

Appendix M

Pre-Call Interviews

The following is based on information provided by the Council of Presidents.

Pre-call interviews, visits, and post-call visitations are not prohibited by the Holy Scriptures or the Lutheran Confessions. In fact, we highly recommended that these elements are part of your candidate evaluation process. Each congregation has the right to determine procedures for reviewing candidates; however, the congregation needs to function in such a way that the dignity and divine nature of the call is maintained. And it is important that the process remain the same for all candidates.

Remember: the congregation is not simply “hiring an employee” but is seeking the full measure of the Holy Spirit’s guidance and insight in discerning the person to fill the office of Holy Ministry.

Most congregations today are finding it helpful to conduct pre-call interviews and visits to assist the pastor and congregation in learning more about one another. These interviews and visits enable the candidate and congregation to share a sense of their vision of ministry with each other and provide “first impressions” which may prove helpful in considering and deliberating about a potential call.

Note that the pre-call interview or visit should never be the only impression of value—it is important that congregations consider all the information and credentials provided on candidates.

Also note that not every LCMS pastor will consent to a pre-call interview. **This should not disqualify the candidate from consideration.**

Benefits and Potential Risks

The decision to call a pastor is among the most important that a congregation ever makes. While pre-call interviews are neither commanded nor forbidden by Holy Scripture or the Lutheran Confessions, it is recommended that you make these interviews part of your call process. It is important to exercise care and understand potential risks.

Pre-call interviews are valuable ways to become more familiar with the candidate’s theology, interests, experience, skills, and leadership style so that the congregation can equip itself to make an informed decision at its call meeting. Telephone, video, and face-to-face interviews provide both the pastor and congregation insight into each other, and the potential fit between them.

Pre-call interviews can involve risks of which you should be aware. Answers during interviews may give a misleading picture—the pastor and the congregation may not present themselves as they really are. It is imperative that interviews be based on honest, open, and frank conversation, which is honoring to the Holy Spirit and each party involved as together they seek His will.

Personal interviews may also place undue emphasis on the outward aspects of the call (e.g. appearance of the sanctuary, the condition of the parsonage, the neighborhood, the community, the people, etc.) rather than on the challenges and opportunities for mission and ministry. Furthermore, in-person interviews entail costs for lodging, meals, events, etc.

Considering the risks as noted above, pre-call interviews are important and recommended steps in the journey towards calling a pastor as the Holy Spirit leads.

Guidelines

Following are some general guidelines regarding pre-call interviews. If you have questions about these guidelines, do not hesitate to contact your circuit visitor, regional vice president, or district president.

1. A pre-call interview should not be conducted until after the congregation has completed a careful and thorough self-study. The congregation needs to have a clear understanding of its mission and ministry and its current situation. Congregations should wait to decide on whether

or not to conduct pre-call interviews until after they have received their call list, reviewed the information provided by the district president, and conducted an evaluation to determine who are the top candidates they would like to interview.

2. Pre-call interviews should only be conducted with those individuals who are named on the call list provided by the district president. Also, at this point in the call process it is important that you do not add any last-minute candidates without the review and support of the district president.
3. Congregations choosing to conduct pre-call interviews must be careful to maintain the dignity and divine nature of the call. When calling a pastor, congregations are **not** hiring an employee, but asking God to send them a pastor. The entire call process should be surrounded with fervent prayer.
4. The actual interviewing will normally be done by members of the call committee. (The call committee and the interview committee may be the same group of individuals or two different groups of individuals or a sub-committee of the call committee as the congregation directs or as the call committee structures itself for its work. Throughout this document, it is understood that references to ‘the committee’ speak of the group—whatever its title—that undertakes the interviewing task.)
 1. If the congregation’s constitution does not provide for a call committee, an enabling resolution should be adopted by the voters’ assembly establishing both the make-up and the duties of the call committee.
 2. The candidates for interview will be taken from the call list as prepared by the district president.
 3. Congregations should work closely with the circuit visitor, regional vice president, district president or his representative in conducting pre-call interviews, including requesting assistance in developing questions, determining the best process, and inviting them to participate in the actual interviews.
5. After contacting your top candidates to inquire of their willingness and ability to engage in the call process, it is recommended that interviews with willing candidates occur in two phases:
 1. Initial interviews – 60–90 minute interviews using video (Zoom, Go-to-Meeting, Google Meet, etc.) to determine the list of candidates you would like to bring to your campus for onsite visits.
 2. Onsite visits – Face-to-face meetings with the candidate and his wife over a weekend or 1.5-2.5 days during the week with staff, school faculty, meet-and-greet/Q&A with the congregation, attending worship, touring the campus and community, fellowship, etc. Make sure to be flexible and attend to the comfort of the candidate and his wife.
6. See below for a sample interview format. The Interview Committee will be careful to conduct each candidate interview in the same way. Questions should be formulated based on the results of your self-study. For example, challenges and opportunities that you uncovered in your self-study should lead you to create questions that ask the candidate how he would address similar situations. The Committee should limit the number of questions addressed to the candidates, with the same questions asked of each of the candidates. The congregation can be given the opportunity to submit questions or subjects to the call committee to be touched upon in the interviews. “Trick” questions have no place in these interviews.
7. Ensure your interview questions can be covered adequately in the allotted time for the interview. As you formulate questions, evaluate them in three ways:
 1. What does it have to do with the position?

