



Northwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Call Process Handbook:

A 10-step guide through your faith community's rostered
minister transition

www.NWMNSynod.org

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Northwestern Minnesota Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Dear Siblings in Christ,

As children of God and followers of Jesus, each of us is a part of the body of Christ and individually members of it. We are all called to serve our neighbor and love Christ through our unique vocations. Rostered ministers are public leaders who are called to serve the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to live out that call in specific congregations and institutions of our church. Rostered ministers in the ELCA are called to serve as either Ministers of Word and Sacrament (pastors) or Ministers of Word and Service (deacons).

Ministers of Word and Sacrament: Pastors serve with active, courageous faith to offer the hope of the sacraments and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in congregations and other ministry settings. They are public theologians and leaders in their communities, and they oversee the word and sacrament ministry of the congregation or institution they serve.

Ministers of Word and Service: Deacons serve in congregations and other ministries of the ELCA, including family ministries, youth, administration, volunteer ministry, social services, music or parish nursing. Deacons connect the church with the needs of the world and work to equip others to lead a living, active and caring Christian life.

The calling of a pastor or deacon is not the same as hiring an employee, and what is often accepted in business and industry is NOT the process used in the church. Respect for the call process includes prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit; reflection upon the unique gifts and ministries of your congregation. Please understand that the calling of a pastor or deacon is a time of significant change for rostered ministers, congregations, and also for the synod. All have an important stake in what is unfolding.

This booklet sets out a step-by-step approach to what is actually a complex process requiring full engagement of call committees, congregations and synod staff. Know that we treat each call process as a unique experience and that each process involves countless hours of work by your synod staff, both in your presence and behind the scenes. This handbook brings together the call process that is common across the ELCA and those aspects that are unique to our context here in the Northwestern Minnesota Synod.

Throughout the process, I encourage you to be in daily prayer for guidance from the Holy Spirit. We need God's Holy Spirit at every step, and it is right to ask for holy guidance. You should expect to be perplexed, disappointed, and anxious as well as inspired, grateful and surprised! All of those feelings are involved when God's Holy Spirit moves us. This process is designed to assist you in your prayerful discernment. I firmly believe that the Holy Spirit is involved in these processes, and I know that you will discover this as well. God's richest blessings of the Spirit as you begin this exciting journey!

Sincerely in Christ,

The Rev. Bill Tesch, Bishop NWMN Synod

10 STEPS TO GUIDE YOU THROUGH A ROSTERED MINISTER TRANSITION

1. **Resignation of the rostered minister**
2. **Conclusion of ministry of the outgoing rostered minister**
3. **Interim ministry or provision for ministry during vacancy**
4. **Formation of the call committee**
5. **Working with the LGBTQ+ Accompaniment Team**
6. **The congregation self-study**
7. **Receiving names and interviewing candidates**
8. **Recommending a candidate for call**
9. **The congregation meeting to call a rostered minister**
10. **Welcoming a new rostered minister**

*The word congregation is often used to describe a location but please understand we mean any faith community who is calling an ordained minister to serve as their rostered minister.

For additional help and guidance, please contact Pastor Genelle Netland, Associate to the Bishop for Leadership genellenetland@cord.edu

STEP 1: RESIGNATION OF THE ROSTERED MINISTER

Sometime prior to submitting a resignation, the rostered minister contacts the synod office for advice and counsel. ([sample resignation letter](#)). The Rostered Minister needs to have current boundaries training completed to have their profile activated. Anti-racism training also needs to be completed or the bishop recommendation will note this requirement not being completed.

The rostered minister submits their resignation to the congregation council normally with a 30-to-45-day notice. Longer notices have been found to be unhelpful to the life and vitality of the congregation.

The congregation is notified of the resignation shortly after the council receives the letter of resignation; we recommend within the week. A council response to the rostered minister's resignation is most helpful. ([Sample newsletter response](#)). **NOTE:** Except in very exceptional circumstances, a letter of resignation from a rostered minister is final; it may not be withdrawn even with the consent of both parties. The date of the resignation may be revised after the letter has been accepted with the bishop's approval.

The pastor and congregation president will receive an email encouraging them to use this handbook and other resources as a guide throughout the call process.

An [exit interview](#) takes place led by the synod staff with the rostered minister and representatives from both the council and, where possible, representatives of the call committee that was in place when the rostered minister was called.

The synod staff meets with the council immediately following the exit interview to discuss the following:

- Discuss options for interim or [pulpit supply](#) during the vacancy.
- Provide a brief, high-level overview of the call process with particular emphasis on the formation of the call committee.
- Inquire/Examine congregation openness to the LGBTQ+, people of color, or indigenous candidates and explain work of the Accompaniment Team.

