

Guidelines and
Suggestions
for Interviewing
First-Called
Candidates

into

Commissioned Ministries

of

The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod

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1. Introduction

Your congregation is seeking a graduate of one of the colleges or universities of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. You are seeking a candidate who has been trained and certified for an educational or auxiliary ministry of the church. This document provides you with background information about those ministries, suggested procedures for securing candidates, and interview questions and guidelines.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has a long and rich history of providing Christian education for the members of the congregations and communities served. From the very beginning the Saxon Lutherans recognized the need to educate young people in the Word of God and the doctrines of the church, providing the knowledge necessary to be educated citizens.

Included in the educational process was recognition of the need to educate those who would minister to children and young people. To that end, colleges were established to prepare those who would serve in the churches and schools that have been such a significant part of the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The development and maintenance of a comprehensive system of colleges and universities has most certainly enabled Lutheran preschools, elementary, and secondary schools and our churches to develop and expand. While other Lutheran church bodies in America established parochial schools, without the support system of training institutions to supply the schools with teachers prepared to teach in Lutheran schools, the parochial schools simply faded into history.

The colleges and universities of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod continue to recruit and prepare women and men to serve as commissioned workers in Lutheran ministries. This document is for leaders of congregations and schools who look to the colleges and universities of the *Concordia University System* for graduates.

2. Background

Reflecting on our rich heritage of Christian education helps us to make important connections of where we have been, to know where we are today and to determine where we will need to be in the years and decades to come. Changes in Lutheran schools and churches have been both subtle and dramatic. The most recent decades have brought about a variety of significant changes that have influenced and continue to influence what Lutheran schools are to their congregations and communities. Recent changes and trends include the declining percentage of Lutheran student enrollment, growing diversity within Lutheran schools, the establishment of many preschool and day care programs, and an expansion of curricular offerings and the manner in which schools are staffed.

This document seeks to assist church leaders with the appropriate procedures for staffing schools and churches of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod with graduates of synodical colleges and universities. The process has changed over the past two decades in order to provide better assistance for congregations, schools and the candidates to be placed. Students, congregational leaders and leaders of other educational agencies are much more involved in the initial placement process. For the sake of good order, it is essential that leaders follow clearly established guidelines for placing commissioned workers.

It is important that church leaders use this document along with the document entitled ***Rubrics Governing Call and Placement Procedures for Ministers of Religion—Commissioned, Adopted April 2002***. The Rubrics document can be found on the website at <http://higher-ed.lcms.org/200-church-voc.asp>. It provides information about the appropriate procedures for calling and placing commissioned workers, along with a glossary of terms. Please note the section, *Calling Procedures for First Placement Candidates*, found on pages eight and nine of the Rubrics Bulletin. This *Guidelines and Suggestions* document is an expansion of those guidelines with the goal of enhancing the ministry of the Lutheran commissioned graduate, especially through improved communications in the interview process. The calling body (congregation or school) should notify the District that it would like to extend a call. The Concordia Placement Website is available at: <http://higher-ed.lcms.org/candidates/>. This website is designed to give the congregation preliminary information on available candidates from each of the ten campuses. The calling bodies can then contact the Placement directors on the campuses that have candidates who fit their needs to request credential files. Calling bodies then have the opportunity to contact the candidate by phone, e-mail, personally on campus or on site. The following information is provided for school leaders so that the contacts might be productive and beneficial for both the calling body and the candidate.

3. Suggested Procedures

Starting the Process:

1. Prayerfully consider the specific aspects of ministry the congregation wishes to have filled by the candidate. Contact your District for assistance with identification of needs in your setting.
2. Develop a position description along with a list of qualifications.
3. Make decisions about salary and benefits, housing, and other significant details of the Call.
4. Check the website and contact one or more of the college/university Placement Directors, share the above information and ask for professional credentials of qualified candidates along with guidelines for using the names(s), which the Placement Directors recommend. The college/university contact information and the educational programs available are included on pages 13 and 14.
5. Review the professional credentials in relation to numbers one and two above.
6. When a decision has been made to interview a candidate, contact the appropriate Placement Director for assurance that the candidate is still available for placement.
7. Prepare interview questions based on the suggestions found in this booklet and the specific needs of your educational ministry.
8. Contact the candidates selected for interviews. Establish interview times and other arrangements.
9. Conduct interviews; make decision.
10. Follow the procedures for Designation for a Call outlined in the *Rubrics Bulletin*, pages 8 and 9.