2. Why do we need to know?
3. Would we be willing to answer the same question about ourselves?
8. Avoid “yes/no” or other short answer questions. Examples of good questions that focus on behavior include:
 1. Tell us about a time when...
 2. What do you want us to know about...
 3. Give us an example of...
 4. You say. . . about yourself. How has this been demonstrated?
 5. Describe an experience where...
9. In conducting the interview, focus on how the pastor functions rather than on the ideas and concepts he expresses. Remember that the manner in which a person has handled a situation in the past may well indicate how he might act in the future given the same or similar circumstances. Note especially expressions of energy, conviction, enthusiasm, respect for acceptable differences, and the way personal faith is shared. Listen carefully in order to ascertain how the pastor draws naturally, winsomely, and confidently on the resources of his education, experience, and faith.
10. A written summary of each interview should be made and distributed to each member of the call committee. It is from these summaries that a report can be made to the congregation, and a candidate or candidates can be recommended. As the Holy Spirit leads, there may be only one candidate whom the committee feels should be recommended, or more than one. A slate of three candidates from which the congregation makes their choice is a good target. Your congregation’s constitution may provide guidelines. See below for a sample report to the congregation.
11. As a matter of courtesy, the call committee should communicate with each candidate who has been interviewed, expressing appreciation for his participation.
12. Remember that the committee does not act on its own behalf, but as the representative and servant of the entire congregation. Its agenda should be what’s best for the congregation and not some private or individual agenda. At the same time, the committee is chartered to do this work on behalf of the congregation, and so should go about this important business diligently, thoroughly, and confidently, seeking the Holy Spirit’s leading and using the gifts God has provided each member to arrive at a God-pleasing recommendation.

Sample Interview Format 1

Some areas of concern and typical questions relating to them may be of benefit to you as you structure your interview process. The following statements or questions are meant to serve as thought starters in developing your interview format. Your statements or questions, of course, should be based on your own congregational situation and on the information about the candidates being interviewed.

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND PREACHING

When a change in pastors takes place, changes are also likely to occur in the congregation’s worship practice. The principal concern in the interview is for the committee to determine the candidate’s attitudes and convictions about worship, preaching, and liturgy.

Preaching, teaching, and leading worship are important aspects of the pastor's work. However, there is often a variety of attitudes concerning what constitutes a "good" sermon, a "good" Bible class, and "good" worship. Therefore, some issues to discuss in this area might be:

1. Describe how you make decisions about worship.
2. Describe how you have introduced changes in the worship practice of your present congregation.
3. Describe your convictions about the importance of the liturgy and the Sacrament of the Altar and how you carry out these convictions.
4. Describe how you go about preparing your sermons.
5. Describe your satisfactions and disappointments in designing and delivering speeches.
6. In preparing sermons, describe what use you make of the Bible, the church year, the Scripture lessons, personal experiences (your own or others), current events, contemporary issues in culture and society.
7. What is the average length of your sermons?
8. Describe how important you consider preaching to be in the church's life.
9. Describe how you use guest preachers.

