

# CALL PROCESS MANUAL



NORTH AMERICAN  
LUTHERAN  
CHURCH

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## North American Lutheran Church - NALC

This process is designed to address situations in which a pastor seeks to secure a call to another ministry or a congregation seeks to fill a pastoral vacancy. This manual provides the necessary direction to allow those impacted to navigate through the call process.

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### WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT CALL AND MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH

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Lutherans believe that God calls each of us to discipleship within the Body of Christ to save lost sinners, to witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to serve those in need in our world. The gift of baptism into the life of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is our initiation, our ordination into ministry as a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ. Within the Body of Christ all are called to mission and ministry in Jesus' name. Our call or vocation is the particular way or ways in which God wishes to use us and gives us gifts and blessings to fulfill our calling. We may be called to minister to the poor, to feed the hungry, to lead music in worship, to sing in the choir, to serve as a Sunday school teacher. Our calling or vocation may also be to serve God as spouse, parent, or neighbor. Our "job" may or may not be our particular vocation. Our job may be an instrument God provides for us to fulfill our calling in our daily lives.

At the same time, God calls certain persons from the Body of Christ to serve as ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament. As Lutherans, we believe that God calls such persons, and the call is affirmed by the Church. In the Scriptures, we see again and again that God calls persons to serve Him. When persons experience a pull or a push — a desire to attend seminary and begin to prepare for ordained ministry — we do not yet consider that they have been "called" but have only been led to prepare. Even after seminary education is completed, a person is not ordained into ministry until he or she has received a valid call from the Church. Normally, this call comes through a local congregation. We believe that it is God who controls the call process of a pastor, and the congregation seeks to discern God's will through prayer, interviews, conversation and, finally, the vote of the congregation. The congregation votes to extend a call to a pastor to recognize that this is the person God intends to be the next pastor of this congregation. This is why the congregational call process and the discernment of the pastor available for call must involve prayer, attention to God's Word, and a yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit.

In preparation for a congregational call process, and when a pastor is open to a new call, time should be spent in Bible study with regard to what Holy Scripture says about God's call, the responsibilities that go with God's call, the gifts and abilities provided by the Holy Spirit, and the cooperative nature of the ordinary (baptized) ministry and the extraordinary (ordained) ministry within the Body of Christ. In preparation for entering the call process of the NALC,

we encourage all involved to make use of the following Bible study. It is an integral part of the Congregational Workshop in Preparation for the Call Process, and may be profitably used by all participating in that event. In addition, call committees might use their first one or two meetings to study these passages together. Pastors newly entering the call process may do this study alone, or if married, may wish to involve their spouse in studying these passages together.

Each of the following passages relate to God's call and our response to that call. After prayer for the insight and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, read each passage and consider these questions:

- What is God saying about His call to mission and ministry?
- What insights come from this passage regarding the ministry of the congregation/the community of disciples?
- What insights come from this passage regarding the ministry of the ordained pastor?
- How am I — how are we — being challenged by this passage to live and serve differently?
- In light of this passage, how might ministry in the NALC be renewed and restored?
- What is God saying to me in this passage?

#### Matthew 28:17-20

17 And when they saw Jesus they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

#### Mark 16:15

15 And Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

#### Luke 24:44-53

44 Then Jesus said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." 50 And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. 51

While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple blessing God.

#### John 10:7-18

7 So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

#### John 20:20-23

20 When Jesus had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

#### John 21:15-19

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” 19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying

this he said to him, "Follow me."

#### Acts 6:1-7

1 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.

6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

#### Galatians 1: 11-17

*The apostle Paul wrote:* 11 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. 12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. 14 And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

#### Galatians 5: 13-25

13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery,

enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

#### Ephesians 4:11-16

<sup>11</sup>And he (Christ) gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup>so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup>Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint

with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

#### 1 John 4:1-7

*John wrote:* 1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. 4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

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**After studying these questions for each Scripture passage, spend time reflecting/discussing the following questions:**

#### **For Pastors**

1. How do I experience the call of God today? Is God calling me to something new and

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different? Is God calling me to continue on where I am?

2. Am I aware of the presence of Jesus Christ in my life, leading and guiding me? Or am I often distant from Him?
  3. Do I see myself as a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ, or a professional church worker?
  4. Am I attuned to the Holy Spirit, seeking the will of God, or following my own will and way?
  5. How might I be renewed and reenergized for ministry?
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***For Call Committee (and Congregations)***

1. How has our ministry been going?
2. What was the nature of the relationship between our last pastor and congregation? Positive? Struggling? Cooperative? Tense?
3. How did our congregation work together with our last pastor? An equal partnership? Fruitful? All using their gifts and talents fully?
4. How might our congregation prepare for the coming of our next pastor, in light of these Bible passages? What needs to change in our congregation to create a healthy, cooperative spirit between pastor and congregation? How can we effect these changes?

