



**The Upper Susquehanna Synod,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

***A Guide re: Pastoral Vacancies for Congregation Councils***  
*(Revised Oct. 27, 2010)*

**I. RESIGNATION OF THE PASTOR**

- A. THE PASTOR**, upon resignation, sends a copy of the Letter of Resignation to the Congregation Council and to the bishop.
- B. THE CONGREGATION COUNCIL**, at a regular or called meeting, accepts the pastor's letter of resignation. The letter of resignation is sent promptly to the entire congregation, preferably so that the congregation receives it the day after the council is informed of the resignation. The congregation is notified of the ending date of service of the pastor and perhaps a word of thanks for the gifts of ministry that have been shared. Most pastors need approximately four weeks (30 days) to complete ministry tasks and say good-bye. Thirty days is specified in a pastor's original call. In some cases, upon mutual agreement, this could last up to six weeks or more, depending upon circumstances.
- C. THE CONGREGATION COUNCIL PRESIDENT** contacts the bishop's office to communicate the pastor's resignation and its effective date, if the bishop is not already aware of the pending resignation. When possible, the bishop or a member of his staff will attend the council meeting when the pastor announces her/his resignation in order to discuss the council next steps.

The president of the council, in consultation with the bishop or a member of the bishop's staff, arranges for appropriate coverage between the time of the pastor's resignation and the arrival of an interim pastor. If supply pastors are needed, the schedule will be arranged in consultation between the bishop's office and the synod's supply scheduler.

- D. THE CONGREGATION COUNCIL SECRETARY** reviews the congregation's membership records with the pastor and determines that they are up to date. The synodical constitution specifies that the parochial records must be in good order before a pastor can be installed at another call. The form in Appendix 1 is completed and sent to the synod office.
- E. AN EXIT INTERVIEW** may be planned by the Congregation Council and/or the bishop's staff. Suggestions for exit interview questions are provided (Appendices 2 & 3). The purpose of the interview is to evaluate the ministry, to identify areas of potential growth for the pastor and congregation, and to

celebrate the ministry. If an exit interview is conducted by the council, please consider sharing a copy with the bishop.

**F. FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS** between the pastor and congregation are settled. This includes any salary or benefits due. The pastor likewise settles any debts owed to the congregation.

**G. THE CONGREGATION'S CONSTITUTION** needs to be up-to-date prior to calling a new pastor. If assistance is needed, contact the Synod's Constitution Committee. Revised constitutions need to be submitted to the Synod's Constitution Committee for approval and then to the congregation.

**H. A CELEBRATION** is planned to mark the end of the pastor's ministry and to provide the opportunity for saying "thank-you" and "good-bye." A Service of Farewell and Godspeed is appropriate to use as a part of the liturgy on the pastor's last Sunday with the congregation (Appendix 4).

## **II. MEETING OF THE CONGREGATION COUNCIL AND THE BISHOP**

The bishop or a member of his staff meets with the Congregation Council before the pastor's ending date. The resigning pastor should not attend this meeting. Items discussed at this meeting include:

### **A. REVIEW OF PASTOR'S CLOSURE WITH THE CONGREGATION.**

Have records been reviewed, accounts settled, exit interview conducted, etc.?  
Are there any "loose ends" that need to be tied?

### **B. PLAN FOR INTERIM MINISTRY. (See Section III below).**

### **C. REVIEW OF THE CALL PROCESS.**

A copy of the "Guide to the Call Process" is given to the council president, questions are answered, and any unusual situations or needs discussed.

### **D. PLAN FOR A MINISTRY SITE PROFILE**

The [Ministry Site Profile form](#) (MSP) provides congregations (single and multiple point parishes) and church-related organizations (schools, social ministry organizations, healthcare institutions, and agencies) a single, common form to use to describe their mission and their search for a rostered leader.

The MSP is filled out by leaders within the congregation or organization, under the guidance of the synod bishop or synodical staff. Once completed and submitted, the MSP will be stored within the ELCA's mobility database.

