelines for Choosing Members of the Call Committee*

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Those responsible for selecting persons as nominees for the call committee have a very important task and should prayerfully approach their work seeking God's guidance. The constitution should be reviewed to determine any restrictions relating to the number of persons to serve on the committee, the method of election or appointment, whether alternates will be selected, and the nominating process that may be required. It is never wise to simply solicit volunteers for a call committee. Rather, a careful and thoughtful discernment process should be followed to ensure that the best possible candidates are considered and selected to serve.

**General characteristics and expectations of ALL persons who serve on the call committee include the following:**

- **Strong evidence of faith** -Faithful worship participation should be a prerequisite for any person chosen to serve on the call committee. These people should be persons of prayer who will faithfully and carefully seek to discern God's will for this congregation.
- **Active in the life of the congregation** - call committee members should be involved the life and ministry of the congregation beyond worship, and familiar with its programs and activities. They will represent the importance of these ministries to potential pastors.
- **Positive and enthusiastic spirit** -The call committee will represent the congregation to the pastoral candidates during the interview process. They should have a deep sense of the vision and mission of the congregation. This is not a place for chronic complainers.
- **Faithful stewards** -Those who serve on the call committee should recognize that all that they have and are belongs to God. As good stewards, they are persons who share their gifts of time, talent and treasures in the ministry of God's Kingdom.
- **Commitment and follow-through** -The call committee is charged with a significant responsibility on behalf of the whole congregation. Meetings may be frequent and a willingness to share and participate faithfully in the work of the committee is critical.

**Further, the call committee should be as representative of the whole congregation as is possible.**

**Special consideration should be given to including:**

Newer members and longer term members; Older and younger members, perhaps including a youth; Ethnic and cultural diversity; Balance of female and male members; Representation of various ministries and programs of the congregation.

**Special notes:**

1. Congregation members who are also employees or staff members of this congregation should not serve on the call committee because of potential conflict of interest.
2. Rostered persons, active or retired, or their spouse/partner should not serve on a call committee. There are other ways for these folks to share their input. An exception is that the senior pastor serves on the call committee to call an additional rostered leader.
3. It is not necessary for council members to serve on the call committee, and if desired, the maximum should be one; the council president should not serve on the call committee.

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*Resource B*  
***Installation of a Call Committee***  
*with Prayers for a Shepherd*

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*P= Presiding Minister A= Assisting Minister R= Call Committee C= Congregation*

*The order follows the Creed and replaces the Prayer of the Church. The congregation may be seated.*

P. Sisters and brothers in Christ, God has called us to a new time in our life as \_\_\_\_\_ Church. It is a time for reflection and prayer, a time for self-examination and seeking, a time for expectation and hope. We need a shepherd to lead our flock, and God has promised that he will provide a shepherd for us.

A. The following persons have been appointed/elected to serve as the call committee of our church.

*As the names are read, those persons present come forward to the chancel.*

P. Dear friends, you have been duly *appointed/elected* to serve as the call committee for this congregation in order to seek a pastor to shepherd and lead us. Sacred scripture guides us in our task, to seek a pastor who strives for righteousness and godliness, faith and love, endurance and gentleness - -a pastor who is a servant as Christ himself was a servant--a pastor who is not domineering or quarrelsome, but who leads with care and concern for God's flock--a pastor who is filled with the Holy Spirit and a trustworthy steward of the mysteries of God. Yours is a spiritual endeavor on behalf of this congregation. Are you willing therefore to be open to the Spirit's leading, and, by prayer and holy conversation, to undertake this calling to seek a shepherd for us?

R. **Yes, by the help of God.**

P. Will you be diligent in your seeking, careful in your listening, purposeful in your questioning, and respectful in all that you do?

R. **Yes, by the help of God.**

P. Will you seek the Lord's guidance through Holy Scripture and prayer and in your deliberations with your fellow committee members until you are brought to one mind and one will in Christ and have discerned God's shepherd for us?

R. **Yes, by the help of God.**

*All stand.*

A. Let us pray for those who are being installed today and for our church as we seek the Lord's guidance during this special time.

Almighty God, you alone are the great Shepherd of the sheep, and we turn to you to lead and guide us in all things. Our trust and our hope is in you.

C. **You are the way, the truth, and the life.**

A. As you have raised up faithful servants of your holy word to tend your flock in each time and place, send us now, we pray, a faithful shepherd to lead our flock.

C. **Send us a shepherd, O Lord.**

A. Send us a shepherd of goodness and grace, of strength and faith, of righteousness in your sight.

C. **Send us a shepherd, O Lord.**

A. Send us a shepherd to comfort and care for us, to preach your word, to teach our children, to baptize and commune, to marry and counsel, to visit the sick and lay to rest, to guide us and pray for us.

C. **Send us a shepherd, O Lord.**

A. Give us a holy patience in this time of our seeking, a patience that trusts in you for our present care, knowing that you will bring our good work to fulfillment in your time.

C. **O Lord, hear our prayer.**

A. Keep us faithful in mission, regular in worship, responsible in stewardship, mindful of the needy, and diligent in prayer.

C. **O Lord, hear our prayer.**

A. Fill us all with your Holy Spirit and magnify our gifts of discernment, that we might follow your will and leading into a future yet unknown.

