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Sample Agenda for a Voters' Meeting to Call a Pastor

The officiant should include at least the following in the materials he takes to every call meeting: Official call forms (at least two copies), paper ballots and pencils (at least three ballots for each voting member), sufficient copies of the Agenda for each voting member, the call list provided by the CLC President (copies of the list for every voter), biographies of the men on the call list, Bible and opening devotion, written prayer (if needed), CLC Directory, CLC Constitution, CLC Mission Code compensation figures, and note paper. The officiant should also make sure that a copy of the congregation's constitution is available in case a constitutional question arises. Ideally, the officiant should familiarize himself with the congregation's constitution prior to the meeting.

1. The meeting will be called to order by the President of the congregation, after which the meeting is turned over to the visiting officiant.

Officiants should bear in mind that we no longer issue "joint calls." If a pastor is asked to serve in a dual or tri-parish arrangement, each congregation is to issue its own separate, autonomous call. Those calls can be coordinated to spell out division of compensation, responsibilities, etc., but make clear that each call stands on its own and can be rescinded (for scriptural reasons) on its own. (An explanation of why the meeting is ordinarily conducted by a visiting pastor will be given under 4, A, below.)

2. Opening prayer and devotion by the officiating pastor.

It is important to open the meeting in the Name of our Triune God, for reasons that are probably obvious. The devotion can take any acceptable form and length, but it is advisable, at some point, to review both the Doctrine of the Divine Call and of the Means of Grace. It is always our desire that the Holy Spirit's will be done, rather than our own will. We also have the comfort of knowing that the call involves two parts (the issuing of the call by the congregation and the acceptance of the call by the pastor) both of which, we pray, are made in harmony with the will of our God. It is also helpful, in explaining the calling process, to remind the congregation that the Holy Spirit works through means (rather than immediately) also in connection with the divine call. It can be confusing, for example, to use terms like, "The Holy Spirit moved us (or has led us) to issue this call." While this can certainly be used and understood in the right way, a better expression might be, "Having asked him for guidance, we believe this call is in harmony with the will of God the Holy Spirit." Such terminology helps to remove the Reformed idea of the immediate working of the Holy Spirit. This also magnifies the importance of the opening devotion and prayer, since the Word of God is the means through which the Holy Spirit has promised to operate. Pray also for wise and discerning hearts for all participants, and that charity and harmony might prevail, God's will being done.

3. Review and adoption of the proposed agenda.

Instruct the voters to look over numbers 4 through 11 below and then give them sufficient time to do that. If there are no suggestions for change, entertain a motion to approve the agenda as presented. The purpose here is to conduct the meeting in good order, but not without individualized input and direction from the calling congregation. We also want to guard against the appearance of being dictatorial. That said, it is rare (to the point of non-existent) for someone to suggest changes to the agenda.

4. Overview of the procedure in calling a pastor and preliminary notes.

During this part of the meeting, the officiant discusses with the voters the actions that will be taken under Number 5, below, and gives explanation.

A. Why a visitor (outsider) conducts the meeting

1. A visiting officiant enjoys the assumption of impartiality; the current pastor and/or congregational chairman might not. 2. A visitor should be familiar with the names submitted or added to the call list, and thus be able to answer appropriate questions 3. Having a visitor chair the meeting allows the congregational chairman to act and speak as any other voter (something a good chairman normally refrains from doing when he chairs a meeting) 4. A visiting officiant is (or should be) trained to conduct such meetings and should understand some of the more subtle nuances involved in the process (what information, for example, should be shared and what should be discouraged from being shared, what questions are inappropriate e.g., "Does his wife play organ?" "Does he like to hunt and fish?" "Does he golf?" etc.)

B. Why a list is solicited from the President of the CLC

1. The CLC President is privy to information that could disqualify a candidate from consideration 2. The President has a feel for the strengths and weaknesses of the various pastors and can thus suggest a list of men who he feels would complement the needs of the calling congregation 3. The President might be aware of physical limitations that would prevent a pastor from considering a call 4. The President is in contact with the various Conference Visitors and CLC boards, who keep him apprised of current conditions and needs in the various congregations. This, in turn, makes him well suited to suggest appropriate candidates.