["Ministry Opportunities"](#) makes it possible for rostered leaders and others to

search the database of MSPs to learn of ministry openings, to read a basic snapshot of information about each opening, and to learn about the appropriate contact person for each call process.

The MSP and Mobility Database System are designed only for searches for those rostered within the ELCA. It is not intended for searches for other church workers, including lay professionals.

### **Steps for use of the Ministry Site Profile**

1. Go to the ELCA Call Process website ([www.elca.org/call](http://www.elca.org/call)) and look under “[Using this Site](#)”. Read the introduction page, the “Ministry Site Profile” page, and the “Frequently Asked Questions” page for detailed instructions on how to proceed.
2. The Ministry Site Profile (MSP) is a Formatta form. Formatta Filler is a small computer program used across the ELCA for completing forms. To complete the MSP, you must first download Formatta Filler to your computer. To download, follow the directions on the right sidebar under “Formatta Filler”.
3. Look under “[Call Process Forms](#)” at the bottom of the page for a “Sample” Ministry Site Profile (MSP). Print out this form, and use the hard copy to begin to gather the necessary information to complete a form. The entire council and call committee can work on the profile together. Once a common text is agreed upon, designate someone to complete the Ministry Site Profile online.
4. The designated person next needs to create a Ministry Site Profile account from the “[Call Process Forms](#)” page. Follow the directions on this page under “Creating an Account”. You will be required to provide an email address and create a password. Write these down for future reference.
5. The MSP will reside on your computer while it is being completed. You should take care to save your work and your password as you proceed.
6. When the MSP is completely done, follow the directions on page 14 of the MSP to:
  - save your work to your computer,
  - print a copy for your records,
  - date your MSP,
  - lock the form with a password you create, and
  - with the computer connected to the Internet, submit your form to the Mobility Database.
7. After submitting the MSP, you will see a dialogue box confirming that the MSP has been sent successfully.
8. You’re still not done! Next, you’ll be sending the appropriate form to your outside reference to complete your MSP.

- a) Go back to the ELCA Call Process page ([www.elca.org/call](http://www.elca.org/call)), and look under the heading “Access Account”.
  - b) Click on “Ministry Sites”, and enter your email and password.
  - c) Click on the PDF file, “Reference Recommendation”, and save the form to your computer.
  - d) Draft an email to your designated reference, and attach this PDF file to the email. Your reference will complete the form, and submit it to the system themselves.
  - e) IMPORTANT NOTE: opening this PDF file has the electronic effect of “marking” it to the person opening it. In other words, if you want to see what it says, and open it before you send it to your reference, your reference will be unable to use that particular form to submit it through the system. In this case, simply download a new, unopened version of the form, and send this copy to your reference.
9. The MSP does not become active in the system until the Synodical Bishop approves it and allows it to post to the system. The Bishop can do so only after both the form AND the reference recommendation have been received electronically.
  10. To provide more information to potential candidates, your congregation may also download and complete any or all of the “Seven Reflections on Ministry and Context”. Samples of the form are found under the MSP sample form. To complete this form, access your account (as in step #8 above) and click on this optional form.
  11. You can, as needed, go to “Access Account” on the web site in order to
    - monitor the status of your MSP,
    - request a copy of your current MSP in order to edit it for re-submission,
    - request a copy of the supporting forms for the MSP (the *Reflections* and *Reference* forms), or to
    - request that your MSP be archived within the system.
  12. If you wish to update an existing MSP, you may edit the copy on your computer and re-submit it. You should also go to “Access Account” to request that the previous MSP be archived so as not to have the previous MSP active in the system at the same time. Each re-submitted form must be reviewed each time by the Synodical Bishop before being activated in the system.
  13. If your ministry site has more than one opening to be filled by a rostered leader, you may edit your existing MSP to reflect this second position and then resubmit it. If you need a blank MSP in order to describe this second position, go back into the system (using the same ID/password as before) and download a fresh MSP.