C. **O Lord, hear our prayer.**

A. Bless those who are especially called to serve on the call committee. Give them the gifts they need to seek and find the pastor of your own nurturing, the shepherd of your own choosing, that we might be fed by your holy word and sacraments and grow in faith and love and ministry.

C. **O Lord, hear our prayer.**

P. All these things we ask, O God, with whatever else we need, in the name of him who is the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord.

C. **Amen**

*The minister addresses the call committee.*

P. I now declare that you have been installed as the call committee of \_\_\_\_\_ Church. May God bring your good work to fulfillment and grace in Christ's name.

C. **Amen**

P. The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C. **And also with you.**

*All share the peace of the Lord.*

*The liturgy continues as is customary after the peace.*



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## SECTION 4

# *The Work of the Call Committee Begins*

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### **The Experience of Serving on a Call Committee**

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It is often reported that the experience of serving on a call committee is one of the most important and rewarding things that members of a congregation can do. They experience first-hand the working of God's Spirit through the whole process of discerning God's will for the congregation and the calling of its new pastor. It gives them an opportunity to see how the local congregation is vitally a part of the synod and the whole church.

In a very special way, members of a call committee participate in opening a new chapter in the life and ministry of a congregation. As a first step in the work of the call committee, the members of the committee will want to review the entirety of this manual, *Walking Together Through The Transition Process*, and the various resources provided.

Two resources are included at the end of this Section 4 to assist call committees in their work. The first, *The Call to Ministry*, will assist members of the committee to understand the very nature of God's calling to all people within the Church. The second resource is a short article on *Discerning God's Will*, which presents basics in the process of discernment. Finally, a set of *Five Devotions on Discernment from the Book of Acts* for the call committee (useful elsewhere too) will assist the committee to incorporate these ideas into their work and spiritual lives.

### **The Importance of Communication**

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Communicating regularly to the council and the congregation regarding the work and progress of the call committee helps keep everyone aware of how the process is moving along, and helps avoid the perception that things are being done in secret. Creative and frequent communication is a wonderful way to include everyone in the excitement of calling a new pastor!

The call committee should review the resource, Importance of Communication, located in the resources following the Introduction of this manual, for more information about communications. Some ideas include:

- Sharing a description and outline of the process;
- Posting summaries or copies of resources provided in *Walking Together Through The Transition Process* manual;
- Prayer petitions for the various stages of the call process to be used in worship;
- Temple Talks by various members of the call committee to share updates;
- Bulletin board displays showing the Time-Line Poster and providing information about the present work of the committee;
- Newsletter and bulletin articles; e-news updates;
- Visits to adult and youth Sunday School classes for conversation and sharing of news.

## Confidentiality

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While open and regular communication is a high priority, there are some parts of the call committee's responsibilities that are highly confidential in nature. During the interview stage of the call process, the call committee must keep all verbal and written information about each pastoral candidate strictly confidential. This means that committee members will need to establish ground rules and boundaries with their spouse/partner, family, the council, and the congregation at large.

Pastor-candidates place a great deal of trust in the ability of members of the call committee to keep confidences so as not to hinder their present ministries if they were not to receive a new call. It is inappropriate for call committee members to mention any information about candidates outside of the committee.

When a primary candidate has been identified by the call committee, only that candidate's name and information is to be shared with the council. It then becomes the council's role to decide whether to recommend the candidate to the congregation and to determine the process for introducing the candidate to the whole congregation.

The confidential information and the Rostered Minister Profile of the candidates who are not recommended to the council should be collected by the call committee chairperson and properly destroyed/shredded, or returned to a representative of the Office of the Bishop.

## Call Committee Expenses

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The congregation bears the responsibility for paying any expenses incurred by the call committee, including the costs involved in the travel, lodging and meals for pastoral candidates being interviewed by the call committee. The chairperson of the call committee works closely with the Treasurer of the congregation to assure that matters of confidentiality are maintained. Any travel and related expenses of call committee members incurred while doing the work of the Call Committee are to be reimbursed by the congregation.

It is the responsibility of the congregation council to authorize and provide in advance a budget line for call committee expenses. It should be understood that these expenses could well include the airline flights of pastoral candidates from various places in the United States and will include lodging expenses and meals. It is best to provide motel lodging for all candidates so that they may have their privacy, and confidentiality is maintained. It is inappropriate to place candidates in the homes of single persons. Confidentiality is broken when candidates are placed in homes that include family members who are not on the call committee.

The chairperson of the call committee should meet with the council to be certain that a budget line has been approved and that it is adequate for the call committee to do its work. Projections can be difficult because of uncertainty about where the pastor-candidates might live, but a reasonable figure can usually be determined in advance.



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## Resource A

# The Call to Ministry

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### The Call of All Christians

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I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in my Lord Jesus Christ or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has CALLED me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith just as he CALLS, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth.

*(Small Catechism, 3rd Article, Apostles' Creed)*

In our Baptism, the Holy Spirit enters our lives to fill us with God's Spirit and to give us the faith through which we receive God's free gifts of forgiveness and new life. In Baptism, we are called into a relationship with God and to a life of service to all the people God has made.

