

Organizational Structure of LCMS Churches



The Call Process
Part 3 of a
Leadership Series

Definitions

- ✦ **Divine Call** A call to fill the office of the ministry, established by Scripture, and distinguished from the universal Priesthood of all believers
- ✦ **Call** A call to fill a specific vocation that is committed to the church, such as a teacher, organist, Director of Christian Education, etc.
- ✦ **Vicar** A seminary student, generally in his third year of education leading to ordination

Definitions

- ✦ **Vacancy Pastor** A pastor who has been assigned to shepherd, on a part time basis, a parish that has a pulpit vacancy
- ✦ **Interim Pastor** A pastor assigned to shepherd a parish on a full time basis and for a longer period of time. Generally, the parish is not ready to extend a call until a later time

Definitions

* **Missionary Pastor** A pastor who has been assigned to establish a mission station or outpost in a particular location, with the intention it will become strong enough to extend a call in the future

* **Eligible Pastors** Those who are on the roster. (Missionary pastors, interim pastors and vacancy pastors are not primary candidates for a call)

Overview

* Some concepts concerning the call

- ◆ All pastors, teachers and others on the *rosters* of Synod are *eligible* for a call
- ◆ If they are not on the *roster*, they are not eligible
- ◆ Commissioned workers on the *roster* may also serve under contract for periods of time without a call
- ◆ Commissioned workers on the *roster* also serve in seminaries and the Synod

Overview

* The district *only* has an *advisory* role in matters dealing with congregations, *including* the call process

* The congregation has *autonomy* in all matters of its local government (polity), *including* the call process and its initiation

* The Voters' Assembly, as the *corporate body* of the congregation, has *exclusive* responsibility for the call process

Overview

- ✦ The pastor's call is rightly titled a "*divine call*" because it is ordained by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ
- ✦ It is the "highest office" in the church as it is the *appointment* of Christ's servant to *serve* and *shepherd* His flock
- ✦ It is not a "Lordship" over the flock, but a *servant set apart*, by his divine call, from the rest of the flock

Overview

- ✦ The shepherd/pastor is properly the *spiritual leader* of the flock for all things spiritual, but not things administrative
- ✦ The pastor is *accountable* to the Lord and the flock/congregation for his *spiritual fidelity* in
 - ◆ Proclamation of the true Law & Gospel
 - ◆ Proper administration of the Sacraments
 - ◆ Instruction of the congregation in The Word and the Lutheran Confessions
 - ◆ Adhering to his ordination and installation vows

Overview

- ✦ The sheep properly *judge* their *shepherd* for faithful scriptural and confessional teaching and preaching
- ✦ The church (congregation) *must exist* in order for a *divine call* to be extended to a pastor to serve as its shepherd
 - ◆ A church *rightly* exists where its assembly consists of a pastor and laymen
 - ◆ Having a vacancy does not mean the congregation is not a real congregation during that time, just not a complete one

Vacancies

✦ Happen as the Holy Spirit *moves* pastors and other workers to *give up* one divine call where they are and *accept* a new divine call at another location in Christ's vineyard

- ◆ After *prayer* and *reflection* of where they may *best serve* the Lord, as a *true servant*

✦ Happen as a *result* of retirement, health problems, etc

✦ Happen as a *result* of church discipline and unrepentant sin

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Vacancies

✦ Happen as a result of *human reasons* getting in the way of a divine call

- ◆ Removal of a pastor or teacher for non-Scriptural reasons
- ◆ Removal of a pastor or teacher due to outside interference, e.g., circuit or district

✦ Happens due to "bad chemistry" between the pastor and the *majority* of the congregation

- ◆ Orthodox pastor arrives at a poorly catechized congregation, or vice versa

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Voters' Assembly

✦ The Voters' Assembly basically "manages" what Jesus has *entrusted* to the members of a congregation to do

- ◆ Regardless of how the vacancy *happened*, the *process* is the same
- ◆ The Voters' Assembly has the *entrusted* role to keep the Office of Public Ministry occupied by a *faithful* servant
- ◆ The Voters' Assembly may *add* or *subtract* offices as its needs change

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Voters' Assembly

* The role of the Voters' Assembly in the calling process is *sacrosanct* in that it has been a fundamental role since before there was a Synod

- ◆ Any attempts to *change* the established pattern without due process is an attempt to seize by improper means *control* of the process
- ◆ This can happen from within by church leadership, or without, by Synod/district interference

Voters' Assembly

* When a vacancy exists the first decision the assembly makes is to fill immediately, or not

- ◆ If there is no other called pastor there is no option, a call must be made
 - The Board of Elders is instructed to make arrangements with the Circuit Counselor for assistance in the assignment of a vacancy pastor
 - That assignment is *confirmed* by the Voters, unless delegated
- ◆ If there is a second called pastor serving then there may need to be an adjustment of duties