**KEY TO THE ACRONYMS**

NALC – North American Lutheran Church

ABME – Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism

MD – Mission District Dean

CPC – Call Process Coordinator  
PCAT – Pastoral Care and Transition Team  
AAB – Area Assistant to the Bishop

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## THE CALL PROCESS IN THE NALC

Because the NALC serves pastors and congregations throughout the North American continent, the call process is continental in nature. Most calls in the NALC do not happen within one mission district (MD), but pastors move from one MD to another. In some cases, pastors may be considered for call across national borders — for example, from the US to Canada. For this reason, the call process is shepherded through the office of the Bishop of the NALC. The bishop has primary responsibility for working with congregational vacancies and pastors available for call within the NALC. The bishop offers spiritual and pastoral guidance to all involved in the call process. In his office and under his authority, the assistant to the bishop for ministry and ecumenism (ABME) is the chief overseer for this process. The Call Process Coordinator (CPC) is main facilitator and works under the purview of the ABME. Although congregations and pastors will find the NALC process open and flexible, most are encouraged to find that there is a simple and straightforward process, and that there is a resource person available in the bishop's office to assist and guide them through this process.

The MD deans, while they may be involved in the call process, are not responsible for calls within their respective MD. The MD dean works together with the CPC for the good of pastors and congregations in the call process. The involvement of the MD dean is varied and often depends upon the particular needs of congregations and pastors, in cooperation with the ABME and the CPC. The MD dean is a resource person for the call process, a shepherd willing to push or pull when needed, a local pastoral support for all involved in the call process and a helpful contact for congregations and pastors. The MD dean does not normally recommend pastoral candidates directly to congregations, nor do congregations request names of pastoral candidates directly from the MD dean. Again, the call process takes place through the bishop's office. The CPC has primary responsibility for working with pastors and congregations. The CPC and the MD dean will work together and assist one another, as needed, to provide pastors and congregations with support, guidance, and encouragement throughout the call process.

The role of the MD dean in the call process, as called upon by the bishop or his assistant, may take several forms. For example, the MD dean may recommend possible local pastoral candidates to the Call Process Coordinator. The MD dean may be called upon to meet with a particular congregational call committee when they are experiencing tension or conflict. The MD dean may be asked to meet with congregational leadership when compensation is not sufficient to call a full-time pastor and they may need to consider part-time or “yoked” ministry with another congregation. The involvement of the MD dean is shaped by the particular needs

of congregations and pastors, and though the dean will not be involved in every call process, their availability and wisdom are invaluable resources.

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## WHEN THERE IS A CONGREGATIONAL VACANCY

When a pastor resigns, retires or a congregation experiences a pastoral vacancy for some other reason, the congregational lay leadership will immediately consult with the CPC, and inform their mission district dean. It is the responsibility of the congregation council, in consultation with the mission district dean, to make arrangements for pulpit supply on Sundays and to contract with other local pastors who may be able to serve them during the interim period between pastors. This is the first task to be considered during the vacancy. Again, the local MD dean will assist the congregation in planning for the vacancy.

Many healthy congregations are able to continue on in ministry during a vacancy with a local pastor offering Word and Sacrament at weekend services, together with increased involvement of lay members, partnering with local clergy as needed for pastoral care, funerals, etc. In these circumstances, a congregation may wish to engage a nearby NALC pastor to serve as “vice-pastor.” The vice-pastor doesn’t normally serve the vacant congregation on Sunday mornings but attends council meetings and assists the vacant congregation as needed with spiritual guidance, administrative advice and counsel and stable pastoral presence. This is helpful when a variety of pastors are filling the pulpit on Sundays. In some circumstances, there may be need for covenanting with an “intentional interim minister” who will assist with reflection, renewal and healing within the congregation during the vacancy.

The NALC is working to develop a larger cadre of trained intentional interim ministers. Arrangement for such an interim minister takes place through the cooperative work of the congregation, the MD dean and the NALC bishop’s office. The congregation, ABME, CPC or the MD dean may highlight the need for an intentional interim minister. When such a need exists, the local MD dean, together with the office of the bishop, will recommend a particular interim and make the initial contact between the congregation and the interim. After a period of conversation and exploration, the congregation and interim minister will develop a covenant. The length of the interim ministry will be negotiated by the interim minister and the church council, depending upon the needs of the congregation. Interims in the NALC may be six months or one year, with month-by-month extensions. An interim ministry covenant template is available from the ABME upon request.

