**PASTORAL VACANCY AND CALL PROCESS:**

**A CHECKLIST FOR THE CONGREGATION**

A pastoral vacancy is a time of great opportunityfor a congregation. It is an excellent time for self-study and evaluation, a time to consider options, a time to plan, a time to strategize, and a time to become more focused on God’s mission. In I Corinthians 14:40, the Apostle Paul states, “Let all things be done decently and in good order.” Since the calling of a pastor from the field can involve a number of different individuals, **the Council of Presidents has determined that the following guidelines provide for an efficient process. Therefore, congregations are encouraged to follow these guidelines.**

**\_\_\_\_\_ Contact your circuit visitor** who serves as a representative of the district president’s office. His role is to advise and help the congregation in all call matters. He should be informed of and invited to attend all call meetings and necessary meetings of the call committee.

\_\_\_\_\_ Determine if the congregation needs the services of a vacancy pastor or an intentional interim pastor.

\_\_\_\_\_ If the congregation determines that the services of a vacancy pastor are sufficient, **work with your circuit visitor to choose a vacancy pastor**. Develop an agreement outlining the services to be provided, the time to be spent in serving the vacancy, and the compensation to be paid to the vacancy pastor. If the vacancy pastor is currently serving another congregation, make a formal request to his congregation, seeking permission for him to serve as your vacancy pastor.

\_\_\_\_\_ If the congregation determines that there are special needs prior to calling the next resident pastor (healing, conflict resolution, planning, etc.), you should consider calling an intentional interim pastor. If you would like to discuss the availability of an intentional interim pastor, contact the district president.

**\_\_\_\_\_ Schedule an open forum Pre-Call Meeting with the district president and the circuit visitor** to discuss and establish the process which will be followed to fill the pastoral vacancy.

\_\_\_\_\_ Following the Pre-Call Meeting, **complete the Congregational Self-Study and submit to the district president**. The Self-study is available from the district office and on the district website. The congregation can determine how best to work with the leadership and congregation to complete the Self-Study.

\_\_\_\_\_ The congregation *may* wish to hold an open forum meeting to discuss the results of the Self-Study and the gifts and abilities needed in the next resident pastor.

\_\_\_\_\_ Consider if the congregation would be served best by calling a seminary graduate or a pastor from the field.

\_\_\_\_\_ If the position to be filled is for an assistant/associate pastor, develop a ministry description and the lines of accountability for the position.

\_\_\_\_\_ Unless the constitution specifies otherwise, the call committee is normally comprised of the chairman, secretary, and board of elders. If the congregation operates a Christian day school, the principal or his/her representative should also be included on the call committee.

\_\_\_\_\_ Establish a process and responsible parties to communicate on a regular basis (bi-weekly or at least monthly) with the members of the congregation regarding the progress that is being made with the call process (nomination deadline, members on the call committee, dates of meetings, interviews with potential candidates, etc.) so that all members are kept abreast of the progress that is being made in filling the pastor vacancy.

**\_\_\_\_\_ Solicit from the communicant members of the congregation nominations for candidates for the call list.** Nominations should be made in writing, using the nomination form provided by the district president, during a specified period of time (often three weeks) established by the Voters Assembly or call committee.

\_\_\_\_\_ Designate who is to receive the nominations of potential candidates submitted by the members of the congregation using the form provided by the district president as part of the call process. All nomination forms should be sent to the district in a single packet (i.e. at the same time). Once the nomination window has closed and nominations have been forwarded to the district office, additional nominations may not be made unless a second call list is needed.

\_\_\_\_\_ The district president will secure the Personal Information Form (PIF) and the Self Evaluation Tool (SET) for each candidate on the official call list. He will also add his own suggested candidates to the call list. It is important to note that it is the prerogative of the district president of each pastor requested, whether or not to grant permission to use that pastor’s name on a call list at any given time.

\_\_\_\_\_ The Call Packet (with Call List, PIFs, and SETs) is mailed by the district president’s assistant to the church address. A second packet (normally Call List and PIFs only) is mailed to the circuit visitor.

**\_\_\_\_\_ The official list of candidates should be “published” or made known to the entire communicant membership of the congregation** and a specified number of days be allowed during which any communicant member in good standing shall have the right to file a valid objection, in writing, with the chairman of the call committee concerning any candidate on the official call list. If such an objection is made and deemed to be valid, then the name of the candidate in question shall be removed from the call list. (Note: A valid objection is one according to which a person cannot in good conscience or on moral grounds accept the man in question as his or her pastor.)