Planning the interview:

It is important that planning the interview be done professionally and with dignity. The colleges and universities prepare the graduates for interviews. The actual interview provides the candidate with the opportunity to share educational philosophies, attitudes and experiences in ways that will not likely be shared on paper. Careful planning and appropriate questions will enhance the process for all concerned.

The following interview process has been successful in a variety of settings:

Phase I

Screening interview - For the purpose of narrowing the field of candidates.

Selection interview - For the purpose of selecting the person to fill the position

During this phase the focus is on the skills and abilities of the candidate for the position that is available. A focus on promoting the local situation can cause confusion about the reason for the interview and the role of the candidate in the process.

Phase II

Promoting the position to the candidate. During this phase the committee will seek to *share the reasons for which a candidate will want to be part of the ministry* of the congregation and school. Care should be taken not to mix Phase II into the process of Phase I.

When planning for an interview, consider the following suggestions:

1. Determine if the interview will be a phone interview or a personal interview. In either case, be certain that the candidate has advance notice; that the time for the interview is convenient for the candidate and the interviewer(s); and that the candidate has some advance information about the position, the school, the congregation and the community. All costs for a personal interview including transportation, lodging and meals are the responsibility of the congregation/educational agency.
2. If a phone interview is conducted, plan the details carefully.
 - a. Time (be aware of time zones). A carefully planned interview, 45-60 minutes in length, is sufficient.
 - b. Number of interviewers.
 - c. A conference call is an effective way to conduct an interview, especially when the candidate is not available for a personal interview. Consider assigning one member of the interview committee to ask the prepared questions. Too many voices can be confusing to the candidate. All members of the committee should have the opportunity to ask questions after the prepared questions are completed.

- d. At the beginning of the session, advise the interviewee of the categories of questions that will be asked – professional training, educational experiences, philosophy, classroom management, etc. Helping the candidate to be at ease will enhance the quality of the interview.
 - e. Those participating in the interview should clearly identify themselves at the beginning of the interview and when asking questions. When there is one questioner, the candidate should be aware that there are others listening to the interview. The candidate should also be told if the interview is being taped.
 - f. If more than one candidate is being interviewed for a position, it is helpful to ask the same questions of all candidates so that comparisons can be made. In addition, there may be questions specific to the individual.
 - g. As you seek to identify a commissioned minister who will serve in the ministry of the Lutheran church or school in your setting, the following format for the interview is suggested:
 - i. Opening Prayer
 - ii. Introductions
 - iii. Prepared Questions
 - iv. Clarification
 - v. Closing Prayer
 - h. Use a prepared list of questions for all candidates. However, it may be necessary to ask clarifying questions during the interview. When using one person to ask questions, select that person who has a good “phone voice” and who can best conduct a professional interview.
3. If a personal interview is conducted, these additional considerations should also be included:
- a. Comfortable room furnishings
 - b. Appropriate number of people (too many interviewers may be intimidating)
 - c. Maintaining eye contact while taking notes.
4. At the conclusion of either the phone or personal interview, indicate:
- a. How long interviewing of candidates will continue.
 - b. The time-table for making a decision
 - c. When and how the committee will notify the placement officer and the candidate. It is important that each candidate interviewed be notified promptly when a decision is made. This will help to put the candidate at ease and promote positive communications.

Interview Questions:

Planning interview questions is important for a successful interview. What you will ask of a candidate will be a bit different from what you ask an experienced educator. Do not expect the same level of sophistication and confidence that you would from one who has been in a ministry for several years. Plan questions that will enable the candidate to respond based on his or her level of experience.

One purpose of the interview is to relate questions to the position and the ministry in your setting. It is essential when developing questions to be sensitive to the candidate by not asking those questions that are inappropriate both legally and ethically. Consider developing questions around the following themes:

- Personal background
- Professional training and experience
- Understanding of mission and ministry
- Gifts as a person and a commissioned minister
- Nature of teaching/learning process
- Reaction to real classroom/ministry scenarios
- Educational/ministry goals
- Specific questions related to your local situation

The following are examples of questions that you may wish to include in an interview. These are not inclusive nor should all be used. Be selective. Ask only those questions which help to achieve your objective(s) for conducting an interview.