All those who are baptized are called to proclaim the Gospel and to follow Christ's example of humble service and love for others. There is no higher calling.

For the sake of good order in the church, some Christians are called to ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament.

### A Call to the Public Ministry of Word and Sacrament

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In order that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel.

*(Augsburg Confession, Article V)*

In the course of daily living, God provides many settings in which the people of God are to live out their vocation or calling: marriage and parenthood, civil service, occupations, the ordained ministry, to name a few. The Office of Pastor was given to the church as a way to see that the means of grace, the Word and sacraments, were made available to the people in a regular and orderly fashion. Lutherans believe and teach that God established the Office of Pastor and authorized its perpetuation by the church.

The Spirit is at work calling some people to serve as pastors. Lutherans believe there are two parts of the Spirit's call. There is both an internal and external dimension of the call. The *internal call* is the nudging by the Holy Spirit that an individual experiences that prompts one to ministry. The *external call* is the call of the church. In it, the church discerns and publicly recognizes a person's internal call and confirms it with a call to specific ministry. Both dimensions of the call are necessary for a person to have a valid call to the ordained ministry. A person's call to the Office of Pastor and his/her ability to perform the required tasks are developed and certified by the church through seminary training and ordination.

*It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call. (Augsburg Confession, Article XIV)*

The Lutheran reformers saw the necessity of good order and recognized ordination as the church's means to assure it. Ordination belongs to the church. It is the task and privilege of the church to determine the standards for ordination and to oversee the continuing fitness of its pastors for ministry. Therefore, individuals who are ordained and rostered place themselves under the life-long authority of the church.

## **A Call to a Particular Context for Ministry**

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*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I, send me!" (Isaiah 6:8-9a)*

All calls originate with God, but the church issues calls to specific ministry. Ordinarily, this is through a congregation. If a pastor is being called to specialized ministry in the world, the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or a Synod Council may issue a special call. The process of calling a pastor is very different than hiring an employee and should not be confused with secular hiring practices.

Lutherans firmly believe that the Holy Spirit plays the major role in the decision about who is the most appropriate person to provide pastoral ministry in any particular place. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Office of the Bishop, the Call Committee and pastoral candidates seek to discern God's will for the mission and ministry of a particular congregation.

## **Martin Luther's Advice to Those Seeking a Pastor**

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*Act in this way: first beseech God with prayers, both individual and in common. For this is a great undertaking, and the magnitude of it, rather than its novelty, impresses me. When you have so prayed, have no doubt that God to whom you have prayed is faithful and will give what you ask, opening to the one who knocks and granting to the one who seeks (Matt. 7:8).*

*Thus you may be assured that you are not pushing this matter, but being pushed in it. Then call and come together freely. Then let those who are leaders among you lay hands upon them, and certify and commend them to the people and the church or community. In this way let them become your bishops, ministers, or pastors. Amen. (Concerning the Ministry, Luther's Works, 40:40)*

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## *Resource B*

# *Thoughts on the Call Process*

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*The following is an excerpt from an individual who recently served as Chair of a Call Committee.*

I had the wonderful opportunity to be the Chairperson of the Call Committee for Calvary Lutheran Church. I have to say that this was probably the most fulfilling service experience I have ever had in the church. Here are my thoughts on what made my personal experience—as well as the wonderful end result—so exceptional.

1. Choose the right committee members. I spent time in prayer and in consultation with other church leaders in order to choose an appropriate committee. Members had to represent all three services, both genders, and a variety of ages. I also invited new, as well as, long-time members. The one thing they had in common was that they were all very faithful in worship and seemed to have only the best interest of the church at heart. When I asked them to consider being part of the committee, I was very upfront about the commitment. I let them know that the time frame was open-ended. I also did not accept answers immediately. Instead, I asked that they go home, talk to others in their families--and pray out it. I have to say—this process lead to an amazing group of outstanding dedicated and spirit-filled members.
2. Follow the Process, as outlined in the guidelines provided by the synod. The Call Process packet is outstanding. Read it. Then read it again. Follow it. Most importantly—USE THE DEVOTIONS! We began our meetings with the suggested devotions from the book of Acts. If you think you don't have time for the devotions, think again! You do Not have the time to waste in meetings with committee members who do not understand that hearing the whispers of the Holy Spirit is the most important factor in guiding you! In fact, our first couple of meetings focused on learning how the disciples came to choose a replacement for Judas and how the early Christians chose their pastors. If it was good enough for them, it must certainly be good enough for us! We did not draw lots...but we did have wonderful discussions on how we each hear the Holy spirit in our lives. Through these devotions and conversations, we grow to know, to trust, and to respect one another. This became crucial in our working together to choose our new pastor.
3. Call on the synod for support. We had the pleasure of having Pastor Rita (Assistant to the Bishop) attend one of our meetings. She was able to direct us and answer the many technical questions we had regarding the nuts and bolts of the process. She remained available and very supportive via phone and email throughout the call process. At the end, when we were putting together the final contract with a tentative call, the Bishop was also available for guidance and final approval. It was surprising (though maybe it should not have been) that leaders of our synod were so available, so responsive, and so approachable.

