

APPENDIX I

Pre-Call Interviews

The following is based on information provided by the Council of Presidents.

Pre-call interviews, visits and post-call visitations are not prohibited by the Holy Scriptures or the Lutheran Confessions. In fact, we highly recommended that these elements are part of your candidate evaluation process. Each congregation has the right to determine procedures for reviewing candidates; however the congregation needs to function in such a way that the dignity and divine nature of the call is maintained. And it is important that the process remain the same for all candidates.

Remember: the congregation is not simply “hiring an employee” but is seeking the full measure of the Holy Spirit’s guidance and insight in discerning the person to fill the office of Holy Ministry.

Most congregations today are finding it helpful to conduct pre-call interviews and visits to assist the pastor and congregation in learning more about one another. These interviews and visits enable the candidate and congregation to share a sense of their vision of ministry with each other and provide “first impressions” which may prove helpful in considering and deliberating about a potential call.

Note that the pre-call interview or visit should never be the only impression of value – it is important that congregations consider all the information and credentials provided on candidates.

Also note that not every LCMS pastor will consent to a pre-call interview. **This should not disqualify the candidate from consideration.**

Benefits and Potential Risks

The decision to call a pastor is among the most important that a congregation ever makes. While pre-call interviews are neither commanded nor forbidden by Holy Scripture or the Lutheran Confessions, it is recommended that you make these interviews part of your call process. It is important to exercise care and understand potential risks.

Pre-call interviews are valuable ways to become more familiar with the candidate’s theology, interests, experience, skills, and leadership style so that the congregation can equip itself to make an informed decision at its call meeting. Telephone, video and face-to-face interviews provide both the pastor and congregation insight into each other, and the potential fit between them.

Pre-call interviews can involve risks of which you should be aware. Answers during interviews may give a misleading picture - the pastor and the congregation may not present themselves as they really are. It is imperative that interviews be based on honest, open and frank conversation, which is honoring to the Holy Spirit and each party involved as together they seek His will.

Personal interviews may also place undue emphasis on the outward aspects of the call (e.g. appearance of the sanctuary, the condition of parsonage, the neighborhood, the community, the people, etc.) rather than on the challenges and opportunities for mission and ministry. Furthermore, personal interviews entail costs for lodging, meals, events, etc.

Considering the risks as noted above, pre-call interviews are important and recommended steps in the journey towards calling a pastor as the Holy Spirit leads.

Guidelines

Following are some general guidelines regarding pre-call interviews. If you have questions about these guidelines, do not hesitate to contact your Circuit Visitor, Regional Vice President or District President.

1. A pre-call interview should not be conducted until after the congregation has completed a careful and thorough self-study. The congregation needs to have a clear understanding of its mission and ministry and its current situation. Congregations should wait to decide on whether or not to conduct pre-call interviews until after they have received their call list, reviewed the information provided by the District President, and conducted an evaluation to determine who are the top candidates they would like to interview.
2. Pre-call interviews should only be conducted with those individuals who are named on the call list provided by the District President. Also, at this point in the call process it is important that you do not add any last-minute candidates without the review and support of the District President.
3. Congregations choosing to conduct pre-call interviews must be careful to maintain the dignity and divine nature of the call. When calling a pastor, congregations are **not** hiring an employee, but asking God to send them a pastor. The entire call process should be surrounded with fervent prayer.
4. The actual interviewing will normally be done by members of the Call Committee. (The Call Committee and the Interview Committee may be the same group of individuals or two different groups of individuals or a sub-committee of the Call Committee as the congregation directs or as the Call Committee structures itself for its work. Throughout this document, it is understood that references to 'the committee' speak of the group—whatever its title—that undertakes the interviewing task.)
 - a. If the congregation's constitution does not provide for a Call Committee, an enabling resolution should be adopted by the voters' assembly establishing both the make-up and the duties of the Call Committee.
 - b. The candidates for interview will be taken from the Call List as prepared by the District President.
 - c. Congregations should work closely with the Circuit Visitor, Regional Vice President, District President or his representative in conducting pre-call interviews, including requesting assistance in developing questions, determining the best process and inviting them to participate in the actual interviews.
5. After contacting your top candidates to inquire of their willingness and ability to engage in the call process, it is recommended that interviews with willing candidates occur in two phases:
 - a. Initial interviews - 60-90 minute interviews using video (Skype, Go-to-Meeting, Google Meet, etc.) to determine the list of candidates you would like to bring to your campus for onsite visits.
 - b. Onsite visits – Face-to-face meetings with the candidate and his wife over a weekend or 1.5-2.5 days during the week with staff, school faculty, meet-and-greet/Q&A with congregation, attending worship, touring the campus and community, fellowship etc. Make sure to be flexible and attend to the comfort of the candidate and his wife.
6. See below for a sample interview format. The Interview Committee will be careful to conduct each candidate interview in the same way. Questions should be formulated based on the results of your self-study. For example, challenges and opportunities that you uncovered in your self-

study should lead you to create questions that ask the candidate how he would address similar situations. The Committee should limit the number of questions addressed to the candidates, with the same questions asked of each of the candidates. The congregation can be given the opportunity to submit questions or subjects to the Call Committee to be touched upon in the interviews. "Trick" questions have no place in these interviews.