Personal Background

- Briefly summarize your personal history. Tell us about your family and early growth experiences.
- Where did you attend elementary and high school?
- What were your activities at school and in your home congregation?
- What are your hobbies? How do you relax?
- Who or what influenced you to become a Lutheran teacher?
- How would you describe your personal relationship with Jesus Christ?
- Describe your faith journey up to this point.

Professional Training and Experience

- What led you to choose the college/university that you chose?
- How did your college/university education prepare you to serve in a Lutheran church or school?
- What experiences other than college courses were influential in your preparation as a commissioned minister?
- Describe your student teaching/internship experience(s). What did you learn?
- How did student teaching help you to make a decision about the grade level that you would like to teach? Why do you want to work with children?
- In what grade level(s) do you feel most qualified to teach? Why?
- Share your strengths and limitations.

Understanding of Mission and Ministry

- How is being a part of the Lutheran teaching ministry unique?
- What is your understanding of the role of the Lutheran school today? What is unique about the Lutheran school?
- What is your view of the relationship of the church and the school?
- How would Law and Gospel be part of your classroom?
- How would you enable and encourage students to put into practice what is learned in the study of religion?
- What special skills and interests do you bring to this school and congregation?

Philosophy of Education

- Describe your philosophy of educating a child for living in the world today and the years to come. Share your understanding of how _____ is an important part of modern education in America. (Select current trends and programs that are used or may be used in your setting.)
- What is the role of the family in the education of children today?
- How will you develop a successful classroom or ministry? Include thoughts on discipline, classroom management, dealing with "administrivia," dealing with parents, meeting the needs of special students, working with boards of the church and reaching out to the community. How will you affirm students and/or members?
- List three goals for your classroom/ministry next year.

Classroom/Church Scenarios

- Develop classroom/church scenarios dealing with real issues of your school, church and community. Consider topics such as relating to parents, staff relationships, a disruptive student, helping two arguing students. Ask for an identification of the issues and possible solutions and what action should be taken if the plan does not work.

Educational Goals

- What activities do you feel are important for your professional growth?
- Are you considering enrolling in an advanced degree program? In what area of education are you interested in pursuing an advanced degree?
- What would you like to be doing in five years?

Local Questions

Develop several questions that deal specifically with your church or school, the position for which the candidate is being interviewed, and the skills for extra duties along with any other questions unique to your setting.

It is always a good idea to ask the candidate if he/she has any questions of you, so that he/she will have the necessary information and background for consideration of a possible future Call. The following are examples of questions that candidates have asked:

- What assistance will I receive to help me become a better, commissioned minister?
- How will my service be evaluated?
- How are texts/study materials selected and what is currently used?

- What is the philosophy of the various curriculum courses, the programs of the school and church, and discipline?
- What worship styles are available to enrich me in the Lord's ministry?
- Will you interview other candidates? What is your schedule or process for selecting a candidate?
- What is the housing situation in the community? What is the benefit package? (They shouldn't ask about salary, but you can indicate the salary if you wish.)

Additional Interview Guidelines:

It is important that questions asked in an interview not violate acceptable legal questions. Questions should not only be appropriate but also be phrased correctly to follow guidelines.

The guidelines below are for those concerns most frequently addressed by interviewers and leaders.