You should remember that the style and schedule of worship in the candidate's present congregation is not necessarily what he prefers or would choose or would try to duplicate in another situation.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Your objective in this area is to discover what might happen if this candidate and your congregation undertake a spiritual journey together. You will be concerned here about the candidate's spiritual/devotional life and the spiritual life, growth, and health of your congregation.

In discussing Christian education, your committee will be interested in some of the following elements in the candidate's responses: his level of creative energy, the range of resources he has used, his familiarity with various educational materials and curricula, his views on the training and involvement of lay people in multiple roles, and his level of direct personal involvement and competence in education.

Your committee will want to discuss all levels of congregational education as it now exists and as you hope it will develop, including Bible classes, Sunday School, Confirmation instruction, youth programs, and topics for auxiliary organizations. Questions may include:

1. Describe how you and your present congregation have grown in spiritual life, separately and together.
2. Describe how you view Christian education and its role in the congregation's life.
3. Describe some of the resources you use to enhance the congregation's spiritual life.
4. Describe what you expect adults and children to learn and retain through the congregational education program.
5. Describe some of your favorite tools and resources for Bible study, Sunday school, and catechism.
6. Describe what curriculum material you use and why.
7. Describe how you recruit, train, assist, support, and supervise a teaching staff.

8. Describe how you involve parents in the Christian education of children.
9. Describe how you teach people to pray.
10. Describe your experience with various traditions of spiritual life, for example, retreats, prayer disciplines, private confession, observance of church festivals, etc.
11. Describe what resources refresh you personally.

PASTORAL CARE

Parishioners always look to the pastor for pastoral care, but especially in times of personal crisis or transition—birth, death, marriage, divorce, vocational stress or change, or physical or mental illness. They want to know and be convinced that their pastor cares about them, that he will be available in time of need, and that he will apply the resources of the Gospel to their condition. Parishioners are also interested in knowing how the pastor deals with problem situations. It is appropriate to visit the candidate about his response to specific situations. For example:

1. Describe what kinds of pastoral care and counseling congregational members can expect from you.
2. Describe how you visit your parishioners (hospital calls, nursing homes, homebound, other).
3. Describe how you prepare a couple for marriage (pre-marital counseling).
4. Describe how you address the issue of couples living together outside of marriage.
5. Describe how you address LGBTQ realities in the church, school, or community.
6. Describe how you handle unwed pregnancies.
7. Describe how you work with:
 1. Troubled teenagers.
 2. Persons involved in the abuse of alcohol or drugs.
 3. Patient and family members in a terminal illness situation.
8. Describe how you minister to those afflicted with bereavement.
9. Describe what you do about nonmembers that come to you for pastoral care or counseling.
10. Describe how you deal with your limitations in counseling.
11. Describe how you provide for pastoral care when you are not there (e.g., on your day off or during vacation).

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

As the “overseer” of the congregation, a pastor faces a wide range of administrative responsibilities. In covering this area during an interview, you will want to keep your congregational situation in mind and concentrate on it rather than on the candidate’s present situation.

During this part of the interview, your committee may wish to ask the candidate:

1. Describe how you relate to the staff, boards, committees, and other leadership groups in the congregation. How do you maintain a balance of power among the various groups of the congregation?
2. Describe how you handle conflict in the congregation. Talk about a relationship you salvaged after a conflict or falling out with the person.

3. Describe how you deal with staff changes.
4. Describe how you intentionally identify, equip, and launch leaders.
5. Describe how you recruit and train volunteers.
6. Describe familiarity with different church governance systems (i.e., church council, policy-based governance) and any preference.
7. Describe how the agenda is prepared for Council/Board of Directors and Voters' meetings.

Indications regarding the candidate's administrative skills can also emerge in the way he handles the correspondence and arrangements for the interview.

LUTHERAN SCHOOLS

When a school or preschool is part of your mission and ministry, it is important to gauge the candidate's philosophy towards and experience with this important part of your congregation. Your Board of Education or whoever is responsible for its operation will undoubtedly have a list of questions or concerns related to the school.