7. Ensure your interview questions can be covered adequately in the allotted time for the interview. As you formulate questions, evaluate them in three ways:
 - a. What does it have to do with the position?
 - b. Why do we need to know?
 - c. Would we be willing to answer the same question about ourselves?
8. Avoid "yes/no" or other short answer questions. Examples of good questions that focus on behavior include:
 - a. Tell us about a time when...
 - b. What do you want us to know about...
 - c. Give us an example of...
 - d. You say. . . about yourself. How has this been demonstrated?
 - e. Describe an experience where...
9. In conducting the interview, focus on how the pastor functions rather than on the ideas and concepts he expresses. Remember that the manner in which a person has handled a situation in the past may well indicate how he might act in the future given the same or similar circumstances. Note especially expressions of energy, conviction, enthusiasm, respect for acceptable differences and the way personal faith is shared. Listen carefully in order to ascertain how the pastor draws naturally, winsomely, and confidently on the resources of his education, experience, and faith.
10. A written summary of each interview should be made and distributed to each member of the Call Committee. It is from these summaries that a report can be made to the congregation, and a candidate or candidates can be recommended. As the Holy Spirit leads, there may be only one candidate who the committee feels should be recommended, or more than one. A slate of three candidates from which the congregation makes their choice is a good target. Your congregation's constitution may provide guidelines. See below for a sample report to the congregation.
11. As a matter of courtesy, the call committee should communicate with each candidate who has been interviewed, expressing appreciation for his participation.
12. Remember that the committee does not act on its own behalf, but as the representative and servant of the entire congregation. Its agenda should be what's best for the congregation and not some private or individual agenda. At the same time, the committee is chartered to do this work on behalf of the congregation, and so should go about this important business diligently, thoroughly and confidently, seeking the Holy Spirit's leading and using the gifts God has provided each member to arrive at a God-pleasing recommendation.

Sample Interview Format

Some areas of concern and typical questions relating to them may be of benefit to you as you structure your interview process. The following statements or questions are meant to serve as thought starters in developing your interview format. Your statements or questions, of course, should be based on your own congregational situation and on the information about the candidates being interviewed.

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND PREACHING

When a change in pastors takes place, changes are also likely to take place in the worship practice of the congregation. The principle concern in the interview is for the committee to determine the candidate's attitudes and convictions about worship, preaching, and the liturgy.

Preaching, teaching, and leading worship are important aspects of the pastor's work. However, there is often a variety of attitudes concerning what constitutes a "good" sermon, a "good" Bible class, and "good" worship. Therefore, some issues to discuss in this area might be:

1. Describe how you make decisions about worship.
2. Describe how you have introduced changes in the worship practice of your present congregation.
3. Describe your convictions about the importance of the liturgy and the Sacrament of the Altar and how you carry out these convictions.
4. Describe how you go about preparing your sermons.
5. Describe your satisfactions and disappointments in preparing and delivering sermons.
6. In preparing sermons, describe what use you make of the Bible, the church year, the Scripture lessons, personal experiences (your own or others), current events, contemporary issues in culture and society.
7. What is the average length of your sermons?
8. Describe how important you consider preaching to be in the life of the church.
9. Describe how you use guest preachers.

You should remember that the style and schedule of worship in the candidate's present congregation is not necessarily what he prefers or would choose or would try to duplicate in another situation.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Your objective in this area is to discover what might happen if this candidate and your congregation undertake a spiritual journey together. You will be concerned here not only about the candidate's spiritual/devotional life, but also about the spiritual life, growth, and health of your congregation.

In discussing Christian education, your committee will be interested in some of the following elements in the candidate's responses: his level of creative energy, the range of resources he has used, his familiarity with various educational materials and curricula, his views on the training and involvement of lay people in various roles, and his level of direct personal involvement and competence in education.

Your committee will want to discuss all levels of congregational education as it now exists and as you hope it will develop including Bible classes, Sunday School, Confirmation instruction, youth programs, and topics for auxiliary organizations. Questions may include:

1. Describe how you and your present congregation have grown in spiritual life, separately and together.

2. Describe how you view Christian education and its role in the life of the congregation.
3. Describe some of the resources you use to enhance the spiritual life of the congregation.
4. Describe what you expect adults and children to learn and retain through the congregational education program.
5. Describe some of your favorite tools and resources for Bible study, Sunday School, and catechism.
6. Describe what curriculum material you use and why.
7. Describe how you recruit, train, assist, support, and supervise a teaching staff.
8. Describe how you involve parents in the Christian education of children.
9. Describe how you teach people to pray.
10. Describe your experience with various traditions of spiritual life, for example, retreats, prayer disciplines, private confession, observance of church festivals, etc.
11. Describe what resources refresh you personally.