- **Age** A person can be asked for proof of age if hired, but it is unacceptable to ask age, birth date, dates of attendance or completion of elementary or high school, and questions which tend to identify a candidate over age forty.
- **Birthplace/citizenship** A candidate can be told that proof of a legal right to work in the United States may be required after employment. However, candidates should not be asked about birthplace of parents or other relatives, if they are U.S. citizens, or to furnish naturalization papers.
- **Natural Origin** A candidate can be asked about languages read, spoken, or written but should not be asked about nationality, lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent or parentage of candidate or of parents and spouse. The candidate should not be asked how foreign language skills were acquired.
- **Sex, Marital Status, Family** You can share a policy statement about workers who are related. Avoid questions about the candidate's sex, marital status, number and/or ages of children or dependents, provisions for child care, questions regarding pregnancy, child bearing or birth control, or asking about with whom the candidate resides.
- **Race, Color** The candidate may be told that a photograph may be required after employment. Questions about the candidate's race or color and questions regarding candidate's complexion or color of skin, eyes or hair are unacceptable.
- **Physical Condition, Handicap** If there is a policy that requires individuals to pass a job-related physical, you should inform the candidate. You can ask, "Do you have any physical condition or handicap which may limit your ability to perform in this position? If yes, what can be done to accommodate your limitations?" Do not ask questions about a candidate's general medical condition or state of health, regarding receipt of Workers' Compensation, or directly asking if the candidate has any physical disabilities or handicaps.
- **Arrest, Criminal Record** Questions can be asked about convictions of a felony or misdemeanor (specify period of time) which resulted in imprisonment. A candidate should be informed that a conviction will not necessarily disqualify him or her. The candidate should not be asked for an arrest record or "Have you ever been arrested?"
- **Military Service** A candidate can be asked about skills which may have been acquired in military service, but should not be asked general questions about service such as dates and type of discharge.
- **Economic Status** Do not ask questions about candidate's current or past assets or liabilities or credit rating.

- **Organizations, Activities** It is acceptable to ask a candidate to list job-related organizations, clubs, professional societies or other associations. A candidate does not have to list those that would indicate race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex or age.
- **References** You may ask for the names of individuals who would provide character or professional references. Avoid questions about former employers or questions which would elicit specific information about race, color, names, creed, national origin, ancestry, physical handicap, medical condition, marital status, age or sex.

Follow-Through:

1. Compare notes taken during the interview. Identify any questions or issues that need additional attention.
2. Contact the Placement Director if additional information will help in the decision-making process.
3. Contact the candidate when more information is needed.
4. When a candidate is selected, follow the guidelines for Designation for a Call in the booklet, *Rubrics Governing Call and Placement Procedures*. This booklet can be viewed or downloaded on the higher education website: <http://higher-ed.lcms.org/200-church-voc.asp>
5. If more than one candidate was interviewed, inform each person interviewed that another has been selected and express appreciation for being part of the interview process.
6. Immediately inform the individual Placement Director with the name of the candidate to be designated for a Call. Also, shred the credentials of those not selected.

4. Terms

- A **Candidate** is an individual who has been declared qualified for a first Call and who is assigned a first Call in accordance with the bylaws of the Synod. He/she has successfully completed a degree program and has a synodical college's/university's approval for his/her respective ministry. (Bylaw 2.09, a-c) The commissioning of ministers of religion occurs prior to first placement installation in accordance with forms and practices developed by the Synod for that purpose.

(The term **Candidate** can also refer to a member of the Synod who is eligible to perform the duties of any of the offices of ministry as specified in Bylaw 2.15 but who is not currently an active member or an emeritus member.)

- **Commissioned Minister** – See Ministers of Religion-Commissioned below.
- **Designated Call** – a call extended by a calling body to a specific first-placement candidate.
- **Assignment** or **First-Placement** is the result of the action of the Board of Assignments working together with the placement directors of the colleges/universities of the Concordia University System, individual District Presidents (and/or their designees), and calling entities in placing candidates in their initial position in an educational or other ministry of the church. (Bylaw 2.11, a)

- The **Placement Director** is the official of a college/university in the Concordia University System responsible for recommending candidates to the Board of Assignments and for assisting candidates to complete the Call process for assignment or first placement satisfactorily. (Bylaw 2.11, b)
- The **District Education Executive** is usually the individual delegated and appointed by the District President and/or the District's Board of Directors to assist the District President in administering the Call process for Ministers of Religion—Commissioned in his District. District Presidents normally exercise their responsibilities in the Call process through District Education Executives. The specific title given to a District Education Executive will vary from District to District.
- **Ministers of Religion—Commissioned** includes Teachers (and School Administrators), Directors of Christian Education, Directors of Christian Outreach, Deaconesses, Parish Assistants, and Certified Lay Ministers and Directors of Parish Music. (Bylaw 2.07, a) All commissioned ministers on the roster of the Synod who serve a legitimate calling entity are considered by the Synod and the Internal Revenue Service to be called and self-employed, regardless of the terminology used.