

Guidance Document: Calling a Minister of Religion, Commissioned

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What is a Divine Call?

The Holy Spirit guides and directs the process of calling workers in His kingdom through people, on behalf of calling entities according to their constitutional process. Each step of the process will always include prayer that God's will be done and that the Holy Spirit guides the process and decisions. A call comes from God through the calling entity and is extended by God to the called person.

Who should be called?

Calls are to be issued to teachers and administrators who appear on the roster of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as *Minister of Religion, Commissioned*. Workers with this classification are said to be *rostered*. They have graduated from a synodical college/university after completing a synodically prescribed course of study or have completed a *colloquy* process (*visit the [Colloquy for Church Workers](#) page on the LCMS website for more information*) and have been certified by the LCMS as eligible for a call. It is expected by the LCMS that *rostered* workers will be called rather than contracted. The LCMS considers any employment arrangement with a *rostered* worker to be a call. As a result of their classification as *Ministers of Religion, Commissioned*, these workers are eligible for housing allowances and must file taxes as *self-employed*.

Who may extend Divine Calls?

1. A Divine Call may be extended by a single congregation or an association with that authority as a representative of several LCMS congregations.
2. A call is ordinarily continuing, but it may be issued for a limited period of time. Whether or not a call is continuing or limited needs to be specified in documentation accompanying the call.
3. All *rostered* personnel are to be engaged by call rather than by contract. As stated previously, all *rostered* personnel are considered *called* by the Kansas District and by the LCMS regardless of the document used for employing personnel.

How does a congregation begin the call process?

You are ready to start the call process if...

1. An official vacancy exists because:
 - (a) a person in this position has accepted a call to new ministry, resigned, or retired; or
 - (b) a new position has been officially created.
2. The position to be filled is defined in writing and a position job description is approved by the calling congregation or association. Your position description should include ministry qualifications and an outline of roles and responsibilities. State the salary and specify all benefits being offered. Even if a position description already exists, this is an excellent opportunity to review it, and, if desired, update it.
3. A call committee is in place according to the constitution of the congregation or association.
4. The Kansas District Office is informed of the vacancy. Contact 785-357-4441 Ext. 5001.

How does a congregation identify candidates?

1. Members of the calling congregation or association may propose names to be considered. Any names submitted for consideration are forwarded to the District Education Office by the designated representative of the congregation or association for status review and credentials.

2. The Kansas District Education Office will provide a list of candidates' names upon request from the congregation or association. Your congregation/school may also be granted search rights through the District Office. Access to a Commissioned Minister Information Form (CMIF) search is granted (for a 60-day time limit) to a single designee (Pastor, School administrator, Call Committee Chair, etc.). The search process can be renewed after the 60 days have expired. This individual may ONLY receive search rights through the District Office. A CMIF search can produce a list of potential candidates for a call list.

Access to the CMIFs may only be obtained from the District Office.

The Kansas District can also assist with any search for a congregation/school (this is including Congregational searches for Teacher, DCE, DCO, Deaconess, Early Childhood, etc.).

District offices may also access CMIFs of individuals who have asked to be placed on call lists from other districts.

3. **The Kansas District Education Office will vet all candidates considered on a call list for CALL ELIGIBILITY. District vetting will verify that candidates are on the Roster of the LCMS and are in good standing.** Additional vetting regarding whether a worker is truly capable and possesses the proper credentials for a specific ministry is solely the responsibility of the group extending the call.
4. CMIF forms are to be considered private information. Having someone's papers does not suggest that this person is applying or is being recommended for the specific position. Any printed CMIFs must be shredded at the close of the call process.
5. It is inappropriate for the congregation or association to request information directly from other district offices. All requests are to be channeled through the Kansas District Education Office.

What about securing a candidate (placement) through the Concordia University System (CUS)?

Calling bodies are invited to fill out a candidate request form when looking for new candidates to fill their ministry needs. Congregations/schools will work directly with the Concordia University System and NOT the District Office. Access to the placement process can be obtained through this website:

[Candidate Placement Information \(cuw.edu\)](http://www.cuw.edu)

Is a candidate really available if a call is extended?

It is appropriate to contact a candidate by phone and ask, "*At this point in time, is there anything that would prohibit you from considering a Divine Call?*" This question does not obligate the congregation to extend the call nor the candidate to accept it. This question is usually asked following an initial review of credentials which identified those candidates the call committee wishes to pursue further. NOTE: The CUS system will have specific protocol when interviewing their placement candidates.

How does a congregation investigate a candidate's suitability for a particular position?

1. Contact the people who are listed as references on the CMIF or credential papers.
2. Contact the references – current or past supervisors/pastors of the candidate.
3. Contact any other people who may be acquainted with this person's past performance record.
4. Criminal background checks should be conducted. We recommend contracting with "AAIMCheck" for background checks – www.aamea.org

When these people are contacted, you may ask about the person's educational style, record of accomplishments, areas of strength or weaknesses, length of service in that location, and generally about the candidate's abilities to meet the demands of the position. You may **not** ask any questions prohibited by law. A good local place to determine what is or is not appropriate is to ask the human resources director of your local public school.

How does a congregation interview a candidate?

The questions asked during the interview process should be prepared in advance and be directly applicable to the position and the recommendation criteria and shared with the applicant beforehand.

Consider questions which address background, their relationship with Jesus Christ, the distinct characteristics of a Lutheran ministry in congregations and schools, administrative and teaching experience, staff relationships, planning processes, curriculum understanding, child development, methods of teaching/learning, co-curricular activities, understanding of students, plans for continued education, etc. Spend time modifying, changing, adding, or deleting from this list as you prepare for the interviews.