Once prepared, a copy of the covenant should be sent to the NALC General Secretary for review. The congregation should also send a copy of the interim covenant to their MD dean. It is expected that the intentional interim minister will make evaluative reports to the office of the bishop at six-month intervals throughout the interim.

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## FORMING THE CALL COMMITTEE

Once arrangement has been made for worship/pastoral leadership during the vacancy, the church council will form a call committee in accordance with the congregation's constitution. In some congregations, the call committee is appointed by the congregation council. In others, the call committee is elected by the congregation. Normally, the call committee elects its own chairperson and secretary. The goal in selecting members for the call committee is to involve a wide range of members from the congregation. Normally, one member of the congregation council serves as a member of the call committee and liaison to the council. Other officers of the congregation do not normally serve on the call committee. Once the call committee chair has been elected, the chair should download the congregational profile form from the NALC website, [thenalc.org/call-process](http://thenalc.org/call-process).

At the first meeting of the call committee, a conference call with the Call Process Coordinator should be scheduled. During this call, the CPC will provide orientation, explanation and training for the work of the call committee. By the end of the conference call, it is hoped that all will feel prepared to move forward with their responsibilities as the call committee of the congregation.

## CONGREGATIONAL WORKSHOP

One of the initial responsibilities of the call committee is to work with the council president/officers to contact the local mission district dean to arrange for the "Congregational Workshop in Preparation for the Call Process." The workshop template may be found on the NALC website, [thenalc.org/call-process](http://thenalc.org/call-process). This workshop should be scheduled at a time convenient to most members of the congregation, together with church council. The workshop may be facilitated by the mission district dean, or his/her appointed representatives.

Most mission districts have formed "Pastoral Care and Transition Teams" (PCAT Teams), and in some circumstances, the dean may invite team members to facilitate the congregational workshop. When there is an intentional interim serving during a congregational vacancy, the interim may participate with the dean or member of the PCAT Team as facilitators of the workshop.

The congregational workshop has several goals: to engage the congregation in biblical study and reflection upon the nature of the call of God; to invite congregational leaders and members to evaluate past relationships between pastors and the congregation; to consider leadership and how leadership functions within the congregation; to reflect on how conflict and tension are handled in the congregation; to encourage the congregation to consider the four Core Values of the NALC and how they are lived out within the congregation; to invite the congregation to be involved in the NALC's Life-to-Life Discipleship Initiative; to enlist all members of the congregation in providing input into several aspects of the congregational profile. The workshop is forward-looking, resulting in a number of helpful action-oriented steps to assist the

congregation in preparing for the next pastor/congregation partnership. Normally, the workshop will be scheduled on a Saturday, but may also be divided into a two-session format, if necessary.

## THE INITIAL COMMUNICATION

An important responsibility of the call committee chair is to arrange for regular reporting to the congregation with regard to the call process. Often this happens through newsletter articles or announcements, “temple talks” at worship, etc. The more a congregation is informed and made aware of the work of the call committee, the less anxious and impatient they will be.

For this reason, a first communication to the congregation should be developed as soon as the call committee is formed and a chair elected. This first communication should include the following:

1. A complete explanation of the call process of the NALC, in light of the congregation’s own constitution, together with invitation to all to participate in the Congregational Workshop in Preparation for the Call Process, announcing date and time of the workshop.
2. A discussion of confidentiality, explaining that the call committee will not be making regular announcements of pastors with whom they are in conversation, as some may be serving other local congregations and not wishing to announce they are open to call until and unless they receive another call. In some circumstances, the call committee and congregation may choose to refer to pastors being considered by initials or some other designation, to protect confidentiality. At the appropriate time, full name and information will be shared with the council and the congregation.
3. A discussion of the nature of the call process. Explain to the congregation that the call process is a spiritual process of discernment led by the Holy Spirit. It is God’s process, not the congregation’s. It will take whatever time God intends, so there will be no rushing to judgment. For example, what may seem like an inordinate delay to some may indeed be the Holy Spirit working in the process and in a particular pastor’s life so that he/she is available and open to call by the congregation. The goal is to allow God’s will to unfold in such a way that the call committee, council and congregation recognize and receive the pastor whom God is calling to be their next pastor. The call process is about the revealing of God’s will, not completing the process as quickly as possible.
4. Calling a pastor is not the equivalent of “hiring an employee.” Many in the congregation will be tempted to think in terms of secular employment: develop a pool of applicants, interview them all, select the best one, and fire them if they don’t work out. The call process is much more relational and covenantal. Calling a pastor is much more like a marriage, and the call process more similar to finding a mate for life. In this sense, going slowly and intentionally, seeking God’s will, and developing a relationship are more important than lining up skills and needs. Keep in mind, not every pastor whom God calls to a particular congregation has all the gifts and skills needed to lead that congregation. But God gives these gifts and skills to those