## Some tips on filling out the MSP

- *Write the MSP carefully*  
All the information that will appear within your listing on the ELCA website database "Ministry Opportunities" is drawn from your entries on the MSP. Write the MSP carefully, as if the whole world will read it.
- *Complete the MSP*  
Congregations are expected to fill out the entire MSP. Church-related organizations may, with the concurrence of the bishop, only complete Parts 1-4 and 8-19.
- *Involve others*  
Involve as many people as possible at your ministry site in thinking and writing about the questions of Identity/Purpose, Gifts/Resources, and Context/Needs. Begin every conversation with Bible study and prayer.
- *Give thought to the narrative questions*  
The most important questions are the narrative questions. Give them a lot of thought, especially question 8 which will be publicized within "Ministry Opportunities."

### Staying Active in the Database

MSPs remain active in the database system until:

1. the user requests that their forms be archived (using "Access Account"),
2. the bishop determines that the account needs to be archived, or
3. one year has elapsed (at which time automatically generated e-mails will request that the MSP be updated and submitted for re-approval).

## E. PLAN FOR THE SELECTION OF A CALL COMMITTEE.

A call committee is appointed. Nominations may be made immediately following the bishop's departure from this meeting. The number of persons appointed depends upon the congregation's constitution. Normally this is 5-6 persons, at least two of whom are members of the congregation council. (See Section IV for guidance in choosing and organizing a call committee).

**Officers should not be appointed by the council**, but will be chosen by the Call Committee itself when they meet with the bishop for their initial training.

## III. INTERIM AND SUPPLY MINISTRY

So that the well-being of a congregation during a pastoral vacancy may be maintained, the synod bishop and bishop's staff cooperate with the Congregation Council to provide continuing pastoral ministry.

To facilitate this, the bishop, in consultation with the Congregation Council, appoints an interim pastor during the congregation's pastoral vacancy. Normally, the appointment of the interim pastor is made prior to the resigning pastor's departure or shortly thereafter. It may be necessary for worship leadership to continue with the assistance of supply pastors and/or authorized lay worship leaders.

#### **A. TYPES OF INTERIM PASTORAL MINISTRIES.**

1. **AN INTERIM PASTOR** may be appointed to serve pastoral needs while the congregation is in the call process seeking a regularly called pastor. Normally, this type of interim ministry involves the part-time services of the pastor, usually 10 hours per week as a minimum, excluding preaching and presiding. If the interim pastor is serving another congregation or entity, the approval of the council or board of that body must be obtained. Because of the limited availability of pastors for interim service, it may be necessary to obtain other pastors to assist the appointed interim to fulfill the responsibilities needed by a congregation.
2. **AN INTENTIONAL INTERIM PASTOR** may be appointed by the bishop in consultation with the council to serve the congregation in a specific ministry of transition to help the congregation move toward the process of seeking a regularly called pastor. This type of interim ministry may involve the full-time or part-time services of the pastor to lead the congregation through self-examination, attending to conflict, and/or orienting toward the future. Intentional interim pastors generally bring specific training to this ministry. An interim pastor appointed to serve in a multiple-staff congregation would normally be a pastor from outside the congregation. If the associate/assistant pastor is appointed to be the interim, then that person shall not be eligible for a call as senior pastor.

#### **B. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE INTERIM PASTOR AND CONGREGATION.**

The duties of an interim pastor are similar to those of a regularly called pastor. Such duties normally include emergency calls to members at home or in the hospital, pastoral guidance for the council and the congregation, catechetical instruction, pastoral acts, etc.

Since the availability of the interim pastor for many duties may be limited, it is the duty of the Congregation Council to inform parishioners of the interim pastor's responsibilities to avoid unrealistic expectations. The council may need to designate persons or committees to oversee certain aspects of the congregation's interim life—such as the newsletter, care of the church property, and other administrative tasks. Consultation with the church secretary and other staff will aid in such designations. In multiple-staff situations, it should

not be assumed that remaining staff members take over the duties of the departing staff.

Contact persons should be arranged for each congregation to be served by the interim pastor. The contact person to provide information to the interim pastor about shut-ins, deaths, meetings, etc. These persons should be active members who regularly attend worship, have telephones and preferably email.