Possible interview questions:

1. Describe how you have experienced and lived out your relationship with Jesus Christ as a church worker and as a child of God.
2. Why have you chosen the ministry of Lutheran education as a career?
3. How have you built an educational climate in which Christ is the center of all that is done and taught?
4. What activities have you initiated to reach out to visitors?
5. How have you gone about initiating and promoting new policies and procedures?
6. Describe your concept of team ministry. How have you experienced team ministry in your work with pastoral staff, support staff, and volunteers?
7. How have you evaluated and adapted curriculum and instruction based on the characteristics of children of this generation?
8. What activities have been essential to your work in the advancement of God's kingdom?
9. List several activities that have resulted in individuals growing in their discipleship.
10. How would people at your present church describe how you have modeled the Christian life and have provided spiritual leadership for others?
11. What training tools have you provided volunteers in Christian education as they work with children? Youth? Adults? What evidence of growth have you observed in these volunteers following their training and their work with these various age groups?
12. Describe a time when you experienced conflict in ministry. How did you resolve the situation?

How does a congregation conduct the interview?

Contact the candidate with a specific request for an interview. Be prepared to describe to him/her the details about the interview including time, date, place and whether it is to be a phone, online or a personal interview. If it is a personal interview, the calling body is responsible for all expenses incurred.

Prior to the interview, consider providing access to the following items:

- Constitution of the congregation or association
- Handbooks for students, parents, and/or staff
- Position description and related information
- Basic information about your community

Keep in mind that you are seeking to interview the candidate(s) for a called position, and not just a job.

If it is to be a video/phone interview:

- Make certain that you tend to detail (e.g., equipment is in good working order).
- Sit in such a way that all participants can both see/hear and speak into the equipment.

If a personal interview:

- Select a room that is neither too crowded nor excessively large.
- Arrange tables and chairs in a circle or rectangle.
- Seat the candidate to be part of the group rather than the target of an inquisition.
- Place a name tent in front of each person, clearly identifying each person's name.

In either type of interview:

- Determine who will lead the interviewing process.
- Determine who should take written notes.
- Determine who will ask which questions.
- Record the interview ONLY with the agreement of the candidate.

Follow these general interview suggestions (length 60 minutes):

- Open the interview with a prayer for guidance from the Holy Spirit.
- Work to establish rapport with the candidate.
- Make a conscious effort to avoid stress.
- Listen, remain objective, and avoid biases.
- Work to maintain consistency for each candidate.
- Go through prepared questions and any that might be *tag-ons* with the candidate.
- Ask if he or she has any questions to ask of the interviewers. Do not expect in-depth questions from the candidate. At this time, the candidate has not been issued the call and should not be expected to be already considering it. The candidate's questions may be very general.
- Ask if there is something the group should know about the candidate that has not surfaced to this point.
- Thank the candidate and close with a prayer.

After the interview:

- Compare notes.
- Document your observations.
- Compare the candidate's responses to the position description and to the recommendation criteria.

Accessing call documents for Commissioned Ministers

Current call documents must be prepared accurately and completely, with support material assembled, and a cover letter composed on behalf of the calling entity. Most of the documentation and supporting materials can be prepared prior to the meeting, completing the documents once the congregation/association has voted. **NOTE: District Salary Guidelines are accessible from the Kansas District website – www.kslccms.org/business-office – when preparing the salary and benefits package. The District Business Office can assist with this process.**

Call documents for Commissioned Ministers are available in electronic format. You may access the call documents by contacting the District Office. You will need a username and password to access the call document for Commissioned Ministers. You will receive instructions on completing the call documents.

The Diploma of Vocation needs to be printed on a sheet of parchment. All other documents can be printed on regular plain paper. Any questions, please call 785-357-4441 Ext. 5001.

How does a congregation actually extend a call?

1. **Follow the calling process described in your constitution and by-laws.**
2. Pray. Take the formal vote.
3. Contact the candidate by phone to inform him/her of the issuance of the call. Pray with the candidate.
4. An email might be sent to the congregation or association of the person being called at the time of the call, informing them of the call you are extending to said individual. This is a courtesy to the organization from whom you are calling their worker. It can also be an invitation to them to join you in prayer for a God-pleasing decision.
5. Call documents should be sent via Priority or Registered mail within one day after the call meeting. Make certain that all appropriate signatures are secured before sending the documents.
6. Within one day of the vote, notify the Kansas District Education Office **IN WRITING** of the call you have extended.
7. OPTIONAL: If it is feasible, invite the candidate and spouse to visit your congregation with their expenses paid by your congregation/school.
8. Expect the candidate to interview you. Whether by phone or in person, make every effort to be accommodating.
9. Pray!

Period of deliberation – how long should we have to wait for a response?

There is no prescribed timeline for the candidate to respond. Generally, 30 days from receipt of documentation is a good guide. You may receive an answer earlier than that. You may ask the candidate when he/she expects to reach a decision, but pressure should not be applied in decision-making.

There are occasions when decisions take longer than 30 days. There may be extenuating circumstances in the individual's present congregation/school that are consuming time and energy. It is even possible that another congregation/school has also extended your candidate a call, which may extend the decision-making process. A personal or family health issue may also slow down the process. Be understanding and encouraging.

When calls are accepted/declined, notify the Kansas District Education Office **IN WRITING** at the time when you receive official notice from the candidate of the decision.

The Divine Call has been accepted!

1. It's time to schedule the commissioning/installation with the District Office.
2. Complete appropriate paperwork through the Office of the District President for the commissioning/installation of the worker.
3. Remember to thank the call committee for their service!
4. Roll out the 'red carpet' for the new worker and make sure they attend the District New Worker Orientation (generally held in late July)!
5. Provide a mentor for the new worker and begin your onboarding!