4. DON'T RUSH THE PROCESS!!!! This is probably the most important piece of advice I could give. I had the opportunity to chair the second call for an associate pastor at Calvary. I took special care to learn from the mistakes of the previous call that proved not to be a success. I didn't care about who to blame, but rather what went wrong last time. Why did we end up calling someone who proved to be a poor fit? After reviewing the previous process, we found that some of the committee members stated they knew that the pastor we were calling was not a good fit. But we proceeded with the call anyway.

In chairing this most recent committee, we agreed among ourselves to be open and honest—and to always be respectful of one another's opinions. And to listen...to one another, but especially to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit. We agreed that we would not call a pastor unless we felt we truly had the person chosen for us by God. We did not allow pressure from the outside to interfere with our being led by the Holy Spirit.

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This past Sunday I took part in the installation of our new Associate Pastor. It was a jubilant celebration of Calvary's moving forward in mission. My heart was full—and my eyes filled with tears—knowing that God had worked his will through us, His faithful servants—who took time to listen and be led by Him.

Respectfully submitted,  
Cheryl Zemina  
Call Committee Chair  
Calvary Lutheran Church  
Apollo Beach, FL

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*Resource C*  
***Discerning God's Will: The Basics of Discernment***  
*by the Rev. Thomas L. Weitzel*

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### **The Call Process: Discerning God's Will**

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The process of seeking and calling a pastor to serve a congregation is one of discernment. For Christians, the goal of all discernment is seeking the will of God in each situation. The call process therefore seeks to know God's will for the future mission and ministry of a congregation and who God chooses as pastor and shepherd for that ministry. It is God who chooses. It is the work of the Call Committee, the Congregation Council, the congregation, the pastors interviewed and the Office of the Bishop to discern God's choice and the Spirit's leading.

When a congregation enters into the call process, they enter into a process of discernment that has its roots in the New Testament community described in the book of Acts. In Acts 1, when it was time to fill the vacancy left by Judas among the Twelve Apostles, the disciples all prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry..." (Acts 1.25-26). It was a prayer of discernment.

In Acts 6, when it was time to expand the ministry of the local church in Jerusalem, the leaders called the membership together and asked them to nominate seven men "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" for this new task of ministry. And when the seven were chosen, the Apostles then prayed and laid hands upon them. The seeking of candidates "full of the Spirit" was a seeking of the Spirit's leading and calling, and seeking of God's will. It was a process of discernment. (Acts 6.1-6).

Throughout Acts, at every point of development of the new Christian Church, the Spirit was there doing the leading with the church members seeking the leading and following the Spirit's bidding. The Spirit led Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch to interpret God's word and baptize him (Acts 8.29). The Spirit led Paul and his companions to each and every city of his missionary journeys, even forbidding entry to some (Acts 19.21; 16.6-7).

Even at a crucial point in the development of the Church, when the earliest leaders and members had thought that God had only given salvation to the children of Israel, it was the Spirit who made it known to them through a careful process of examination of evidence and conversations and deliberations and reports that "God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11.1-18). This led to further discoveries of God's will for the Gentiles that did not require their observance of Jewish laws regarding food and circumcision (Acts 15). A decision by church leaders was made about this and a report of that decision sent to Gentile Christians in Antioch that stated very clearly how that decision was reached: "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials..." (Acts 15.28).

The Church lived its life as a life of discernment. And as a result, “Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, the church increased in numbers” (Acts 9.31).

How did the Spirit lead? How was God’s will known? From Acts we see the Spirit coming to both individuals (11.12) and groups (2.1-4; 21.4). In Acts, the Spirit comes during worship and fasting (13.2), during prayer (10.9-16), in answered prayer (10.31), during the preaching of God’s word (10.44), at baptism (19.1-6), in the laying of hands (8.14-17), in visions (9.10-12; 10.3-6), as a voice heard (8.29; 10.19), as an insight (11.28), as a matter of reading the signs and interpreting events (11.1-18; 16.6-7; 20.22-23), and as reported above, within group processes of deliberation and conversation (Acts 11 and 15).

As it was for these first Christians, so it is for those in the Church today, whether seeking God’s vision and will for ministry or seeking a pastor for that ministry. And just as God came to a variety of members in a variety of ways, so also the Spirit will continue to come to those who believe and trust in God and listen for God’s voice.

## Some Basics about Discernment

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Through Holy Scripture and faith experience, all Christians have come to realize that knowing and doing God’s will is the best possible thing that can happen to them. And so Christians pray to God frequently, even daily, “Your kingdom come, your will be done,” as Jesus taught in the Lord’s Prayer.

