



Making **a** **DIFFERENCE**
NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD, EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

CALL PROCESS

This call is inspired...listen!

When a Northeastern Iowa Synod congregation needs a pastor, it's growth time. The *call process* kicks in, which stretches the pastors who are involved and the congregation.

Three questions

Growth occurs when the congregation and pastors take the Holy Spirit as a partner and approach the call process with a positive attitude. The best possible match can result.

Rev. Darrel Gerriets, one of three assistants to the bishop, sees the call process work most smoothly when congregation members know their congregation and have carefully

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**Listen,
God is calling...
and the match is
grrrrreat!**

considered where they feel God is calling them to minister.

Gerrietts says congregations answer three questions during the call process. Using the synod's call process as it is intended, congregations ask these questions openly, then plot the answers, and work toward goals.

The three questions are—

1. What will this congregation look like in the future?
2. Will this congregation grow or not?
3. How much will this congregation spend on the answer to the last question?

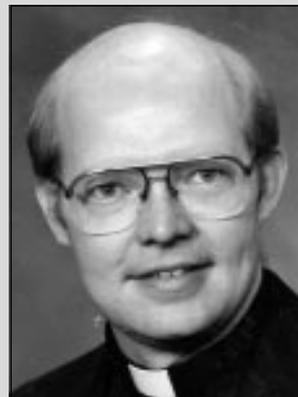
Gerrietts said, "When a congregation asks itself about growth, it has a right to either answer—*yes* or *no*. It can serve Christ in the Kingdom with either answer, because there is a difference between growing and reaching out. A congregation can stop growing and still reach out. For example, a huge cathedral in a large city can reach out by financing a satellite in another neighborhood. However, growth is a topic a congregation does consider."



GERRIETTS

Some of the best advice about calling a pastor that Rev. Darrel Gerrietts has heard comes from Rev. Curt Miller, former bishop of the Western Iowa Synod. Here are Miller's four hot tips—

- **Pick wisely.**
- **Have an agreed-upon, written job description.**
- **Treat the pastor mighty well.**
- **Expect to keep the pastor a long, long time.**



MILLER

Trust the Spirit

Rev. Nancy Larson, assistant to the bishop, said, “Although the call process is orderly, the Spirit works through it. Trust the Spirit, the matchmaker. Be intentional about seeking, listening to, and following the Spirit during the call process. Pray for guidance for the call committee, the congregation, and that pastor whom God is already preparing.



LARSON

“When I work with congregations who are calling a pastor, I trust God to lead us, and I see God at work. Although the synod staff and the congregation’s call committee use their best knowledge and diligence, we all expect God to be in charge.”

Partner with the synod

When a vacancy is announced, call the synod staff. Listen to them. Communicate. Ask questions. Welcome them.

Linda Hudgins, assistant to the bishop, meets with a congregation’s council soon after a resignation is announced.



HUDGINS

“I’m in the congregation right away to answer their questions and walk them through the process,” Hudgins said.

“People feel a lot of anxiety about facing a vacancy. I listen to them and share with them that feelings of abandonment, disappointment, and anger are normal and expected. When people admit to their feelings and work

through them, they’re ready to recognize that change can be God’s will.”

Hudgins encourages congregations to go through the call process as it is intended.

“Each step has a purpose and creates a partnership between

God, the congregation, the synod, and the ELCA,” Hudgins said.

The goal is a good match between the pastor and congregation so, as Gerrietts says, “the congregation and pastor have a good time in the kingdom.”

Celebrate, laugh, cry

When a pastor leaves, relax and take time for closure.

“The pastor’s departure can feel like the death of a loved one,” said Bishop Steven Ullestad.

“Expect to feel grief, anger, and fear of change.

“Congregation members need to share their feelings about the pastor leaving,” Ullestad said. “Plan farewells where congregation members and the pastor remember and celebrate their time together and laugh and cry. Schedule an exit interview between the council and the pastor, and ask the pastor for honest insights that may help the congregation as it looks ahead.”



ULLESTAD

Timing

Prepare congregation members to change expectations about how soon a vacancy will fill.

“Sometimes you can accomplish a call in six months,” Gerrietts said, “but I haven’t seen a call fill that quickly for years. A year and a half is most common.”

Recently, the synod has averaged 32 vacant congregations.

“I tell people that successfully calling a pastor may well be a two-year process, and a congregation that wants a pastor with special skills, such as youth ministry or open rural parish, may take even longer,” he said.

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More pastors needed

Gerrietts recognizes the need for more people entering the ministry. He feels that congregation members don't realize how important they are in encouraging youth to consider the ministry.

“Raise the question to youth before they reach confirmation age,” Gerrietts said.