STEP 2: CONCLUSION OF MINISTRY OF THE OUTGOING ROSTERED MINISTER

All final paperwork is signed and submitted to the synod office (resignation letter, [certification form](#), and the below covenant).

The rostered minister explains to the council the expectations regarding appropriate boundaries after leaving the call as stated in the [ELCA's Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline](#) and in the [NW MN Synod Constitution](#).

[A covenant](#) is then signed by the outgoing rostered minister and the president of the congregation or designee.

Both the congregation AND the rostered minister need to contact Portico (Porticobenefits.org) regarding the end dates of the ministry.

Recognition and celebration of the rostered minister and their family can be the responsibility of the congregation council. A committee may be appointed to plan and carry out an event for a blessed farewell. The ending of a pastoral relationship is a time for compassion and care-giving.

IDEAS FOR A ROSTERED MINISTER FAREWELL:

- Blessing/Laying on of hands during their last worship service
- Meal/potluck/social event
- Card shower
- Short program highlighting shared ministry together

STEP 3: INTERIM MINISTRY OR PROVISION FOR MINISTRY DURING VACANCY

Key leaders of the congregation including the president of the council, the executive council and possibly staff who stay on during the transition remain in touch with the Synod Minister for Community and Leader Engagement regarding options during the interim period.

Pulpit Supply: A question to ask, "can we function effectively during the interim period with a combination of [pulpit supply](#), existing or temporary staff and lay leadership?" (1099's need to be issued to anyone with a paid year's total over \$2000.) Please contact the synod staff for the password to access this list.

Synod Authorized Minister (SAM): Is there someone in the congregation who has gifts for ministry who may be able to serve as a [Synod Authorized Minister](#) "SAM"?

Interim Minister: Is there a need for a full- or part-time contracted interim minister? (Note: Availability of interim ministers cannot be guaranteed. The synod will work with you to find an interim from among the ministers available for this type of work.) There are two types of interims that need two different forms:

- [Interim Contract](#) – This form should be used when the goal of the congregation is to find a new leader; will put together a call committee, etc.
- [Pastoral Service Agreement](#) – This form should be used when the rostered minister signing this agreement is fulfilling the pastoral needs of this congregation for the foreseeable future and no call committee is being formed.

Vice-pastor: Arrangements for a [vice-pastor](#) would entail using a called pastor in a nearby congregation/parish whose task is to help meet the pastoral needs of the congregation/parish in interim. The vice-pastor would help with funerals, confirmation, annual meetings, council meetings

and even some call-process work. This vice-pastor, and vice-congregation/parish, would come alongside the congregation/parish in interim.

All above options for interim ministry may require a 604.20 background check which is initiated by the congregation by filling out this [form](#).

If an interim minister is contracted, plan for an appropriate celebration/recognition of their beginning.

Issues that were named during the exit interview or during the departure of the former rostered minister are addressed during the interim period. This is a great time to update the congregation constitution, get membership updates, do some assessments of energy and vitality in the congregation, and study what the community needs are.

Since council leadership will be responsible for deciding on the compensation package for the next leader, please use this excel spreadsheet to understand the dollars that will need to be designated to support your next leader. (insert excel spreadsheet here).

NOTE: The interim period may run throughout steps 4-9 or some fraction thereof, depending on interim availability, the congregation's needs, etc.



[STEP 4 VIDEO](#)

STEP 4: FORMATION OF THE CALL COMMITTEE

We recommend that a call committee be formed early in the transition period. While the call committee may not be ready to begin considering candidates for some time, it will be helpful to have a call committee in place early on so that it can receive the orientation from synod staff, coordinate with the LGBTQ+ Accompaniment Team, and have ample time to work through the self-study. Note: there may be some circumstances in which synod staff will advise delaying the formation of a call committee, such as when the previous call ended under less than amicable circumstances.

Consult with your **congregation's constitution** regarding considerations for forming a call committee. If the congregation's constitution requires that the call committee be elected by the congregation, we advise that the congregation council prepare a slate of call committee candidates who are representative of the congregation.

A member of the synod staff, and possibly also the conference dean, will meet with the call committee and executive council for training and orientation. A chairperson and secretary from the call committee will be established and their contact information shared with the synod office.

The members of the call committee commit themselves to daily prayer and [meeting devotions](#) throughout the process and invite members of the congregation to do so as well.

Communicate! The call committee should establish a pattern of regular communication (temple

talks, newsletter articles, letters to the congregation, bulletin inserts) with the congregation. At least monthly communication is helpful, even if there is little to report.

STEP 5: WORKING WITH THE LGBTQ+ ACCOMPANIMENT TEAM

The purpose of the LGBTQ+ Accompaniment Team is to accompany congregations in their discernment of calling a rostered minister through dialogue, education, advocacy, and support in specifically considering the possibility of extending a call to LGBTQ+ candidates.