While realizing that the Spirit will come and lead as the Spirit chooses, Christians over the centuries have come to know that there are some basics that can help in the discernment process:

1. Knowing our identity and calling will provide a foundation for being open to the Spirit’s leading. We are Christians, called into relationship with God and fellow believers and living in the unity of Spirit by the grace of Jesus Christ. Our identity and name not only says who we are, but whose we are as well. We are Christ’s, and therefore children of God.
2. Knowing our mission and purpose will also provide grounding and focus for the task of calling a pastor. The preparing of the *Congregational Ministry Site Profile* will help to detail both this congregation’s identity and purpose.
3. Shedding is a most important step for the success of discernment. The goal of discernment is to seek God’s will, not the will of any one person or group. Therefore shedding occurs in faith and trust and asks each participant to lay aside those things that would hinder the following of the Spirit’s leading. Shedding does not mean leaving behind one’s gifts, but rather allowing those gifts to be used by the Spirit. Shedding leaves behind personal gain or agenda for the sake of God’s will and the common good.
4. Rooting is important to discernment as it connects everyone with the word and activity of God. Rooting asks, “How does the Bible inform us regarding our mission and ministry and the calling of a pastor and shepherd? How does our tradition and history also inform us?” Rooting connects us with God and God’s work among us at the beginning of our task.
5. Listening is a premium in discerning God’s will. Listening hears the prompting of the Spirit, as well as the voices of all in the discerning community. Listening hears those who might be affected by decisions made. God will speak through these voices. But in order to hear them, one’s own voice may need to be silent more than heard. Listening is not confined simply to

call-related meetings and conversations. As was witnessed above in the book of Acts, the Spirit came at many times and in many ways and to many people, even at unexpected times. Therefore a whole posture of listening becomes important during the discernment and call process – in worship, in prayer, in conversation, in deliberation, in private devotions, in group Bible study, in preaching and teaching. Listening is a premium in discerning the leading of the Spirit.

6. Exploring is what will occur within the call process itself, especially at the time of the interviews by the Call Committee, the council and eventually the congregation. Exploring is how Christians come to know God's leading and includes sorting through options. As exemplified in Acts 6, exploring goes beyond skills and gifts to seek the spiritual. During an interview, exploring will ask, "Is the Spirit clearly evident in this candidate? Is this pastor's inner call and personal faith evident as well? Is the hand of God evident in the life and past ministry of this candidate? Is the Spirit leading this candidate to minister in this congregation and setting?"
7. Weighing is what comes after the interviews. In addition to the normal positives and negatives, pros and cons, that are identified, the Call Committee, the council and congregation seeks foremost to know what comes from God. What here leads toward God and not away from God? What is filled with human novelty or invention? Does the Spirit seem to rest on a particular individual or path? Weighing is not about democratic practice. Weighing is the spiritual process of identifying the Spirit's leading.
8. Deciding moves the process to the final test: is this choice the choice of God? Ignatius of Loyola, who founded the monastic order of the Society of Jesus in the 16th century and wrote a great deal about discernment, suggested that a decision based upon discernment will be filled with one of two things. Either it will be filled with *consolation* and movement toward God, assisting in loving God more. Or it will be filled with *desolation* and movement away from God, pulling people toward things that are other than godly.

In the end, the goal of discernment and the goal of the Call Process will be much as it was for those first Christians in the book of Acts. A Call Committee, council and congregation will want to be able to say, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..."

Resources persons are available through the Office of the Bishop to assist congregations, Call Committees and congregation councils to learn more about discernment in scripture and in Christian practice.

Leaders of the congregation might ask the interim pastor to lead a study of the book of Acts during the early part of the interim period.

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*Resource D*  
***Five Devotions on Discernment from the Book of Acts***  
*by the Rev. Thomas L. Weitzel*

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## **1. And the Lot Fell on Matthias**

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Read Acts 1:12-26.

This story follows the Ascension of Jesus into heaven and shows the process by which a new person was chosen to replace Judas the Betrayer for the ministry of the Twelve Apostles.

The story makes clear that there were more who believed in Jesus than just the Apostles. How many did they number? (1:15)

Peter takes the lead in the account and suggests a discernment process to follow.

What was the criteria for the candidate to be considered? 1:21-22

If Jesus' ministry from his baptism to his ascension was about three years long, then what are the implications of the criteria suggested by Peter?

How many candidates were settled upon that fulfilled the criteria? 1:23

Could there have been more? What do you think led them to put forward only two?

What was the next step in the process? 1:24

What specifically did the prayer ask for? 1:24c

The last step in the process was casting lots (1:26). Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is the Lord's alone." Although this method of determining God's will was an old and venerable one, appearing 20 times in both Old and New Testaments, this was the last recorded use of casting lots in the Bible.

How do you see casting lots differing from taking a vote as we do today?

All human methods of determining or discerning God's will can be corrupted by the human element. What might be the advantages and disadvantages of casting lots for determining God's will? What might be the advantages and disadvantages of voting?

In the end, "the lot fell on Matthias, and he was added to the eleven apostles" (1:26).

Does this last verse indicate faith in the process and general agreement among all the believers that God's will had indeed been done?

In Acts 5:38-39, a Pharisee named Gamaliel makes a helpful statement about discernment, saying, "if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them--in that case you may even be found fighting against God!"

That suggests that there are signs that can be read during and after a process is complete that would indicate whether God's will has been done. What might be some of those signs that Matthias truly was God's choice? What might be signs that Matthias was not God's choice?

What do we learn from this passage about God's leading in our ministry?

Close this devotion with a prayer asking God to teach us how to listen with ears attuned to the Spirit and eyes open to the signs of God's leading.

## 2. Full of Wisdom & the Spirit

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Read Acts 6:1-8.

This story details some of the "growing pains" in the new ministry of the fledgling Christian community in Jerusalem as both numbers and ministry needs increased.

What is the "complaint" or conflict that had developed in the community? 6:1

In dividing out ministries, what ministry took priority for the Apostles themselves to do? 6:2 and 4?