But first it's important that youth are on what he terms *their faith journey*.

“Work on youth *faith factors*—things that make kids want to be faithful,” he said. “Eight are being identified: faith integrated into family identity and practice, influence by at least three adult mentors, at least three months' service in the name of Jesus Christ, early church leadership, church experiences that value youth, excellent senior high and young adult ministry, Christian friend encouragement, and crisis support within an engaging Christian community. Kids must be on their faith journey if we want them to be part of a worshipping community.”

Change

The call process confronts congregation members with change, and being ready to change can be a conscious decision. To approach change in a congregation, members can work through *Percept* materials the synod has purchased for each congregation. These user-friendly materials are on internet at <www.link2lead.com>. Twenty members from each congregation can measure their reaction to change, then work through demographics and statistics about their community. Rev. Mark Anderson, synod ministry specialist, presents workshops and seminars helping congregations understand and use *Percept*.

Thinking *outside the box* results, which means congregations can expect the unexpected. They are ready for the Spirit's guidance.



ANDERSON

REFLECTION

Newly installed pastor urges prayer, patience

EDITOR'S NOTE—Rev. Jeffrey Ungs, already a veteran of two calls, shares tips for facing the call process. Originally from Zion, Readlyn, Ungs was installed at Galilean, Clear Lake, September 29. He interned at Our Redeemer, Ness City, Kansas, in 1997-98, and served Christ, Eureka, Kansas, two congregations of the Central States Synod.



UNGS

Pray

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and God's righteousness!

Matthew 6:33

My best tip for pastors and congregations facing the call process is pray, pray, and pray some more. Unless you are listening to that soft still voice (and for some pastors and congregations it may feel like God's voice is silent), it is nearly impossible to discern God's will. We must trust that the calling of a pastor or other rostered leader comes from God. Because there are so many pastoral vacancies, it may take longer to call a pastor. Speaking personally, it was difficult for me as a pastor to discern whether it was God's voice calling me or congregations that were in need of pastors. Pastors and congregations must take the time to pray. Be patient and trust in God. Do not rush the process.

Anxiety

Matthew continues, *Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day.* This is good counsel for congregations in the call process. It does us no good to be anxious about things that are not in our control. Seek the good things that God is doing in the absence of a pastor rather than worrying about getting someone to fill the vacancy.

God can do a lot of wonderful things for congregations who are facing a pastoral vacancy. Many lay people who may have been silent while a pastor is in place are called on to use their gifts of leadership. A pastoral vacancy may be God's way of nudging someone in the congregation to consider a call to ministry.

God's hand

I absolutely felt God's hand in the call process! If I had not felt the Holy Spirit leading me to where I am, I would not be here.

Calling a pastor is different from the job-change model we are used to. Most of us look for a job when we are not happy with the one we have or face an opportunity for advancement in pay or status. If we are an employer, we hire someone with the right qualifications for the work we need to have done. But for pastors, the model is different. Pastors should not wait until they are unhappy with their call, nor should they accept a call because it pays more money or has more status. Pastors are called by God to serve Christ through word and sacrament ministry.

As Pastor Nancy Larson, assistant to the bishop, said to the congregation at my installation service, "You are not hiring your holy man or woman to do religion for you." Congregations are not employers seeking an employee. A pastor is sent by God to serve God's people.

Perfect timing

God has a pastor in mind for your congregation, but you must trust God. One of the hardest parts of the Lord's Prayer is *Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*. Though the call process paperwork may seem a bit redundant and like busy work, it helps pastors discern whether God is calling them to a new parish setting. Congregations must be honest about their strengths and weaknesses so that a good match can be made. The call process can seem lengthy and drawn out. When you get frustrated, remember the promise of Jesus, *Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son*. John 14:13

Just as God uses ministers as vessels to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments, God uses the call process as a vessel to accomplish God's will on earth as in heaven. Though it may seem like you will *never* call a pastor, God's timing is perfect.

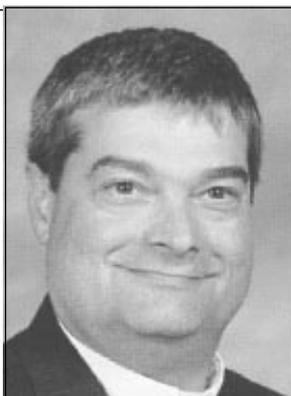
To help congregations keep things in perspective, remember that the Israelites wandered in the desert 40 years before reaching the promised land! God's timing is not our timing, and God's ways are not our ways. But God will be faithful to those who seek the kingdom of God and God's righteousness.