He calls! Few pastors have everything they need when called to a new congregation — but God calls them, then assists them in developing what is needed. Bear in mind, the call of a pastor is open-ended — valid until the pastor may be called elsewhere. In the Lutheran tradition, pastors are not “hired and fired.” Pastors and congregations make a covenantal commitment to one another — to pray for each other, to support and encourage each other, to grow together as needed. It is not unlike, “till death do we part.” The commitment is intended to hold pastor and congregation together through good times and times of challenge.

5. Announce the need for prayer! If the congregation does not currently have a regular prayer group, or in addition to such a group, develop a weekly meeting of folks who will pray for God’s guidance and support during the vacancy and call process. Ask that all members be in regular prayer for the call committee and congregational leadership. Ask all to pray that God will be working in the heart and life of the pastor He wishes to call as your next pastor, that the pastor be open to the working of the Holy Spirit. Prayer will be as essential a part of your call process as everything the call committee does!
6. Finally, explain that the call process is about “waiting for the Lord.”

In Psalm 27, the psalmist writes, “Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!” We read in Isaiah 40, “...but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

The call process is a spiritual process in that we are waiting for the Holy Spirit to move and to work. We cannot hurry the Holy Spirit, nor should we wish to! The Scriptures are full of the problems that arise when humans want to “help God” or “hurry God along.” This will require patience and wisdom on the part of congregational leaders, the call committee and the congregation. All need to be reminded, at the beginning, that apparent delays and timing that doesn’t suit the wishes of some may simply indicate that God’s timing is never our own. God may be using His timing to help the congregation to grow spiritually in some way, as you learn what it means to be patient and “wait for the Lord.”

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## THE CONGREGATIONAL PROFILE AND VIDEO INTRODUCTION

Once the Congregational Workshop in Preparation for the Call Process is completed, the call committee is to complete the “Congregational Profile.” Some information for the profile will come directly from work done by the congregation in the workshop. Some call committees complete the forms with input and review of the congregation council. The local call committee

determines who and how the profile will be completed.

An important aspect of completing the congregational profile is consideration of the compensation being offered. The profile asks the committee to list the total compensation of the last pastor. It will be helpful as part of the call process for the church council to reflect on the compensation package and whether this compensation is sufficient. Are there aspects of clergy compensation that should be added or adjusted? Is the compensation package within the recommended range provided by the NALC ABME or CPC? The council may wish to consult with the MD dean for assistance in evaluating the congregation's pastoral compensation package prior to extending a call to a new pastor.

Please note on the Congregational Profile that there are instructions for creating a brief introductory video for your congregation that will also be linked to your congregation's listing, providing a more visual introduction to your congregation. NALC pastors find this the single most helpful resource available to them in their discernment of call. At the same time, our hope is that such an introduction will generate greater interest in your congregation!

Once completed, send a copy of the completed congregational profile via email to the CPC ([sschultz@thenalc.org](mailto:sschultz@thenalc.org)). The call committee should also send a copy to the MD dean, for his or her information. It is also recommended that you post your congregational profile and video introduction on the congregation's Facebook page or website, together with an announcement that the congregation is engaged in a pastoral search.

As soon as the congregational profile is received, your congregation will be added to the Call Process Vacancy List on the NALC website, [thenalc.org/call-process](http://thenalc.org/call-process). Your profile will then be linked to your congregation's listing, available for viewing by any pastor interested in being called to a NALC congregation.

The CPC updates a summary list of NALC vacancies every 4-6 weeks. When there is a new congregational vacancy, that congregational profile will accompany the updated list of vacancies sent to all pastors available for call in the NALC. The updated NALC Vacancy List will also be emailed to all NALC pastors, active and retired, for their prayerful consideration. After reviewing the new congregational profiles, any pastor may request that the CPC forward his or her profile to one or more congregation(s). The CPC will also be in conversation with pastors available for call with regard to particular congregational vacancies that appear to be a good fit. The call committee will receive emailed pastoral profiles of those who are interested in being considered for call. The number of such pastoral candidates will be determined by those who are interested and willing to be considered.

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## THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Once the call committee has received a profile of a pastor available for call, the call committee

makes an initial contact with each of the pastors. This may be a phone call or email, as a courtesy, indicating to the pastor that you have received his or her profile, thanking them for their interest in your congregation, sharing briefly about the call committee's timing — when the committee will next meet to begin reviewing profiles. It is important that the call committee contact every pastor upon receiving a profile.