\_\_\_\_\_ The call committee may screen the call list, on the basis of the preliminary information which is available if such authority is granted by the Voters Assembly or the Constitution and By-laws of the congregation.

\_\_\_\_\_ Some of the information supplied in the final call packet may be very sensitive. The call committee should work closely with the circuit visitor to determine how best to share appropriate information with the congregation while at the same guarding the sensitive personal information of those on the call list.

**\_\_\_\_\_ Prior to the call meeting**, someone in the congregation should be designated to **complete as much of the information on the call documents as possible.** Also draft an accompanying cover letter in consultation with the circuit visitor, and assemble copies of the Constitution, By-laws, Self-Study, and other appropriate information about the congregation and community. [Note: The Call Documents include the Diploma of Vocation, Supplement to the Diploma of Vocation, Compensation Information, Additional Congregational Information, Summary of the Call, and Summary of Additional Congregational Information.]

\_\_\_\_\_ If after extending one or more calls from the same call list, it is necessary to determine whether remaining candidates on the call list are still available for a call, the circuit visitor shall work with the district president’s assistant to obtain this information before a subsequent call meeting.

**\_\_\_\_\_ Conduct the call meeting with assistance of your Circuit Visitor**, making sure to follow all the requirements of the congregation’s Constitution and By-laws. Unless otherwise specified, several common practices that should be discussed and agreed upon in advance are:

* In order to be elected, a candidate must receive a simple majority.
* All voting shall be done by secret, written ballot.
* In the event that no candidate receives a simple majority on a ballot, then the candidate with the least number of votes shall be removed from the next and all succeeding ballots at that call meeting.
* The election of the pastor is customarily made unanimous. (Remember that the call process should unite the congregation rather than be the cause of any division.)

\_\_\_\_\_ The circuit visitor shall immediately notify by telephone the man who is elected.

\_\_\_\_\_ The circuit visitor shall immediately notify the district president of the name of the pastor who has been elected.

\_\_\_\_\_ The congregation shall be notified who the pastor-elect is, and prayers shall be offered in public worship services, asking the Holy Spirit to guide the pastor-elect in his decision about the call.

\_\_\_\_\_ Finish completing the Call Documents. The Diploma of Vocation shall be signed by the chairman of the congregation and other officers.

\_\_\_\_\_ If calling from the field, mail as soon as possible all Call Documents along with Constitution, By-laws, Self-Study, and other appropriate materials by certified or signature confirmation mail.

\_\_\_\_\_ If calling from the seminary, submit call documents to the district office. (The Constitution, By-laws, Self-Study, etc. can be supplied at a later date.)

\_\_\_\_\_ If calling from the field, it is considerate and customary that a letter from the congregation be forwarded to the pastor-elect's congregation, informing it that its pastor is being called, and soliciting that congregation’s prayers for guidance on this important matter.

\_\_\_\_\_ In the event that one or more calls are declined, and in consultation with the circuit visitor and district president, the call committee may decide whether and when to open the call list for additional candidates.

\_\_\_\_\_ The circuit visitor should see to it that the calling congregation supplies a copy of the Call Documents to the Office of District President.

\_\_\_\_\_ It is helpful for the circuit visitor to notify the district president when the call has been accepted or declined in case the pastor who is called fails to do so.

\_\_\_\_\_ Upon the acceptance of a call, the installation of the pastor-elect needs to be authorized by the district president. The circuit visitor should be consulted regarding the installation service. The congregation should reimburse the circuit visitor and/or the vice president for any expenses they incur associated with the installation. The congregation should also give the circuit visitor or vice president an honorarium if they are asked to preach for the installation.

Throughout the process, pray that the Holy Spirit would guide every step of the call process and those who are part of it.

Encourage the members of the congregation to be patient. Filling a pastoral vacancy takes time.

Contact Information:

* District President’s Office – Tami Lierz, Administrative Assistant, 785-357-4441 ext. 200 or 800-357-4421 ext. 200 or tami@kslcms.org.
* Circuit Visitor – See the President’s office webpage, Vice Presidents and Circuit Visitors

<http://kslcms.org/presidents-office/vice-presidents-circuit-counselors/>

* Congregation Resources – See the President’s office webpage, Congregation Resources

<http://kslcms.org/presidents-office/congregation-resources/>

Adapted for the Kansas District LCMS from the C.O.P. Manual section 9.3.4 and 9.3.7

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