Are there implications in these verses with regard to pastoral involvement in church administration? What might these be?

Bible interpreters have often identified this story as detailing the development of lay ministries within the church. The Apostles suggested specific criteria for fulfilling lay ministry in the church. What were these? 6:3

How do these criteria match our own understanding of lay ministry within our church? When Church Council or committee positions become vacant, how important are these kind of biblical criteria for choosing replacements?

What would be the outward signs that a person is "full of faith and the Holy Spirit" today? 6:5

Who actually chose the seven candidates for ministry of "daily distribution of food" -- the Apostles alone or the whole community? 6:5

What would be the importance of having the whole community involved in the choosing?

Notice that the complaint in 6:1 came from the Hellenists (Greeks) against the Hebrews, then notice that the names of the candidates put forth in 6:5 includes both Greeks and Hebrews. How would the good of the whole community be served by this?

Something of an installation service occurs in 6:6, presumably at worship. What are the individual elements of this rite of installation?

In the Bible, laying hands was a sign of several things: it was a setting apart of a person for service (Num. 8:10), a giving of authority (Num. 27:18-23), a sign of blessing (Mk. 10:14-16), a mode for healing (Mk. 5:23, Acts 28:8), and especially a conveyance of the Holy Spirit (Deut. 34:9, Acts 8:17), particularly related to Baptism (Acts 19:5-6). Which of these uses is being employed in this passage (6:6)?

Although this passage is a simple narrative of a problem and the resolution of that problem through a particular process, how might it be described as a discernment process? Where is the evidence of God's leading in the process?

As mentioned in the last lesson, signs of God's leading within a particular process become evident as time goes on. What are the signs that God blessed the process of the choosing of the seven? 6:7-8

What do we learn from this passage about God's leading in our ministry?

Close this devotion with a prayer asking God to teach us to look for signs of the Spirit and of wisdom and faith in those we encounter within the church.

### 3. Guided by the Spirit

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Read Acts 8:26-40.

In this passage, we see Philip being led in his ministry after being commissioned in Acts 6. Philip hears an "angel of the Lord" (8:26) and then "the Spirit" (8:29) speak to him in very specific ways with very specific directions. Can we take this "hearing" literally? In what ways do people "hear" the Spirit's leading? How do we know that it is the Spirit speaking? Jesus says in John 7:17, "Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God."

What did Philip discover on that "road from Jerusalem to Gaza" that made him realize that it truly had been the Spirit directing him there? 8:27-28

What is the result of this Spirit-led encounter with the eunuch? 8:38

8:39-40 says that "the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away" and he next found himself 15-20 miles away in Azotus. Is this a miraculous moving of Philip from one place to another? How similar is it to say, "The next thing I knew, I was in Albuquerque"? Is the emphasis in this passage on the manner of Philip's movement or on the author of that movement, the Spirit?

When we are following the Spirit's leading, are we fully conscious of it? What tells us if we are?

Read Acts 16:6-15.

This account details part of one of the missionary journeys of Paul. Paul had been called on the road to Damascus for this ministry (Acts 9) and set apart with prayer and laying of hands by the church at Antioch at the bidding of the Spirit (13:2-3).

What's striking in Acts 16:6-7 is the negative advice of the Spirit: forbidding preaching in Asia and not allowing Paul to enter Bithynia. While we normally think of how God positively leads us, this passage indicates that God lets us know what not to do as well.

How might God communicate that something is not the direction that we should take? What signs might be available to us of this? In 16:9, Paul has a vision "during the night." Are dreams and visions the same thing? How might they differ?

How does a person know if a vision or a dream is from God? Note in 16:10 that it was not simply Paul who was convinced of God's call in the vision; rather it says "we" were "convinced." This presumes that after Paul had the vision, he discussed it with his traveling companions to confirm his own feelings about it. In 1 Cor. 14:26-33, Paul is very specific in saying that "revelations" and "speaking in tongues" should always be "interpreted" and "weighed" by others for the purpose of "building up" the church. 1 John 4:1 similarly says "do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God." Discerning God's will is a collaborative process in the church of the New Testament.

How might we go about testing visions and revelations and insights today? What did Paul and his party find when they went to Macedonia that served as confirmation of God's leading? 16:13-15

What do we learn from these passages about God's leading in our ministry?

Close this devotion with a prayer asking God to teach us how to read both negative and positive signs of the Spirit's leading.

## 4. Reading Multiple Signs

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Read Acts 11:1-18.

The entrance of the Gentiles (non-Jewish people) into the Christian Church was the first major test of God's leading encountered in the fledgling church and is described in detail in Acts 11 and Acts 15. The first Christians had been Jews ("circumcised believers"), just as Jesus had been.

What is the posture of these circumcised believers in Judean church? 11:2-3

How might such behavior lead to conflict in a congregation?

Peter's response is to describe his own discernment process "step by step" as it included multiple signs indicating the welcome of the Gentiles. What is the first sign that Peter describes? 11:5-9 What was Peter's sense of the origin of this sign? 11:9 How many times did this sign occur? 11:10 What was the second sign that Peter encountered? 11:11-12a Peter was told of a third sign that someone else saw. What was that sign? 11:13-14 What was the fourth sign that Peter witnessed? 11:15

The fifth sign came in the form of a memory of Jesus' words, 11:16. In John 14:26, Jesus had promised the disciples that "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you."