When the call committee meets next, the committee as a whole reflects on the pastoral candidate(s) and then schedules conference call interviews with the entire committee for each pastoral candidate. Interviewing each pastoral candidate provides the committee with useful experience, even if a particular pastor may not seem a “good fit” based on the pastor's profile. It is important to remember that the pastor's profile, like the congregational profile, is intended to be “a discussion starter,” not answering every question. Often, an interview will begin a relationship in a way that viewing the profile cannot. The interviewing stage of the call process is about developing relationships beyond the profiles.

At this stage of the call process, most every interview takes place via Zoom, GoToMeeting or some other video conferencing tool as available to the congregation and pastor. Because you will be considering pastors from varied locations throughout North America, it is not reasonable to conduct these initial interviews in person. This process of interviewing has served the NALC well and is a cost-effective and timely manner of interviewing multiple pastoral candidates.

Prior to these first full committee interviews, the call committee should develop a list of questions to be asked of each pastor. These questions are not usually provided to the pastoral candidates in advance, although the committee may develop this process as they wish.

After the first round of full committee conference calls is completed, the committee may choose to have a second round of conference calls with a select number of pastoral candidates.

With regard to this period of receiving profiles and interviewing, some additional comments:

† As part of the NALC certification/candidacy process, candidates must agree to a thorough background check through the NALC, which includes criminal and financial screening. A certified, ordained pastor in the NALC will have successfully cleared the background screening and will have obtained a current background check upon engaging in the call process.

† Your call committee may receive profiles of pastors currently living in another North American country. Most often, this will involve pastors in the U.S. interested in a Canadian congregation and vice versa. The NALC will provide information and assistance regarding immigration and work visas through the office of the NALC General Secretary.

† Most pastors have sermons and/or worship services available online via YouTube or Facebook, allowing call committees to become familiar with preaching and worship leadership styles. If a pastor being considered doesn't have such materials available online, the call committee may ask the pastor to create a video recording of a sermon and/or a worship service which may be made available to the call committee.

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† Call committees may contact references at any time during this process. If the three references provided on the profile are not sufficient, the committee may request additional references.

† Keep in mind the need for confidentiality — protecting the pastor’s identity during this initial interview process. Pastors currently under call to another congregation will normally not inform their congregation that they are in spiritual discernment regarding a call to a new congregation. In most circumstances, the call committee will not publicize the name of the pastoral candidate until he/she is invited for an on-site visit to the new congregation.

† If members of the congregation or the MD dean know of pastors who might like to be considered for call to a particular congregation, instruct the pastor to contact the Call Process Coordinator. If the pastor is not certified with the NALC, the vetting and certification process must be successfully completed, including background check, before their profile may be submitted to a congregation. Pastors of other Lutheran bodies are expected to meet the same expectations and requirements as NALC clergy. This may include additional coursework, meeting with the NALC Candidacy Committee or meeting other requirements, as recommended by the NALC Vetting and Certification Panel. To certify as a pastor in the NALC, interested persons should contact the NALC General Secretary to begin the process. Call committees which interview non-certified NALC pastors prior to completion of the NALC vetting and certification process may delay the call process. Non-NALC pastors wishing to be considered by NALC congregations should begin by contacting the CPC as soon as possible to enter into the vetting and certification process. Again, **please note: pastoral profiles will not normally be forwarded to call committees until the pastor has successfully completed the NALC background check, vetting and certification process, receiving approval of the NALC Executive Council contingent upon receipt of a valid call to an NALC congregation.**

† Normally, non-Lutheran clergy will not be considered for call to NALC congregations. Special circumstances and unique congregational mission needs should be discussed with the CPC for counsel and guidance.

## THE ON-SITE VISIT

After interviews are completed, the call committee should have narrowed the focus to one pastoral candidate. At that time, the call committee — in cooperation with the congregation council — should invite the pastor and spouse (in some circumstances, family) for an on-site visit. The usual plan is to have the pastor come for an entire weekend, although congregations may wish to invite the pastor for an extended visit. An example of the schedule would be for the pastor to meet with the call committee on Friday evening, a meeting for Saturday lunch or dinner with the church council, preach and lead worship on Sunday, and have an all-

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congregation potluck with question-and-answer time after worship. The call committee and church council may arrange the schedule as they wish, in consultation with the pastoral candidate. The congregation hosts the pastor and spouse/family — covering the cost of transportation, hotel and meals for the visit. It is important for the call committee chair, church council president and perhaps congregational treasurer to have a discussion regarding compensation, if they have not already. Although they may not work out every detail with regard to compensation, there should be honest and open communication about compensation realities and needs of the pastor and the congregation. In some circumstances, it may be useful to begin this conversation prior to the on-site visit. If a pastor lives a considerable distance from the congregation, it is wise to discuss compensation prior to the expense of travel, hotel, etc. While compensation is not the most important issue to be discussed, if the realities of the congregation and the needs of the pastor are far apart, it may not be worth the cost of bringing the pastor on-site.