An appropriate approach here might be to ask the candidate:

1. Articulate your church and school growth philosophy and how you have implemented that philosophy.
2. What steps do you take to help students, parents, and staff feel secure, trusting, and open with you?
3. Describe the pastor-school administrator relationship you have attained and describe how it affects the church and school climate.
4. To what extent are you the initiator in developing relationships? Tell me about a relationship you built.
5. How do you help others develop positive relationships?

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Many personal questions are illegal to ask during pre-employment discussions. In addition, you need to be guided by the principle: "Don't ask a question that you would not answer for yourself." You should not raise questions about the candidate's marital history, sexuality, personal financial matters, or alcoholism or mental illness history. If such matters are of concern to your committee, a means of dealing with them should be worked out before the interview with input from the district president and circuit visitor.

At the same time, a pastor is, to some degree, a public person, so your congregation will naturally have some interest in the candidate as a person.

An appropriate approach here might be to ask:

1. Describe your goals for your personal development.
2. Describe how you schedule and use your time off.
3. Tell us what books you are reading.
4. Describe what you do for fun.
5. Describe your likes and dislikes about how your life and ministry have gone thus far.
6. Describe your appearance and dress while in the office, attending meetings, or making calls.

CONCLUSION

Finally, your committee may find it helpful to conclude each interview by asking the candidate one final question—Is there anything we should know about you that we didn't ask?

EVALUATION

Although each interview will be personal and unique, it is hoped that there will be enough uniformity of process and content so that conclusions about each candidate interviewed can be arrived at and compared with fairness and accuracy. One recommended way to conduct a fair and thorough evaluation is for the call committee to agree upon a ranking system for the candidate's response to each question, 1 to 5, with 1 being a poor response to 5 being an outstanding response. This can serve as a good starting point for discussion, along with each committee member's notes on reactions.

Sample Interview Format 2 – Phone Interview

Before the Day of the First Phone Call

1. Discuss and select the 10–15 questions to be used in the phone interviews.
2. Be sure to arrange for a comfortable, private room with a speakerphone and voice recorder.
3. Identify who is to serve as call host and ask the selected questions (preferably, this person will ask the questions of all candidates interviewed).
4. Review the interview process.
5. Make sure everyone has the interview grid and is clear about the questions to be asked.
6. Meet for prayer 15 minutes before the scheduled start of the interview(s).

During the Phone Call

7. When a candidate answers the phone, verify that it is still okay to proceed with the interview.
8. Ask for permission to record the conversation to share with committee members unable to be present and for future reference by the committee.
9. Indicate to the interviewee how many questions there will be and the allotted time.
10. Introduce (name, position in congregation) those involved in the interview.
11. Begin with an introductory question (i.e., what would you like to tell us about yourself?).
12. Move through the selected questions, allowing adequate time for the candidate to respond.
13. Committee members may ask clarifying questions at any time.
14. When finished asking the selected questions, thank the candidate for sharing responses with the committee.
15. Ask if the candidate has a question for the committee or any additional thoughts and comments.
16. Share the anticipated time frame of the search process and indicate that the candidate will be kept informed of the progress.
17. Close the interview with a brief prayer (one option is to ask the candidate to do so).

Following the Phone Call

18. Share initial reactions to the interview (see Phone Debriefing Worksheet).

19. Agree to make any needed refinements in the interview process.
20. Prepare for the next call if another is happening that night.
21. When interview(s) conclude, turn the interview grid worksheet in to the Chair until the next meeting.

Sample Candidate Summary Report For Congregation

(Provide information to the congregation that illustrates how the pastors you interviewed possess the gifts and attributes described in your pastoral profile. Include a photo of the pastor or the pastor and his family if available.)

Rev. John Smith

Age: 39

Current Congregation: First Lutheran Church and School, Anytown, CA; 700+ worshippers each Sunday

Role: Senior pastor since 2014. Pastor Smith has served churches in Big City, Florida, and Suburb, AZ, starting new church campuses in Florida and metro Big City.