Did Peter witness and read these signs alone? No, 11:12b. Note, as discovered in the last devotion, discernment is a collaborative process.

What was Peter's conclusion from all these signs? 11:17 Did the assembled church in Jerusalem agree with Peter's conclusion about the signs? 11:18

Could they have continued to criticize and oppose Peter? Remember Gamaliel's advice in Acts 5:38-39, "if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them--in that case you may even be found fighting against God!"

Drawing conclusions from this passage, if God is calling the church to a new ministry or path: How many signs are likely to point to it? How many people are likely to see it? What will be the place of scripture in relation to the signs? cf. 11:16 How important is interpretation in reading signs and drawing conclusions for direction? Can interpretation be wrong? What would assure that interpretation is not wrong?

In this story, the "circumcised believers," who would have been the majority in the Christian church of that day, were not happy in 11:2 about the influx of the uncircumcised Gentiles. In 11:18, their criticisms were "silenced." What does this say about personal agendas, fears, prejudices when it comes to discernment?

Will a discernment process always "silence" or "convince" (16:10) everyone? In Acts 15:1, some from the Judean church tried to convince the Gentiles that they had to observe Jewish tradition in order to "be saved." Another meeting of the church was necessary (15:6-28) to finalize the matter.

What do we learn from these passages about God's leading in our ministry?

Close this devotion with a prayer asking God to assist us in using scripture to interpret signs of the Spirit's leading.

## 5. How the Spirit Comes to Us

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In previous devotions, we have seen signs of the Spirit's leading in many and various ways. Assign each of the passages below to a different member of your group. Then have each member share with others how the passage describes the Spirit's leading in that particular situation:

- Acts 4:8-10 - The Spirit comes to individuals
- Acts 2:1-4 - The Spirit comes to groups
- Acts 13:2-3 - The Spirit comes during worship and fasting
- Acts 22:17-18 - The Spirit comes during prayer
- Acts 10:30-32 - The Spirit comes in answered prayer
- Acts 10:44-48 - The Spirit comes during the preaching of God's word
- Acts 11:16 - The Spirit comes in recalling Jesus' words (= scripture)
- Acts 19:1-6 - The Spirit comes at baptism
- Acts 8:14-17 - The Spirit comes in the laying of hands
- Acts 9:10-12 - The Spirit comes in visions
- Acts 10:19-20 - The Spirit comes as a voice heard
- Acts 11:27-28 - The Spirit comes as an insight
- Acts 20:22-23 - The Spirit comes as a matter of reading the signs and interpreting events
- Acts 15:6-28 - The Spirit comes within group processes of deliberation and conversation

Can our own egos and desires speak louder than the Spirit? Consider Jonah 1:1-3

Will signs and visions always be from God? No. Acts 19:13-16

What is the place of scripture in helping to interpret such signs? Acts 11:15-17

Multiple signs pointing to the same thing and collaborative process will also help to test signs.

What do we learn from these passages about God's leading in our ministry?

Close this devotion with a prayer thanking God giving us insight into discernment and the leading of the Spirit.

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*SECTION 5*  
*Developing the Congregational Ministry*  
*Site Profile & Seven Reflections on*  
*Ministry and Context*

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### **Developing the Congregational Ministry Site Profile (MSP)**

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The significant task of leading the congregation in developing the Congregational Ministry Site Profile is entrusted to the call committee.

The Congregational Ministry Site Profile provides an important document for those involved in the call process:

- The congregation is given the opportunity to carefully study its history and direction and to articulate more clearly its mission and ministry priorities.
- The call committee and the Office of the Bishop receive valuable and necessary information for their important work of identifying leadership priorities and needs, and matching this information with the gifts and skills of potential pastoral candidates.
- The potential pastoral candidates with a comprehensive picture of the congregation and its mission and plans as these candidates consider being open to a Call to this congregation.

Therefore, it is most important that the council and call committee assure that appropriate time to thoughtfully and carefully produce an excellent Congregational Ministry Site Profile is encouraged. The completed mission profile should be neat and attractive, possibly including the use of pictures and attachments.

### **Some Valuable Benefits of Completing the Ministry Site Profile & Seven Reflections on Ministry and Context**

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There are some very important benefits of engaging the congregation in this self-study:

- The life and mission of the congregation is reviewed and celebrated;
  - The congregation's sense of identity and call from God are renewed;
  - The members evaluate together congregational strengths and growth areas;
  - The congregation more clearly articulates its mission both within the church and in the community/world;
  - The congregation's relationship with the greater church is celebrated;
- AND, the members of the congregation identify gifts and skills that they feel are most important for their next pastor to possess!

## **Part I: Develop the Congregational Ministry Site Profile**

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An early step in calling a rostered leader is completing a Ministry Site Profile, a document that describes your congregation's context and setting, vision for mission and leadership needs. The form has a new look and is more explicitly focused on mission. The intent is to help a congregation to call the leader that can best serve the congregation as it lives out the Good News of God in its community. Hence, a Ministry Site Profile is essential because of the role it plays in expressing who your congregation is now and what you want your ministry to look like in the future.