We recommend that this work happens during the interim period, well before the congregation's self-study begins, as the results of this process may have implications for the writing of certain parts of the congregation's "Ministry Site Profile (MSP)."

The call committee, council, staff, and other interested members of the congregation are strongly encouraged to attend the first gathering with the Accompaniment Team and other follow-up meetings as needed or desired by the congregation.

This process will honor the ELCA's commitment to respect its members' "bound conscience." Congregations that have made a formal decision based on bound conscience that would preclude them from considering LGBTQ+ candidates may choose to opt-out of working with the Accompaniment Team.

This process is designed for congregation leaders who believe their congregation could be open to calling a minister who happens to be LGBTQ+ and for congregations who are conscience-bound to be open to the gifts of all people whom God is calling into ministry.

The congregation president and call committee chair reach out to the synod bishop to set up the gathering with the Accompaniment Team.



STEP 6 VIDEO

STEP 6: THE CONGREGATION SELF-STUDY

This important step will result in a final draft of the congregation's "[Ministry Site Profile \(MSP\)](#)." The MSP will be used by synod staff and by prospective candidates for the call process to learn about the congregation and to discern a good match of strengths and passions between prospective candidates and the congregation.

Set up an account for your MSP at www.ELCA.org/call-process/ministry-sites. Click on the Ministry Site Profile link on the left-hand column to begin. Keep track of your email and password.

Read through "[A Guide to the MSP](#)". Directions for looking at a sample MSP can be found on page 3 of the guide.

The Conference Dean or synod staff meets with the call committee to use tools like SOAR that will help identify Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results in the faith community. This will help the call committee with the wording they can use in the congregation's self-study and in the MSP.

A draft of the MSP is submitted to the Synod Minister for Community and Leader Engagement for review. They may recommend revisions to your profile to help add clarity.

After review, the MSP is submitted to the ELCA Mobility Website. The bishop receives notification of this submission and after final [approval](#) the document becomes live.

The church council works on a job description ([sample](#)), compensation/benefits, ([compensation guidelines](#)), and budgeting costs associated with the call process (meals, travel, and overnight accommodations for the candidates interviewing). [Defined compensation worksheet](#).



[STEP 7 VIDEO](#)

STEP 7: RECEIVING NAMES AND INTERVIEWING CANDIDATES

- The Call Committee may solicit names of potential candidates from the congregation. The call committee should NOT contact any of the solicited names directly but forward them to the synod staff. The synod staff will then follow up with solicited names through their bishop to determine their availability for call. [Here is a fillable form](#) for you to share with your congregation.
- Potential candidates will also be generated and vetted by synod staff from among the rostered ministers serving in the Northwestern Minnesota Synod and from those who have submitted Rostered Minister Profiles (RMP) to the ELCA mobility database, as well as from other sources.
- First-Call candidates (recent seminary graduates) are handled differently in this process. If your congregation is open to a first-call candidate and the bishop agrees, you will only receive one candidate name at a time. This is so first-call candidates are not interviewing against seasoned rostered ministers. It is important to inform the synod when a decision is reached to continue or not with a first-call candidate.
- NOTE: Availability of candidates will vary based on many factors. Each call is different. The call committee may have multiple candidates to consider immediately, or it could take several months before receiving the name of a single qualified and interested candidate. Your synod call process staff meets weekly to review the open calls and to explore options for potential candidates.
- Confidentiality! The call committee must keep the names of all candidates confidential throughout the call process until such time as the candidate themselves gives permission for their name to be shared beyond the call committee. This is to ensure the integrity of the potential candidate's current ministry.
- The call committee chair or their designee should reach out to the candidate within 48 hours of receiving their profile to notify them that they have received their RMP.
- Regular communication is essential with all candidates keeping them informed of what the next steps will be (for example, "Our committee will review the profiles we have and get back to you by such and such a date...") This communication continues through the call process.
- We recommend that every candidate receive an initial informal Zoom interview (meet and greet) for both parties to get a better sense of one another as part of the discernment.
- The call committee will invite one or more candidates for an in-person interview. [Sample Interview Agenda and Questions](#)
- A second interview is strongly encouraged, but not required. This is an opportunity to go deeper into conversation and exploration (no suggested questions). You may want to call references prior to this interview as this may bring to light further questions.
If not previously covered, this would be the time to cover questions about the next steps such as availability, moving, and family/spouse needs. Also, if a spouse and/or family have not been invited to visit, this may be the time to house them to get a sense of the faith community.

- Once the call committee has identified who they believe will be their final candidate for recommendation, they should check the candidate's references indicated on their RMP, in consultation with the candidate, being sensitive that some of the references might be to their current call. ([sample reference check questions](#)) Finally, they need to notify the Associate for Synod Administration so that the search for additional candidates can be suspended.
- All candidates who have been decided against should be informed as soon as possible.