C. Adding names to the list supplied by the President of the CLC

Names can certainly be added to the list provided by the President, although simply discarding the list provided should be discouraged. It is also wise to inform the voters that should names be added, the meeting will ordinarily need to recess so that the President can immediately be contacted by phone to determine if there are any reasons why the name(s) suggested should not be considered (the visiting officiant may already possess such information, either positive or negative). If the President cannot be reached, the Conference Visitor should be contacted. The dangers of adding names include at least the following: 1. Calling a man who is already considering a second call (although not always a bad things) 2. Calling a man who is under discipline, or who has been caught up in a sin and therefore could not and should not consider acceptance of the call 3. Promoting a certain pastor based on family ties, personal friendship, etc.

D. Discussion of the congregation's particular needs and of the names on the call list

The visiting officiant should encourage a frank and open discussion here, both of congregational strengths and weaknesses. The officiant (especially the Conference Visitor or vacancy pastor) is also uniquely qualified to contribute his observations is this regard, and is encouraged to add them to the discussion. Caution the voters, at this point, to be wise in their comments and questions. They need to weigh beforehand what they have inclination to speak. They should weigh the validity and charity of their words, together with the effect those words will have on the assembly. When a candidate is not known by the members of the assembly, one disparaging remark will usually exclude him in the minds of others. One positive word can also sway many ambivalent voters. Negative and positive comments are both appropriate at times, and inappropriate at times. Encourage wise forethought prior to speaking.

Different officiants have expressed different views as to whether or not they should offer their own opinions (with or without the invitation to do so) as to whom the congregation ought to call. Carefully consider the enormous influence such a recommendation will likely create. The wisest course will ordinarily be for the officiant to remain unbiased and impartial.

E. Why a ballot vote should ordinarily be used

1. To allow all voters to vote their conscience without fear of recriminations 2. To ensure that the tally is never in dispute 3. To prevent even the false perception of a miscount or vote tampering.

F. Why the vote is always made unanimous

The vote is always made unanimous so that 1. The pastor who is called knows he will have the full support of the entire congregation and not begin "on probation" with certain members. 2. As a matter of good order 3. So that no voters are tempted to say "I didn't vote for him" if problems arise 4. In humble submission by the minority to the will of the majority.

Inform the voters that if anyone could not support a candidate whose name is on the ballot, they should voice their objection prior to the vote, explaining why they could not, in good conscience, vote to make the call unanimous after a majority is reached. The reason(s) given should then be discussed, and the name removed from the list prior to voting if the concerns are deemed valid. If the concerns voiced are not judged valid, remind the voter of the need for charity, as well as humble submission to the decision of the majority.

5. The calling of a pastor

It is important not to rush any phase of the call meeting in general, but the steps in this section in particular. Give the voters time to consider and meditate, and try to develop a sense of when they are ready to proceed to the next step.

A. The presentation of the list supplied by the President of the CLC

This list should be copied before the meeting and distributed to the voters at this point. Read through the information provided (out loud).

B. Additions to the list

Open the floor for nominations, reminding the voters of the considerations discussed previously

C. Discussion of the names submitted in light of the congregation's needs

A frank and open discussion is healthy, but only when tempered with wisdom, humility, and charity. The greatest art of conducting the call meeting lies in this area.

D. The Vote

Again, do not rush this step. Ask if they are ready and give more time if they feel it is needed. Some congregations like to recess at this point. Such a recess can easily lend itself to abuse (strong personalities promoting their opinions, etc.) If such a recess is requested, clarify how it should and should not be used. Prayerful consideration and appropriate questions are good, politicking is not. To the greatest extent possible, we seek to be guided by the Holy Spirit, so that his will, not our own personal views or opinions, prevails.

E. The vote for unanimous ballot after a majority vote is cast

If a voter refuses to make a vote unanimous, it is incumbent upon that voter to explain his refusal to the majority, and to explain why he did not voice his objection at the proper point prior to the initial vote. If the voter still refuses, he should be encouraged to make the vote unanimous on the basis, again, of humility and respect for the opinion of the majority of his brothers. If he still refuses to make the call unanimous, the call should still be issued without any mention of the lack of unanimity. The voter should later be encouraged, in public or in private (as the officiant deems most appropriate) to receive the new pastor in love and respect, and without apparent reservation, should the candidate accept the call issued to him.

6. Compensation Review

The wise counsel of the officiant is critical also during this phase of the call meeting. You will want to have the CLC Mission Code Compensation figures at your disposal, since many congregations tend to use them as a measuring stick. It is important that the congregation be informed that we, as a synod, have identified the current code salary package as a bare minimum, and that this determination should inform their use of "Mission Code" as their compensation guideline.

