

Appendix U

Building a Relationship Between a Pastor and Congregation

As the call process unfolds, members experience a growing desire to establish a relationship between the congregation and the new pastor as mutually beneficial and productive as possible. This desire is analogous to that experienced by a bride and groom as they enter their new and unique relationship. Each recognizes and accepts that neither is perfect. There will be differences requiring understanding and adjustment by each. However, their hope is confident that with God's help, they will overcome their differences through love and will work together toward common goals.

To make their hope a reality, the congregation must recognize that the covenant relationship established with their pastor through the call process is in accord with God's plan. He plans that each Christian serve God by serving one another. The servant relationship makes it possible for the congregation and pastor to develop trust and concern. Each desire to hear the other's burdens, do good to one another as God instructs, and witness to their unity through such service in Christ. Working early toward such a relationship means that there will be not only a good honeymoon but a significant marriage between congregation and pastor.

In the Diploma of Vocation and the self-study findings, the congregation identifies its corporate needs, priorities, and expectations. By his acceptance, the pastor vows that with God's help, he will serve the congregation, give it pastoral leadership, and help the congregation achieve its mission and ministry objectives.

From the congregation's viewpoint, its needs, priorities, and expectations are likely to be primary importance. However, by its call, the congregation commits itself with God's help to make every effort to meet the pastor's needs and expectations and to serve him and his family. This commitment by the congregation is of equal importance to the congregation as it is to the pastor. When the congregation fulfills its commitment, it cements a feeling of oneness in Christ which encourages and motivates the congregation and the pastor to strive to give their best. The result is that both the congregation and pastor serve the Lord as He intends.

The attitudes communicated by the congregation and perceived by the pastor and his family can enhance the prospects that the relationship between the congregation and the pastor will be a good one. The following are examples of communicating good attitudes:

- We are happy that God has sent you to us. We desire to serve the Lord with you.
- We feel good about ourselves and are ready to face up to our weaknesses.
- We recognize that we are all imperfect human instruments of God. Pastor, we do not expect you to be excellent in everything either.
- We desire to make the best use of your time and talents, pastor. We, as laity, desire to use our abilities to complement yours to achieve the congregation's mission and ministry objectives.
- We value you and your family and desire to assist all of you to become an integral part of our congregation and community. We will do our best to provide adequate financial support for your work and family's needs.

The Desire to Serve the Lord Together

It is a warm and joyous feeling to be welcome and needed. This is even more so when the message expressed is the feeling that the Lord has sent you. There are many opportunities to clarify the congregation's desire to serve the Lord under the unique pastoral leadership of the pastor being called. The thought here is to express, orally and in writing, your happiness and thanks that God, through His Holy Spirit, has led you to the particular person you are calling.

Expressions of the value you place on him and his family and your desire to serve the Lord with them are especially meaningful.

The first opportunity to communicate your feelings occurs following the congregation's decision reached in the call meeting or call service. Usually, a telephone call is made to the pastor the same day, or the next day, as appropriate. The next opportunity occurs in the letter transmitting the Diploma of Vocation and related Call documents. Other opportunities arise should the pastor visit the congregation before or after acceptance. Following installation, there is no end to the possibilities for sharing your feelings with the pastor and his family.

Willingness to Deal Honestly with Weakness

The areas in which the congregation needs strengthening are identified in the self-study. Often they are humanly challenging to deal with but can be most productive with God's help. What is required is a willingness to accept their reality and strive to find solutions. Emphasis should be given to what can be done to overcome a weakness rather than to excuse, defend, or blame it. The pastor is encouraged and inspired when the congregation communicates that it feels good about itself, recognizes its opportunities or challenges, its strengths and the talents available, and is anxious to get on with its ministries.

The Pastor is Human, Too

Do not expect the impossible! Avoid making the pastor feel guilty or defensive. The congregation has every right to expect the pastor to administer the Office of the Keys and carry out the pastoral duties enumerated in the Diploma of Vocation. At the same time, the pastor is human and is unlikely to have all the talents to the degree necessary to perform all of his assigned responsibilities equally well. Encourage and allow him to be himself and to call upon the lay and staffing talents available to complement his ministry in those areas in which others may be better qualified. In the most productive relationship, the congregation and pastor recognize and agree upon those talents best provided by the pastor and the laity.

Best Use of the Pastor's Time

Demands on a pastor's time frequently exceed the amount of time available. Needs by individual members for pastoral assistance due to a personal crisis, death of a family member, illness, surgery, accident, etc., often arise unexpectedly. Events such as meetings of the Council, Voters, and Elders often require the pastor's presence. Also, the pastor must have time for planning worship services, sermon preparation, counseling of members, confirmation and new member instruction, weddings, and travel to and from the activities cited.