When the call committee chooses to bring one pastoral candidate for an on-site visit, they should suspend conversation with other pastors. After the on-site visit, the call committee either continues the call process with the one pastor, or ends that process and returns to one of the other pastoral candidates. If the call committee is not interested in any of the remaining pastoral candidates they have been interviewing, they may contact the CPC to request additional pastoral candidates and begin anew with the initial phone conversation and conference call interviews.

As part of the NALC “open” call process, a pastor may be engaged in the call process of more than one congregation at the same time. At the time of an on-site visit to one congregation, the pastor will inform other congregations and their call processes with the pastor will be put in abeyance.

When entering into active interviewing in the call process, the NALC requires an updated background check of all pastors. In some circumstances, some months may have passed since a pastor’s updated background check upon entering the call process. If the call committee/congregation wish a recent, updated background check, the call chair or congregational officer should contact the NALC General Secretary who will indicate when the most recent background check was completed to determine if an additional background check is warranted. If it is, the NALC General Secretary will facilitate the process. It is expected that the congregation will cover the cost of the additional background check. While the additional background check may be requested and completed as soon as the call committee is focusing on one pastoral candidate, in any event, it should be fully completed before the congregational vote to extend a call.

## ISSUING A CALL

After the on-site visit, the call committee will determine whether to recommend this pastoral candidate for call to the church council. Ideally, the call committee should reach consensus on recommending a pastoral candidate. If not, there should be at least two-thirds of the committee in support of recommending the pastoral candidate. It is the responsibility of the church council, according to most constitutions, to accept the recommendation of the call committee and begin the process of scheduling a congregational meeting for the purpose of voting to extend the call. By this time, the pastoral candidate and congregation leadership should have arrived at an agreed-upon financial package that is to be included in/with the congregational resolution to extend the call and, finally, to be included in/with the letter of call in the formal "Compensation Agreement." A congregational meeting to call a pastor shall be called in accordance with the congregation's constitutional provisions for a duly called congregational meeting. Typically, a two-thirds vote of those present and voting is required for the calling of a pastor.

Following a congregational meeting to call a pastor, the call committee chair will call or email the CPC and MD dean to inform them of the vote to call the pastor. If the vote to call the pastor was affirmative, the NALC call process coordinator will provide the Completion of Call file, which includes complete instructions, checklist, Letter of Call, Certificate of Call suitable for framing, Compensation Agreement and Call Process Response Form. Please email copies of the Letter of Call and Compensation Agreement to the NALC CPC, the Mission District dean, and retain copies for the congregation and the newly called pastor. Return the Call Process Response Form to the CPC via email.

The pastor will communicate an acceptance of the call within two weeks or less of receiving notification of the congregation's vote to extend the call. The pastor will submit a letter of resignation to the congregation where he/she currently serves, providing the required amount of time for notice in accordance with the congregation's constitution, normally not less than thirty (30) days.

If a congregation is a member of the NALC and also a member Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, LCMC, the council or call committee may decide to utilize either or both of the call processes. This would normally include posting the congregation's vacancy on the LCMC website, considering LCMC pastors. While a certified LCMC pastor is not required to certify with the NALC to serve a dual-affiliated congregation, some congregations may require that the pastor be dual-affiliated. At the least, LCMC pastors called to dual-affiliated congregations are asked to complete the NALC's background check. LCMC pastors denied NALC certification previously, now called to dual-affiliated LCMC/NALC congregations, will not be certified in the NALC regardless. The council/call committee's decision will be communicated to the CPC and the MD dean. The NALC CPC will assist the congregation in their call process, as requested, regardless.

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## WHEN NALC PASTORS ARE OPEN TO DISCERNING A NEW CALL

When Lutheran pastors are under call, they often enter into a time of discernment regarding their present call and whether God might be leading them to a new call. Some NALC pastors may enter into the call process because they have a clear sense that their current ministry is completed. Other pastors may be unclear about their current call and enter the call process to have a time of discernment regarding call. This may lead to being called to a new congregation, or it may affirm the current call.