The Council shall complete an information sheet for the interim pastor (appendix 5) which includes the name(s) of the contact person(s).

**C. COMPENSATION OF THE INTERIM PASTOR.**

An interim pastor shall be compensated for the time spent serving the needs of the congregation. If the interim is serving 10 hours per week, the compensation shall be  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the previous pastor's salary, but not less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the synod minimum salary. The terms of such compensation shall be detailed in the agreement between the interim pastor and the Congregation Council (Appendix 6) A trained *intentional* interim pastor's salary and benefits are based on the appropriate synodical guidelines for a pastor of his/her experience.

**D. AUTHORITY OF THE INTERIM PASTOR.**

The interim pastor may be a pastor of a neighboring congregation, a pastor under call to special service, a pastor on leave from call, or a retired pastor. During service to the congregation, the interim pastor shall have the rights and duties of a regularly called pastor. However, the synodical constitution prohibits any involvement of the interim in the call process. It should be understood by all parties that the interim pastor shall not be a candidate for pastor of the congregation.

**E. CLOSURE OF THE INTERIM RELATIONSHIP.**

Upon completion of service, the interim pastor shall certify to the bishop that the parochial records for the period for which he/she was responsible are in order. (Use form similar to Appendix 1.)

**F. OTHER PASTORS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE CONGREGATION.**

The interim pastor should normally perform all ministerial acts within the congregation. Members of the congregation shall not call on the former pastor or any other pastor for ministerial acts without the express invitation of the interim pastor. Pastoral ethics require that the departing pastor not return to the congregation to conduct services, including weddings and funerals, after termination of ministry there, unless there are unusual circumstances and he/she is invited by the interim or newly-called pastor. The former pastor should not return for pastoral acts for at least a full year after the arrival of the new pastor in order that the transition might be completed. This matter would

be appropriate to discuss in the exit interview. This procedure encourages a congregation to begin growing toward the future rather than clinging to the past.

#### **G. SUPPLY PASTORS/ AUTHORIZED LAY WORSHIP LEADERS.**

The bishop's office has a scheduler who arranges supply pastors and Authorized Lay Worship Leaders. Authorized Lay Worship Leaders must obtain special authorization from the bishop to preside at Holy Communion. Ordained pastors will be sought to preside at Holy Communion before an Authorized Lay Worship Leader will be sought. All supply pastors/authorized lay worship leaders should be compensated for their services according to the current synodical guidelines.

#### **H. PASTORS APPOINTED UNDER SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

A pastor may be appointed to serve a congregation that may not be seeking a regularly called pastor. This is a specialized type of ministry that will be defined by the bishop in consultation with the congregation.

### **IV. CALL COMMITTEE**

#### **A. Definition**

The call committee, seeking God's will for the congregation through prayer, interviews, consulting of references, and conversation with one another, unanimously and wholeheartedly recommends a candidate to the Congregation Council for their consideration.

#### **B. Accountability**

The call committee is responsible to the council and to the council alone.

#### **C. Composition**

Normally, the call committee consists of five or six persons, no more than two of whom are members of the council, as specified by the congregation's constitution. Non-council members should be responsible voting members of the congregation. The call committee's membership should reflect the composition of the congregation, seek gender balance and include persons of various ages and length of congregational membership. To the extent possible, they should not be members of the same family.

#### **D. Officers of the Call Committee**

Officers consist of the Call Committee Chairperson, Secretary and Chaplain. These officers should not be appointed by the council, but will be chosen by the Call Committee itself when they meet with the bishop for their initial training.

**APPENDIX 1**

**LETTER CERTIFYING THAT CHURCH RECORDS ARE IN ORDER**

Upon the resignation of a pastor, the following policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America applies: “The parochial records of each congregation shall be kept in a separate book which shall remain its property. The secretary of the congregation shall attest to the bishop of the synod that such records have been placed in the secretary’s hands in good order by a departing pastor before:

1. the pastor is installed in another field of labor, or
2. a certificate of dismissal or transfer is issued.”

Date:

This is to certify that I have examined the parochial records of \_\_\_\_\_ Church, (location) and find them in good order.