PASTORAL CARE

At all times, but especially in time of personal crisis or transition—birth, death, marriage, divorce, vocational stress or change, physical or mental illness—parishioners look to the pastor for pastoral care. They want to know and be convinced that their pastor really cares about them, that he will be available in time of need, and that he will apply the resources of the Gospel to their need. Parishioners are also interested in knowing how the pastor deals with problem situations. It is appropriate to visit with the candidate about his response to specific situations. For example:

1. Describe what kinds of pastoral care and counseling congregational members can expect from you.
2. Describe how you visit your parishioners (hospital calls, nursing homes, homebound, other).
3. Describe how you prepare a couple for marriage (pre-marital counseling).
4. Describe how you address the issue of couples living together outside of marriage.
5. Describe how you address LGBTQ realities in the church, school or community
6. Describe how you handle unwed pregnancies.
7. Describe how you work with:
 - a. troubled teenagers.
 - b. persons involved in abuse of alcohol or drugs.
 - c. patient and family members in a terminal illness situation.
8. Describe how you minister to those afflicted with bereavement.
9. Describe what you do about people who are nonmembers but come to you for pastoral care or counseling.
10. Describe how you deal with your own limitations in counseling.
11. Describe how you provide for pastoral care when you are not there (e.g. on your day off or during vacation).

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

As the "overseer" of the congregation, a pastor faces a wide range of administrative responsibilities. In covering this area during an interview, you will want to keep your congregational situation in mind and concentrate on it rather than on the candidate's present situation.

During this part of the interview your committee may wish to ask the candidate to:

1. Describe how you relate to the staff, boards, committees, and other leadership groups in the congregation. How do you maintain a balance of power among the various groups of the congregation?

2. Describe how you handle conflict in the congregation. Talk about a relationship you salvaged after a conflict or falling out with the person.
3. Describe how you deal with staff changes.
4. Describe how you intentionally identify, equip and launch leaders.
5. Describe how you recruit and train volunteers.
6. Describe familiarity with different church governance systems (i.e. church council, policy-based governance), and any preference.
7. Describe how the agenda is prepared for Council/Board of Directors and Voters' meetings.

Indications as to the candidate's administrative skills can also emerge in the way he handles the correspondence and arrangements for the interview.

LUTHERAN SCHOOLS

When a school or preschool is part of your mission and ministry, it is important to gauge the candidate's philosophy towards and experience with this important part of your congregation. Your Board of Education or whoever is responsible for its operation will undoubtedly have a list of questions or concerns related to the school. Possible issues for discussion with candidates might include:

An appropriate approach here might be to ask the candidate:

1. Articulate your philosophy of church and school growth and how you have implemented that philosophy.
2. What steps do you take to help students, parents and staff feel secure, trusting and open with you?
3. Describe the pastor-school administrator relationship you have attained and describe how it affects church and school climate.
4. To what extent are you the initiator in developing relationships? Tell me about a relationship you built.
5. How do you help others develop positive relationships?

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Many personal questions are illegal to ask during pre-employment discussions. In addition, you need to be guided by the principle: "Don't ask a question that you would not answer for yourself." You should not raise questions about the candidate's marital history, sexuality, personal financial matters, or past history of alcoholism or mental illness. If such matters are of concern to your committee, a means of dealing with them should be worked out before the interview with input from the District President and Circuit Visitor.

At the same time, a pastor is to some degree a public person so your congregation will naturally have some interest in the candidate as a person.

An appropriate approach here might be to ask the candidate to:

1. Describe your goals for your own personal development.
2. Describe how you schedule and use your time off.
3. Tell us what books you are reading.
4. Describe what you do for fun.
5. Describe your likes and dislikes about the way your life and ministry have gone thus far.
6. Describe your appearance and dress while in the office, attending meetings, or making calls.

CONCLUSION

Finally, your committee may find it useful to conclude each interview by asking the candidate one final question—Is there anything that we should know about you that we didn't ask?

EVALUATION

Although each interview will be personal and unique, it is to be hoped that there will be enough uniformity of process and content so that conclusions about each candidate interviewed can be arrived at and compared with fairness and accuracy. One recommended way to conduct a fair and thorough evaluation is for the call committee to agree upon a ranking system for the candidate's response to each question, for example 1 to 5 with 1 being a poor response to 5 being an outstanding response. This can serve as a good starting point for discussion, along with each individual committee members notes on responses.