When a pastor desires to enter into the NALC call process, he/she will contact the CPC. At that time, there will be conversation regarding the call to ministry, the current call, and expectations. The pastor may also wish to be in conversation with his/her MD dean for pastoral counsel and reflection on ministry. Pastors are encouraged to be open to possibilities for call anywhere in the NALC, as our pre-conceived limitations and restrictions may not be in accordance with God's will or the movement of the Holy Spirit. It is not uncommon for pastors to find that once they are more broadly open to a call throughout the NALC, the Holy Spirit may indeed lead them to new, exciting and fruitful ministry in places the pastor may not have previously considered.

The pastor will complete the Pastoral Profile, found at [thenalc.org/call-process](https://thenalc.org/call-process), and will send it to the CPC, via email ([sschultz@thenalc.org](mailto:sschultz@thenalc.org)). The pastor may also send an information copy to the MD dean. When a new congregational profile is received by the CPC, the congregation's profile will be added to the list of vacancies on the NALC website, [thenalc.org/call-process](https://thenalc.org/call-process).

When pastors submit a Pastoral Profile, they are to also contact the NALC General Secretary who will facilitate an updated background check, to be paid for by the pastor. Best practices now suggest that background checks for clergy are reasonable and may be expected regularly, or at least prior to engaging actively in the call process. Should a pastor wish to submit a Pastoral Profile but are not intending to immediately be actively engaged in interviewing, he/she may wait until engaging actively to request the updated background check.

In addition, the CPC updates the NALC Vacancy List monthly, providing a few comments regarding each congregation or ministry, together with helpful information related to vetting, certification, and call process. The profiles of new vacancies are attached to the updated list and distributed to pastors available for call via email. The updated Vacancy List will also be emailed to all NALC pastors, for their information, prayer, and discernment. It is the responsibility of pastors to indicate their desire to have their profile forwarded to certain congregations. Please keep in mind, the CPC does not attempt to be a "gate-keeper." While the CPC may engage pastors in conversations related to appropriateness for particular congregations, needs and skills, experience and openness of the pastor, any certified NALC pastor in good-standing, requesting

to be considered by a particular congregation, will have his/her profile forwarded on to that congregation. Pastors will also be encouraged to be open to the Holy Spirit's calling and be open to engaging with the CPC's recommendation of parishes which may be a good fit. In some circumstances, the CPC, at the request of the NALC bishop, may ask pastors available for call to have their profiles submitted to congregations not requested by the pastor. This is in keeping with the oversight function of the bishop, as pastor to pastors and chief shepherd of the NALC flock. Again, pastors and congregations are expected to be open to the Holy Spirit's guidance, even when outside our previously conceived notions and preferences regarding call.

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## COMMUNICATION DURING THE PROCESS

Regular communication among the call committee chair, pastors, and the CPC is of the utmost importance. During the call process, it would be expected that there be regular (if not weekly) communication, whether through brief email sharing, phone calls, etc., so that all are aware of the movement of the process, particular needs, and prayer/spiritual concerns.

It is the responsibility of the pastor available for call to remain in communication regarding the call process. The pastor available for call is responsible for reviewing the updated list of vacancies and being proactive with regard to interest in the particular congregations. When there is little communication from the pastor available for call, it is presumed that there is no urgency or little interest in a new call at that time. The CPC and the local MD dean will be in communication, as needed, during the call process.

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## PASTORAL COMPENSATION

For complete information regarding pastoral compensation and benefits, please request the *NALC Compensation Guidelines and Expectations* document from the CPC or ABME. This document attempts to provide detailed information and explanation of the unique issues related to clergy compensation in general and the NALC in particular.

With regard to pastoral compensation, please be aware that there are some differences between clergy compensation in Canada, other North American nations, and the United States. For example, health and pension for Canadian NALC congregations is provided through the Lutheran Church–Canada plan with Manulife. Taxation and related issues vary by country. For complete information, contact the MD dean(s) in Canada or non-U.S. nations.

For compensation within the United States, the NALC has purchased a resource from

Christianity Today that provides recommended ranges of pastoral compensation. The resource bases these ranges on actual compensation and considers variables such as annual budget of congregation, average worship attendance, region, context of ministry, educational level of pastor, years of service, etc. To obtain a recommendation for clergy compensation, the call committee chair should request a recommendation from the ABME at [dwendel@thenalc.org](mailto:dwendel@thenalc.org). It should be kept in mind that the recommendations are descriptive and are intended to guide the pastor and congregation in reaching agreement with regard to compensation. The NALC also has developed an extensive *NALC Clergy Compensation and Expectations* document, which may be requested from the General Secretary, CPC, or ABME.