Signed by Council Secretary  
Address

Mailing address for call process:  
Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA,  
P.O. Box 36,  
Lewisburg, PA 17837

## APPENDIX 2:

### EXIT INTERVIEW FOR PASTOR

Date:

Congregation's Name:

Address:

City/State:

Zip:

Pastor's Name:

1. How would you describe the congregation when you arrived?
2. How would you describe the congregation as you leave?
3. What do you believe has gone particularly well during your leadership?
4. What did not go as well as you had hoped?
5. What are the major strengths of this congregation?
6. What are the major challenges of this congregation?
7. What ministry goals would you suggest for the congregation to strive toward during the next 5 years?
8. What other comments would you like to share?
9. What information from this exit interview should be shared, and with whom?

## APPENDIX 3:

### EXIT INTERVIEW FOR CONGREGATION

Date:

Congregation's Name:

Address:

City/State:

Zip:

Pastor's Name:

1. What has gone particularly well during the pastor's leadership?
2. What did not go as well as you had hoped?
3. What are the major strengths of this congregation?
4. What are the major challenges of this congregation?
5. Were there any surprises when the pastor first arrived?
6. What goals does the congregation need to work toward in the next 5 years?
7. Any thoughts you would like to share with the pastor about his/her leadership style?

## APPENDIX 4:

### SERVICE OF FAREWELL AND GODSPEED

(Reprinted from *Occasional Services*, copyright 1982, by permission.)

1. *Farewell and Godspeed is a public affirmation of the corporate nature of the baptismal faith, for use when members leave a congregation.*
2. *When set within the liturgy for Holy Communion, this order is used following either the Prayers (22) or the post-communion prayer (40).*

**(Sit)**

3. *A representative of the congregation comes forward with those who are leaving the congregation and addresses the assembly:*

(NAMES) are leaving our congregation, and we wish to bid *them* farewell.

4. *The pastor or a representative of the congregation may make brief comments about those who are leaving, recalling the important events which have been shared with the congregation.*

5. *The minister says:*

**Pastor:** In Holy Baptism our Lord Jesus Christ received you and made you *members* of his Church. When you *came to/were baptized* in this congregation we rejoiced to receive you into our fellowship in the Gospel. In this community of faith you have heard the proclamation of God's Word, which reveals his loving purpose for you and for all creation. You have been nourished at Christ's holy table and called to be *witnesses* to the Gospel. God has blessed you in this fellowship, and he has blessed us through you.

**All:** We encourage you to continue to receive and share God's gifts in (name of new congregation) as *workers* with us in the kingdom of God.

6. *The prayer is said.*

**All:** Let us pray.

Eternal God, we thank you for (names) and for our life together in this congregation and community. As *they* have been a blessing to us, so now send *them* forth to be a blessing to others; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All: Amen**

**(Stand)**

7. *The service continues with the Peace (23) or the Benediction (42).*

*8. When appropriate, the following or a similar statement may be made by a representative of the congregation:*

Pastor (name) , on (date of call) , we called you to be our pastor; to proclaim god's Word, to baptize new members into the Church of Jesus Christ, to announce God's forgiveness to us, and to preside at our celebrations of the Lord's Supper. With the gospel you have comforted us in times of sickness and trouble, and at the death of our loved ones. Sharing our joys and sorrows, you (and your family) have been important to our life together in the Church of Jesus Christ and in our service to this community.

## APPENDIX 5:

### COUNCIL WORKSHEET FOR INTERIM PASTOR

The Congregation Council may use this worksheet to determine items that should be included in the agreement with the interim pastor (Appendix 6).

An agreement with an intentional interim pastor may include additional items such as the leadership by the interim pastor in developmental tasks of the congregation.

Please bear in mind that the interim ministry is not necessarily full-time and some expectations for ministry will have to be met from within the lay membership of the congregation.