Education: Concordia Irvine, Concordia Seminary St. Louis

Family: Mary [Jones] Smith (married 2003), three children, ages 8-12

Mission-minded Visionary Leader – Pastor Smith was invited to engage with a local faith coalition when he arrived in Anytown. The coalition creates an all-faith group focused on nurturing a sense of community and collaboration to build partnerships with neighborhoods, businesses, schools, non-profits, city leaders, and the faith community. Under Pastor Smith's leadership, they established a ministry to feed the homeless and provide a mobile shower service. He has found great joy in the congregation, catching and repeating the vision to reach the community. Pastor Smith takes his family on mission trips to instill a sense of service and excitement for extending the Kingdom.

Inspiring and Relevant Preacher – Pastor Smith is a high energy, relevant preacher that believes a healthy congregation is exemplified by exciting worship, a desire for fellowship outside of worship, and a willingness to take risks for the sake of the Gospel. He has extensive experience using a high level of technology in worship.

Strong Leader and Administrator – Pastor Smith bases his ministry with transparency anchored in relationships as the foundation. He takes a proactive approach to problem-solving with personal reconciliation as the basis for resolving conflict. He believes that the mission (sharing the fullness of life in Jesus) is more important than any one individual. First Lutheran centers its message in Worship, School Ministries, and Life Groups. He oversees a full- and part-time church and school staff of 83 people.

Church/School Bridge Builder – First Lutheran School is the church's primary mission field. Mary Smith started the Children's Ministry as a bridge between the church and school, and the team organizes nine family events throughout the year. The school has grown to 360+ preschool through 8th-grade students with two classrooms per grade. Pastor Smith is present in the school daily and believes that 80 church and school staff are one team. All of Pastor Smith's pastoral experience has been at churches with schools.

Early to Mid-Career Standout – Pastor Smith was ordained in 2006 and has been a church planter, associate pastor, and senior pastor, with a wide range of experience in different settings. He endeavors to learn from multiple mentors throughout the LCMS and faith community and leverage God's gifts within the church.

Relational, Approachable Spiritual Leader – Pastor Smith is outgoing, engaging, and exhibits high energy. He is an encourager and eager to come alongside people to discover their gifts and find the joy of a full life in Christ, extending the love of Jesus through whatever means necessary.

Rev. Ned Jones

Age: 50

Current Congregation: Faith Lutheran Church and School, Anytown, TX; 500+ worshippers each Sunday

Role: Senior pastor since 2013.

Education: Concordia-Irvine, MPCP/Concordia Seminary St. Louis

Family: Jenny [Brown] Jones (married 1995), five children ages 19-25

Mission-minded Visionary Leader – Pastor Jones believes in humbly creating a place of love and safety in Jesus for sinners so that as many of the lost are reached as possible. Faith is a large established church (founded in 1874) that went through a significant rejuvenation under his leadership as he led them to a new vision for future ministry. Pastor Jones believes that the vision must be proclaimed often and demonstrated consistently. Pastor Jones believes that the most significant open door to bringing people to faith is loving our neighbors.

Inspiring and Relevant Preacher – Pastor Jones loves preaching and takes the attitude that we are all sinners under the cross, pointing each other to Jesus through the word and sacraments. His sermons provide relevant learning coupled with a strong call to action.

Strong Leader and Administrator – Pastor Jones provided skilled, effective leadership to his current congregation in the transition from long-time strong leadership to his own. He is not afraid to lead and challenge the congregation through growth and sacrifice for the sake of reaching the lost. He leads 20+ church and 40+ school staff.

Church/School Bridge Builder – Pastor Jones closely partners with the preschool through 8th-grade school faculty and staff. Over 725 students are served at the school, with each grade supporting 2-3 classes. Pastor Jones has only served congregations with a strong school ministry and firmly believes that the church and school must join in close partnership as one mission for the benefit of the families. He also serves on the Board of Directors of a mission to Kenya based at his congregation.

Early to Mid-Career Standout – Pastor Jones provides strong leadership in preaching, vision casting, and strategic ministry development in moving the congregation towards the vision and mission God has determined for them. He believes in engaging the unchurched through love and care ministries that affect life change and lead others to become disciples of Christ.

Relational, Approachable Spiritual Leader – Pastor Jones is personable and warm, with a gift of “speaking the truth in love” and motivating people to grow and mature in Christ. He also has a humble vulnerability that enables him to share his struggles and joys in ways that build unity and trust.