**Parsonage/Housing Allowance/Equity Allowance vary by congregation.** Some congregations provide a parsonage. When a congregation provides a parsonage, they often provide a “furnishings allowance” which can be tax deductible. When a parsonage is provided, it is also common for the congregation to provide an “equity allowance” to assist the pastor in building up a reserve to be able to purchase a home at the time when the pastor is no longer living in a parsonage. If a housing allowance is provided, the allowance should cover the cost of purchase or rental of a home, plus cost of utilities and related expenses. The pastor’s housing allowance is tax-deductible but must be declared as housing allowance by the church council prior to the pastor’s first paycheck and must not exceed the actual cost of housing incurred by the pastor. The housing allowance must be included on the pastor’s W-2 under “Other Income.” However, congregations should consult the IRS or a tax accountant for accurate information and up-to-date changes.

**Health, disability and lump-sum death benefit** are normally provided to all full-time NALC pastors, with coverage included for spouse and children, if any. Although congregations may choose to secure such coverage elsewhere, most NALC congregations provide insurance through the Lutheran Benefits Plan administered by Hahn Financial Group. Accurate information and cost estimates will be provided by Hahn Financial Group by contacting them at 1-800-516-4246 or [lutheranbenefits@hahnfinancialgroup.com](mailto:lutheranbenefits@hahnfinancialgroup.com).

**Pension** is also normally provided to all full-time NALC pastors through the Lutheran Benefits Plan, although some pastors or congregations may choose to utilize another plan. Pension contributions are normally calculated as 10-12% of base salary and housing.

**Social Security allowance** is provided by many congregations. Because pastors are considered self-employed in many ways by the IRS, congregations are not expected to withhold taxes and related payments from pastors’ salaries. However, pastors must make quarterly estimated income tax payment, and they must pay the entire cost of Social Security and Medicare insurance via the self-employment tax. (Self Employed Contributions Act Tax, SECA Tax). The Federal Insurance Contribution Act (FICA) currently places the contribution at 15.3%, (always subject to change by Congress) of which employees pay 7.65% and employers pay 7.65%. Because pastors are considered self-employed in this regard, pastors must pay the entire 15.3%. Many

congregations choose to provide their pastor with one-half of the self-employment tax (which covers the employer's one-half share of Social Security and Medicare—FICA) contributions. Although this allowance still must be declared as income by the pastor, it is a significant benefit to NALC pastors. As a general rule, Social Security Allowance is computed on base salary and housing allowance or fair market rental value of the parsonage. Again, congregations should consult the IRS or a tax accountant for accurate estimates and up-to-date changes.

**Vacation** time for a pastor — who is considered to be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week — is normally four weeks and four Sundays.

**Continuing Education** of NALC pastors is essential to their growth and development. Congregations often offer their pastor one or two weeks paid time off for continuing education, in addition to providing a line item in the congregational budget to cover the cost of the pastor's continuing education. Congregations generally offer one to two weeks of paid continuing education leave, and \$500-\$1500 continuing education allowance.

**Professional Allowances** are often provided by congregations and may cover professional fees, dues for professional organizations or societies, books and publications, and standard business expense allowances.

**Travel/Mileage Reimbursement** is provided by most congregations and covers the cost of transportation to and from meetings, hospital and home visitations, and other ministry activities. Pastors may not be reimbursed for one commute to and from home each day. Some congregations provide their pastors with a lump-sum travel allowance each month, based on travel estimates.

Pastors must be able to justify the expense of such an allowance to the IRS, or declare the allowance as income. Many congregations pay the pastor a mileage reimbursement based on actual mileage recorded and submitted to the congregational treasurer each month. A few congregations lease a vehicle for their pastor's ministry travel. Normally, leased vehicles may only be used for church ministry purposes or be subject to income tax as a benefit for personal travel. Again, contact the IRS or a tax accountant for further information.

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## INSTALLATION

Once a new pastor has been called by a congregation, the pastor and congregation work together to schedule an installation service. The pastor normally begins service in the congregation, with formal installation as soon after as is practicable. Installations may take place during the regular Sunday morning service(s) or in a special afternoon or evening service. The dean of the local mission district is normally the first to be asked to officiate at the installation. The dean or another pastor may be asked to be the preacher at the installation. If the dean is unavailable to

officiate, a member of the NALC staff may be asked to officiate. Normally, the NALC bishop will not officiate at installations. The rite to be used for NALC installations is the “Rite for Installation of a Pastor,” from the *Lutheran Book of Worship Occasional Services Book*. An electronic file of the service is available from the ABME or the NALC office.

To begin the call process, contact the Call Process Coordinator for further instructions by email Pastor Shelly Schultz at [sschultz@thenalc.org](mailto:sschultz@thenalc.org) or by cell phone (715-418-1761).

— END —