While the call committee is charged with the overall responsibility for the development of the Ministry Site Profile, the committee needs to be in consultation with the council, other congregational leaders and staff, and the members of the congregation to more fully and accurately complete each part of the profile. The Ministry Site Profile is divided into five parts with each part addressing different aspects or areas of the congregation's life and leadership needs.

The call committee will need to review the entire document before attempting to answer questions in any part of the profile. As the committee reads through the profile, it will be helpful to begin identifying persons outside of the committee whose input would be helpful to answer a particular question or section. One particular piece of the mission profile, Part III – Leadership Needs, will involve the whole congregation.

Also helpful is to do the research by locating, for example, your congregation's annual reports. The Congregational Ministry Site Profile will ask you to summarize information on your congregation and community. This information, found in your congregation's current Congregational Trend Report and Demographic Data for Your Zip Code Report, is immediately available through the Department for Research and Evaluation.

To download the Ministry Site Profile (MSP) and the Seven Reflections (optional document):  
<http://www.elca.org/en/Call-Process/Getting-Started>

## **Surveying the Congregation**

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For the completion of Part III: Leadership Needs, Number 11, Top Five Ministry Tasks, and Number 12, Gifts for Ministry, it is particularly important that the call committee invite the greatest participation by members.

Numbers 11 and 12 may be sent to all members through a congregational mailing requesting that it be returned by a certain date to the church office; or the sections may be distributed at worship services for several consecutive Sundays; or time might be set aside at the end of worship services on a particular Sunday announced in advance when members would be invited to complete the sections and return them before leaving. Regardless of the means by which the sections are completed, the objective is to get responses from the greatest number of persons possible. It may be that some would complete the sections at the church, while others would prefer to take them home for additional time to reflect. Both ways are quite acceptable.

These sections are among the most valuable sections in the Congregational Ministry Site Profile in order to identify and seek these gifts in a rostered leader's ministry.



## Putting Together the Survey

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The call committee will need to copy Numbers 11 & 12 of the Congregational Ministry Site Profile. These pages could be copied front to back to save paper.

Also included in this section of the manual is a *Suggested Cover Letter for the Survey* (Resource B) that may be adapted by the call committee to help explain to the members of the congregation the procedure for completing the survey. The committee will want to be sure to include a deadline date for returning the forms and the collection point for the completed surveys.

After the results of the survey have been tabulated, the call committee may wish to share a summary of the results with the whole congregation prior to the completion of the whole Congregational Ministry Site Profile. Congregational feedback could be invited.

## Tabulation of the Survey Results for Numbers 11 & 12

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In Section 11, the top five ministry tasks that are checked most often by the congregation are then identified as the “top five ministry tasks” by the members of the congregation. Follow the same tabulation process for Section 12 to identify the 5 Top Priorities and 5 Very Helpful Gifts. The call committee may not agree with the consensus of the membership, but it is best to reflect the desires and perceptions of the whole congregation. If the committee wishes to communicate additional information about the survey results, further explanation, input or clarification can be added in Part IV: Commentary.

## Draft Profile

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When the call committee has prepared the first draft of the completed Congregational Ministry Site Profile, copies of the draft should be shared with the Office of the Bishop for review and possible editing suggestions.

A representative of the Office of the Bishop will then schedule a meeting with the call committee and/or a representative of the council to share feedback and editing suggestions raised by the Office of the Bishop. Following this editing step, a copy of the new approved draft is given to the council for review and approval. The shared objective is to produce the most representative and accurate Congregational Ministry Site Profile for the congregation.

## The Final Version of the Congregational Ministry Site Profile

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The final Ministry Site Profile (MSP) is electronically submitted to the ELCA database. The call committee is encouraged to make additional copies available to members of the congregation by posting it or having it available at a table after worship for several weeks.

## Part II: Develop Seven Reflections on Ministry & Context

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The Seven Reflections on Ministry and Context provides additional information about your congregation’s mission and vision for the candidates. While the form is listed as optional on the ELCA website, the Florida-Bahamas Synod requires that the Seven Reflections on Ministry and Context be completed. Please complete these seven questions (online and through your congregation’s Congregational Ministry Site Profile account) once you have completed the entire Congregational Ministry Site Profile.

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*Resource A*  
*Suggested Cover Letter for Survey*

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*Date*

*Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,*

*The Call Committee is requesting your assistance. It is time for us to consider the Top 5 Ministry Tasks and Gifts for ministry that we want and expect in our next pastor. Attached you will find copies of two pages from the Congregational Ministry Site Profile which your Call Committee is working to complete. These two pages contain a list of 40 Ministry Tasks and 25 Gifts for ministry.*

*You are asked in Section II to select the 5 most critical tasks required in this position. In Section I2 you are asked to identify 5 gifts for ministry that are a top priority for the rostered leader to provide (left column) and 5 more gifts that you think would be helpful (right column).*

*Thank you for taking the time to complete and return this survey to the church office (or other collection point). The deadline for returning the survey is Sunday, (Date). We will tabulate the results from all the surveys that are received to determine a composite picture of our greatest priorities, the most important skills, and the areas of most essential need.*

*Yours in Christ,*

*Chairperson, Call Committee*

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