However, there are other activities and meetings where only his occasional presence is essential. Good stewardship requires determination and agreement as to the best use of the pastor's time and talents. The laity can meet many ministry needs under the pastor's direction. Such complementary ministry strengthens the body of Christ, and, in the process, God is glorified.

Assisting the Pastor and His Family

The Call Documents sent to the pastor typically include materials to help orient him to the congregation and community. Examples are:

- A brief history of the congregation
- A congregational directory and pictorial directory, if available
- A copy of the congregational newsletter or similar periodic communication sent to the

members

- A copy of the Constitution and Bylaws
- A copy of the Governance Policy, if applicable
- A copy of the current budget report comparing budget to actuals
- A description of current congregational objectives, policies, and decisions or plans that the pastor would be expected to support or carry out
- Self-study findings, including CEF MissionInsite study
- A recent, detailed map of the area the congregation serves to indicate the location of hospitals members generally use; area in which most members reside; and schools most members' children attend
- A brief explanation of the type of community served, types of housing available and current price ranges

It is also helpful to clarify what expenses the congregation will pay (transportation, lodging, meals, etc.). Will his wife's expenses be included? Should the pastor decide to visit before accepting the Call or locating housing?

It may be beneficial if the congregation designates a competent member who offers services to assist the pastor with relocation. Referral of the pastor to a local realtor is usually most helpful. The realtor will be familiar with local mortgage companies, rates, and other valuable information.

The pastor should be offered the opportunity to meet with the council/board of directors and the call committee. The purpose of this meeting is to answer questions either the congregation or pastor might wish to raise and to acquaint him with local customs and informal processes of decision-making and communication generally followed in the congregation.

After installation, the Council/Board of Directors should have ready for the pastor a briefing that includes written summaries of the plans of the congregation and boards and a talent inventory of members. The briefing should consist of any special ministries, such as a list of shut-in members and background data on each.

Recognize that it will take the pastor several months or more, depending on the size of the congregation, to get to know each member as an individual and understand the skills each has to offer. About six months after the pastor's installation might be an appropriate time to review with him the Diploma of Vocation and the congregation's self-study findings, existing plans, and objectives.

Throughout the orientation process, the pastor's wife and family should be remembered and included, when appropriate, in orientation events and invited to join or participate in congregational activities and organizations. At the same time, undue expectations should not be placed upon the pastor's wife and family. Related to their congregational life, they should be allowed to exercise their judgment and use the gifts God has given them according to how they feel God leads them.

Providing the pastor and his family with the kinds of assistance described is one of the ways the congregation communicates its love for them, and its thanks to God for having sent them. It

helps them to become productive members of the congregation more quickly. It also helps to establish a level of trust and open communication.

Support for the Pastor's Work and His Family

One of the ingredients of the call is the remuneration and related benefits offered to the pastor for support of his work and his family. Financial items related to the pastoral office in a congregation usually include but are not limited to:

- Concordia Plan Services (Concordia Health and Retirement Plans)
- Automobile allowance
- Housing allowance or provision of a parsonage
- Utility allowance
- Salary
- Social Security (FICA)/403 (B)
- Continuing education allowance
- Library allowance
- Pulpit substitute allowance (Sickness and vacation)
- Sabbatical (three months encouraged after seven years of service)
- PLI (Pastoral Leadership Institute)
- MAP (Ministry Applied Practice) West Coast - for newly ordained pastors

The Pastor's Family Time

The pastor has the same God-given responsibilities toward his wife and family as does every Christian. There must be regularly scheduled time set aside each week for this purpose.

There should also be a definite amount of annual vacation time that the pastor and his family can count on and plan to use as they wish.

Evaluation of the Pastor's Needs

An essential ingredient in the congregation/pastor relationship is to fix responsibility for an annual evaluation of the pastor's needs and that of his family. The review should include recommendations to the Budget Committee for appropriate revisions in each of the elements that relate to the financial support provided to the pastor. He should participate in the evaluation and furnish data regarding expenses. The board's responsibility for initiating the review and preparing recommendations could be placed with the board of elders since this board has a close and continuing working relationship with the pastor.

References

There are several helpful references to serve as a guide to the call committee and congregation in preparing the information referred to in this section. The references below are limited to those generally secured from the Synod, the Michigan District, or the Federal Internal Revenue Service.

- LCMS Concordia Plan Services (888-927-7526)
- LCMS Tax and General Information Bulletin
- Michigan District Salary & Allowance Guideline (<https://michigandistrict.org/resources/compensation-guide/>)

- Church and Clergy Finance Newsletter
- IRS Publication -- Your Federal Income Tax
- IRS Publication -- Social Security for Members of the Clergy Religious Workers