[STEP 8 VIDEO](#)

STEP 8 RECOMMENDING A CANDIDATE FOR CALL

- Once the call committee has arrived at a final candidate, they should notify the rostered minister to let them know that they are now the final candidate for the call.
 - In consultation with the rostered minister the call committee presents a summary of their recommendation of this candidate to the congregation council for their approval. Confidentiality needs to remain a top priority for both council and the call committee.
 - After the council's approval of the nomination, follow your constitution for the next steps.
 - The council president completes the authorization form that requests the synod staff to initiate the Minnesota State 604.20 background check for rostered ministers (pastors or deacons). This can take several days. [Background Authorization Form](#)
 - The candidate and council meet to agree upon the [compensation package](#) (Word and Sacrament - pastors) or (Word and Service - deacons), start date, and other details related to the start of ministry. ***Please Note: A Synod Staff person MUST review the compensation before the congregational meeting votes on the proposal.***
 - If the candidate agrees to move forward, then that candidate must also withdraw from any other call processes in which they are involved.
 - Once the 604.20 background check is complete, the council sets a date for a special congregation meeting to call a pastor or deacon.
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STEP 9 VIDEO

STEP 9: THE CONGREGATION MEETING TO CALL A ROSTERED MINISTER

- Consult with your congregation's constitution for the procedure for calling a special congregation meeting to call a pastor or deacon. [Sample Congregation Meeting Agenda](#) to Call a Rostered Minister. Minutes of this meeting must be taken and submitted to the synod.
- Communication about this special meeting needs to honor confidentiality of the candidate. For example, the congregation council has called a special congregation meeting on “this date” to vote on a call of a new rostered minister. (No names are shared in any prior communication to the meeting.)
- In consultation with the rostered minister, the call committee presents the name for call at the congregation meeting. Consider the best way, given all circumstances, to present a brief report, respecting confidentially, of the candidate to the congregation. (A short bio; pictures; excerpts from the minister's RMP)
- After a time for questions, conversation and prayer, those present at the congregation meeting vote by secret/anonymous ballot. A 2/3 majority is required to call a rostered minister. Actual vote numbers need to be reported in the minutes of the meeting. These minutes need to be submitted to the synod office.
- If the vote to call is approved, contact the candidate and synod staff immediately and then proceed to Step 10!
- If the vote to call fails, contact the candidate and synod staff and they will go back to Step 7 of the handbook.
- The candidate will have up to 30 days to discern their response to the call of the congregation.
- When the candidate accepts the call, the signed compensation and benefit agreement needs to be submitted to the synod.



[STEP 10 VIDEO](#)

STEP 10: WELCOMING A NEW ROSTERED MINISTER!

- Congratulations! Calling a rostered minister is a long process of discernment, and with God's help, you've come this far! Take a moment to celebrate the good work of your committee and to thank God's Holy Spirit for the guidance and wisdom.
- Plan for a good beginning with the incoming minister including:
 - Move-in date—how can the congregation be helpful in getting the rostered minister and their family settled?
 - Official start date—sometimes the first day of pay and the first day of responsibility will be different to allow time for the minister to get moved in.
 - Celebratory acknowledgment and welcome usually on the minister's first Sunday.

IDEAS FOR A WELCOME:

-Give gifts cards of local shops and restaurants to get to know the community
-Purchase any worship supplies (worship folders, stoles, microphones, etc.) needed for them to be at their best in worship.
-Organize activities where people can gather and meet and greet the rostered minister and their family. Bonfires at local homes; potluck nights where congregation members sign up; etc.
Call committee does a laying on of hands welcome blessing to welcome them in a worship service.

- The congregation president or designee contacts Portico to initiate benefits package. The rostered minister should also contact Portico. (Porticobenefits.org)
- The rostered minister should have a Letter of Call in hand before starting their ministry. Please contact the synod office (genellenetland@cord.edu) to initiate this process.
- New contact information should be submitted to the synod and arrangements made for the rostered minister to join the congregation. Make sure the rostered minister (and family) joins the faith community as a member! Have them be a part of the faith community's new member process.
- The newly called minister will reach out to the bishop to schedule a date for the official installation service. (NOTE: This may be weeks after the actual start date.) If this is a first-call candidate, they also need to arrange for their ordination with the bishop.
- The Call Committee completes the [Call Process Evaluation form](#). This important final step will allow your synod staff to constantly improve our work with the congregations of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod. Thank you!



[FINAL VIDEO](#)

YOU DID IT! You successfully led your faith community through a process that can only be captured appropriately as holy! It isn't always easy work, but it is important work! May God bless you and your partnership with the rostered minister called to shepherd you!

LEFT BLANK FOR YOUR NOTES