1. What do you understand to be the needs of your congregation at this time?
2. How do you see the interim pastor or other leaders helping meet these needs?
3. We would like the interim pastor to preach:  
How many Sunday services a month?  
How many special services?  
How many weekday services?
4. We would like the interim pastor to teach:  
Catechetics/ Confirmation Time Place  
Bible Study Time Place  
First Communion Time Place  
Sunday Church School Time Place  
Other\_\_\_\_\_ Time Place
5. How would you like the interim to be involved with council meetings?  
When and where does the council meet?
6. What other meetings do you expect the interim to attend?  
Committee(s) When and where?  
Staff When and where?  
Other
7. Do you anticipate any upcoming baptisms? Weddings? Funerals?
8. Do you expect the interim pastor to do counseling?  
Baptismal\_\_\_\_\_ Crisis\_\_\_\_\_ Pre-Marital\_\_\_\_\_ Other\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX 5: Continued from previous page**

9. What visitation responsibilities do you anticipate the interim doing?

- Home visits\_\_\_\_\_
- Hospital visits\_\_\_\_\_
- Nursing Home Visits\_\_\_\_\_
- Other (Describe)

10. Do you expect the interim pastor to administer home communions?

- How often?
- When?
- In whose homes?

11. For what other duties would you expect the interim to be responsible?

12. Who are some people in the congregation who can visit with the interim in situations #9 and #10 above?

13. Do you expect an interim pastor to attend to these responsibilities in:

- a full-time position?
- $\frac{3}{4}$  time?
- $\frac{1}{2}$  time?
- $\frac{1}{4}$  time?

*(Interim pastors who are needed less than one day a week are sometimes paid on an hourly basis.)*

14. Who and how should the interim pastor contact leaders in the congregation?

- Council President
- Council Vice President
- Congregational Treasurer
- Regarding visitations
- If the pastor becomes ill?

15. What should be the starting date be for the interim pastor?

## APPENDIX 6:

### SAMPLE AGREEMENT FOR INTERIM PASTOR, CONGREGATION COUNCIL, AND BISHOP

Date:

Congregation:

Address:

City / State Zip

The Reverend (name) agrees to serve as (intentional) interim pastor of (name) Lutheran Church, (location), beginning (date) . He/she will continue in this position until a new pastor has been called, or until the bishop, in conversation with the Congregation Council of (name) Lutheran Church and Pastor (name of interim) determines that his/her services are no longer required, unless a specific term of duty is specified herein. Thirty days notice will be provided by the pastor or the congregation, in consultation with the bishop, before ending this agreement.

The Interim Pastor will perform all official pastoral acts and ministry as agreed upon. For this he/she will be compensated (amount) , and will be reimbursed for transportation costs at \$. per mile(current IRS standard).

Should the Interim Pastor be unable to perform a pastoral act, he/she will, in consultation with the council president, secure another pastor to fill in.

The Interim Pastor shall not be a candidate for the pastorate of this congregation. Also, the Interim Pastor shall refrain from exerting any influence on the call process of this congregation.

The Council President (or other member designated by council) will keep the Interim Pastor informed of the pastoral needs of the congregation.

#### **INTERIM PASTOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES**

In addition to pastoral acts, the Interim Pastor will be expected to do the following: (list will vary according to needs of individual congregations)

1. Be diligent in prayer and reflection.
2. Lead regularly-scheduled worship services and/or special services. (If the interim is not available for Sunday morning worship, supply pastors may be arranged through a pastor supply list.) Honoraria for such worship leadership shall follow current synodical guidelines.
3. Meet regularly with the Congregation Council.
4. Visit the ill in the hospital and at home.
5. Administer at-home communion to the following shut-ins on a \_\_\_\_\_ basis:  
(list current shut-ins and their addresses)

6. Teach.
7. Attend the following committee meetings: (list)

At the conclusion of the interim ministry, the Interim Pastor will certify to the bishop that the parochial records are in good order (Appendix 1).

*(The letter of agreement is complete only with signatures of the council president, the interim pastor, and the bishop of the synod.)*

***This “ Guide re: Pastoral Vacancies for Congregation Councils” is available on the synod website. <http://www.uss-elca.org/for-congregations/resources>***