Voters' Assembly

* The next step is the appointment of a Call Committee by the Voters Assembly

- ◆ The chairman is elected
- ◆ The members should number 5-15, plus the chairman, depending on the size of the parish
- ◆ The members should be from a cross-section of the congregation, with leadership filling no more than approximately 50% of the positions

Voters' Assembly

✦ Every member of the congregation should be given approximately three weeks to nominate names to the list

- ◆ No one can remove a nomination unless there is a pending church discipline or criminal case
- ◆ Once the period is complete the list is closed
- ◆ The list is then sent to the district office for vetting and for additions by the district office
- ◆ The district may remove names where there are pending discipline or criminal issues and so state in their response

Call Committee

✦ At this point the call committee handles the proceedings until it has made all the necessary reviews of recommendations, qualifications, etc., of the final list received back from the district office

- ◆ The vacancy pastor assists in the deliberations of the call committee in the form of *spiritual* guidance
- ◆ If empowered to do so the committee may generate a "short list" of three or four names of the *most qualified* candidates

Call Committee

- ◆ The committee needs to establish a list of questions for interviewing the candidates via telephone, along with a rating system
- ◆ The requirements of the congregation need to be addressed in these questions in an honest and open way
- ◆ Any adopted *policies* of the parish need to be stated
- ◆ What the congregation does not want is to create a situation where all needs are not clearly communicated with the candidates
- ◆ A mismatch will generate different expectations between the congregation and the candidate
- ◆ This generates a recipe for a stormy relationship

Call Committee

* Recommendations and resumes' do not always accurately reflect *true* qualifications of the candidates, unfortunately, thus the telephone interview process should *probe* all needed areas of concern and the duties of the position (duties not included in the call are *not* to be added later as an afterthought)

- ◆ *Primary duties*, Preach, Teach and properly administer the Sacraments
- ◆ *Secondary duties*, (fully define, if not, you are not ready to call)

Call Committee

* Each member of the committee should be assigned to check the references provided for each candidate on the short list

- ◆ Question 1: Would you call this person to your location, unequivocally?
- ◆ Question 2: What is the candidate's strongest point for this call?
- ◆ Question 3: What is the biggest weakness concerning this call?

Call Committee

* When the committee has winnowed the list down to three or four it has basically completed its work

- ◆ During the interview process some candidates voluntarily remove their names because they are no longer available, etc.

* The chairman reports to the Voters' Assembly that a short list has been completed and it time to convene the assembly for discussion and voting

Voting

- * The call committee chairman reports the short list to the Voters' Assembly, and names removed for cause or non-availability, etc.
 - ◆ The short list is presented and candidates discussed until the assembly is ready to vote
 - ◆ Voting is by paper ballot and a clear majority is needed to make a selection
 - ◆ If multiple ballots are needed all candidates receiving less than 20 to 25% of the vote are dropped for the next ballot, until two remain

Voting

- * Voting proceeds until a candidate has clearly garnered the *majority* of the votes
 - ◆ Once a selection has been made it is customary for a *unanimous vote* for the candidate be taken to show *unity* in the choice
 - ◆ Sometimes a vote is also taken to automatically *extend* the call to the second place candidate, if also well qualified, in the event the call is rejected by the first candidate

Voting

- * At this point the President of the congregation makes a telephone call to the candidate to announce his selection
- * Approximately four weeks is allocated to the candidate for the consideration and prayer period
 - ◆ In practice the candidate will inform you how long he will need
- * When the candidate has reached a decision that is communicated to the congregation and circuit counselor quickly

Calling a Commissioned Minister

- ✦ This process is basically the same as for a pastor when a call is issued to fill a vacancy
 - ◆ This is not a Divine Call
 - ◆ A housing allowance can be provided
- ✦ Other options are also allowed
 - ◆ The candidate can be issued a contract for a year or more to fill a vacancy
 - ◆ The contract can be converted to a call later
 - ◆ Contracts can be issued by the Board of Education if the Voters so delegated, but not solely by one person

Summary

- ✦ The process doesn't always work exactly the way it should because we humans tend to gum it up from time to time
- ✦ The biggest areas of concern are the lost "collective knowledge" on the calling process by the laity and external pressures
- ✦ The Voters' Assembly is the administrative authority for all Divine calls
- ✦ The filling of non-called vacancies are never left to an individual to decide or appoint

Summary

- ✦ The call process does not always work as we would want it to, but be patient, you are doing the Lord's work
- ✦ Encourage the parish to pray often during the call process and during the time a candidate is considering your call
- ✦ The points expressed are based on historical practice and may differ among congregations, but are offered as "best practice"