7. The Call Form and the Accompanying Letter

Be sure the congregation understands the importance of getting both the call form and the call letter into the hands of the man called as quickly as possible. Many pastors do not begin serious deliberation of a call until they have this information in hand. In general, the call form and letter should be mailed within a day or two, and thus delivered to the call recipient within the week. A preliminary copy could be emailed, but a hard copy should normally follow, unless the recipient of the call says otherwise.

A. Who will fill out the form and write the letter?

There is no absolute right and wrong here. In general, a representative or representatives from the congregation should be encouraged to serve, rather than the officiant or departing pastor,.

B. What should be in the letter?

Encourage the congregation to include all available information, including congregational needs, strengths, weaknesses, and statistics. List the number of shut-ins and any special projects the pastor will be required to perform (radio meditations, nursing home or prison services, etc.) Also include parsonage information (pictures are helpful) and information on the community whenever readily available. The purpose of this information is to give the called pastor as complete a picture of the congregation and work as possible. Also include contact information in case he has further questions.

C. When will the letter be sent and by whom?

This has proven to be a problem in more than one instance. Make sure that a single dependable individual is appointed who will be responsible for the assembly and mailing of the information, and that he has the necessary address and shipping instructions (US Mail, Priority, Fed Ex Overnight, etc.)

D. Who will notify the called pastor (by phone) immediately?

Designate who will contact the called pastor by phone and when (immediately if possible). Inform the appointed contact person that it is probably not the best policy to leave a message on an answering machine, or to email an announcement of the call, but to keep trying until the pastor is contacted directly. The contact representative might want some guidance on exactly what to say. Here too it is wise for the visiting officiant not to volunteer to serve as contact person. This is the responsibility of the congregation, and they should be encouraged to carry out that responsibility. You may find a sample Call Form which you can download and customize at https://www.elders.clclutheran.org/congregational-leadership.html

8. Vacancy Pastor (This step can be omitted if already being served)

Retired pastors will, at times, agree to serve when needed in a vacancy. Solicit a list of such men from the CLC President, or prepare a list through direct contact with pastor emeriti.

A. Whom?

B. When will he begin?

C. Definition of the Vacancy Pastor's role

Define exactly what the congregation's expectations will be for the vacancy pastor. Will he conduct services each week? At what time? What other duties? (Confirmation Classes, shut-in visits, adult confirmations, marriage or pre-marriage counseling, etc.)

D. Compensation for the Vacancy Pastor

Compensation for the vacancy pastor will depend on several factors, including the workload expected, distances involved, use of the parsonage, and other income (such as Social Security). One half to two-thirds of the normal cash salary (plus mileage) is not uncommon.

Note: The Church Council can be authorized to meet with the Vacancy Pastor to discuss and define points "B" through "D" above.

E. Notification of Vacancy Pastor

Again, a specific assignment of duties is what is sought here, together with a clear picture of when the voters expect those duties to be carried out. This, too, is the responsibility of the congregation, so the officiant should avoid taking this responsibility upon himself.

9. Peaceful release for the current pastor (Establish effective date)

The peaceful release for the current (departing) pastor is a matter of good order. Consult with that pastor prior to the meeting to determine his scheduled last date of service. That date should then be suggested as the effective date for his peaceful release.

10. Other business

This can include any matters that must be discussed or resolved prior to the next scheduled Voters' Meeting. The congregational president will probably reside over this portion of the meeting.

11. Closing notes

Remind the voters to treat the divine call with the respect that it is due. It is a good policy to collect the call lists (if any were distributed) and to encourage the voters not to tamper in any way with the call process (including any attempt to sway any future calls that may have to be issued.)

12. Closing Prayer

13. Adjournment or Recess (Discussion of the ramifications of each)

Many congregations simply recess a call meeting so that they can meet again without following the constitutionally mandated notification steps involved in the convening of a new meeting. Other congregations purposely adjourn the meeting because they consider the purpose of the meeting to have been completed or fulfilled, and the meeting therefore at an end. Most constitutions allow for special meetings but include provision for proper notification. History has shown us that there is wisdom in adjourning, rather than recessing, call meetings. That said, many congregations opt to simply recess the meeting, reasoning that they will certainly have further business to conduct whether the call just issued is accepted or returned. Present the pros and cons of each course of action and let the voters decide. If the meeting is recessed, Roberts Rules of Order mandates that the meeting should be recessed "to a time specific." In other words, a specific time to reconvene the meeting is supposed to be set at the time of any recess. This will not always be practicable.