—Rev. Jeffrey Unga, Galilean, Clear Lake

ADVICE

Let the choreographer chart the dance

EDITOR'S NOTE—Rev. David Werges, a member of St. Peter, Garnavillo from 1957-88, is a veteran of two call processes within the synod. He served Grace, Hanlontown, and will be installed at St. John, Charles City, December 15. He is originally from Big Canoe Lutheran Church, Decorah, and interned in 1997-98 at St. Peter, Dillsboro, Indiana. He was asked if he feels God's hand in the call process and what tips he'd offer.



WERGES

As I was preparing for my first call, Rev. Melvin Amundson, assistant to the bishop of the South Carolina Synod, suggested that I look at the call process as a dance. Ever since that advice, the call process has taken on a whole new course for me and interviewing has become almost a delight.

Choreographer

In the interview process, I see the pastor and the congregations as partners in the dance, and the Holy Spirit is the choreographer. The Holy Spirit directs the movements, but, as in any dance, the dancers still have the freedom of their input as well. The music comes from the movement between the two partners in the dance.

I definitely see God active and thriving in the call process through the work of the Holy Spirit. I have heard some of my colleagues talk about their interviews, and many times they have

said that when they stopped demanding to lead and control the dance and started listening for the music, everything begins to



Tips for pastors

Be open to the Holy Spirit and the surprises the Spirit brings.
Be clear about expectations—yours and the congregations'.
Formulate some questions for the interview, such as—
What is this congregation looking for in a new pastor?
What are the strengths of this congregation?
What are its growing edges?
Where does this congregation intend to be in one year?
Five years? Twenty years?
How does this congregation define its ministry?
How does it interact and fit with the ELCA, the larger church?
How does this congregation care for its pastor(s)?

Tips for congregations

Observe the need for confidentiality.
Be honest about shortcomings.
Remember that synod compensation guidelines are minimums, and prior to the interview know what the congregation can afford.
Respect that the pastor's spouse is not an unpaid staff member and is not responsible for details of congregation life.
Be welcoming to the pastor and his/her family.
Encourage your pastor to remember the Sabbath and take off allotted days and vacations. Discourage the scheduling of meetings or activities on the pastor's days off.

—Rev. David Werges, St. John, Charles City

come together and flows into the choreographed movements.

Signs

I was advised, *Look for the signs that the Holy Spirit leaves*. They are the coincidences that speak only to you. In each of the calls that I have received, there were things that made me think *This is the place*. In one call, it was interests that were demonstrated by the members of the congregation. Sometimes, it is just being able to see yourself doing God's ministry in that place.

—Rev. David Werges, St. John, Charles City

Facts allay unfounded fears about calls

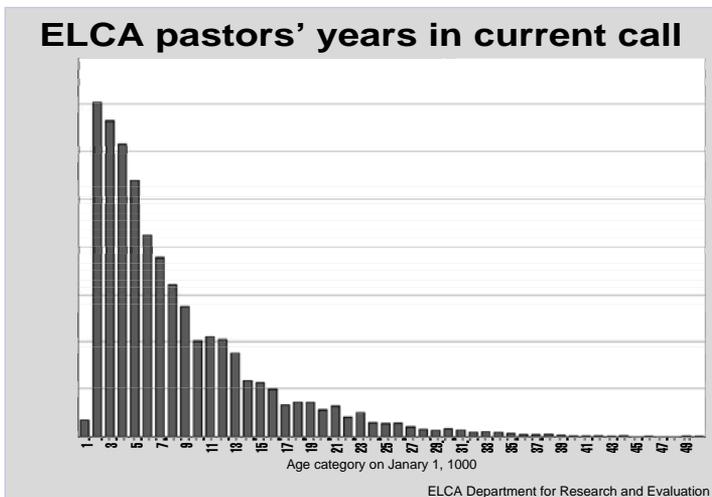
Questions surface about the call process. *How long are congregations usually without a pastor? Are many pastors available? How many will be available in the future?* Here are Northeastern Iowa Synod answers. They paint a picture of the present and put congregations in context with the larger church.

How frequent is a pastoral vacancy? Synod congregations without a pastor sometime during 2002 number 53, including seven two-point parishes. The monthly average was 32 vacancies. Vacancies totaled 53 in 1999; 43 in 1996 (from one year's issues of the STAR).

What is the synod's **vacancy percentage**? 17 percent in 2002 (STAR). The ELCA vacancy rate was 19 percent in 1998 (*Ministry Needs and Resources in the 21st Century*).

How long are congregations vacant? The 17 congregations installing a new pastor the past year were without a pastor an average of 17 months—almost a year and a half. The shortest vacancy was 10 months; four vacancies took longer than two years—30, 29, 28, and 26 months (STAR).

What do we know about congregations that were **without a pastor 12 months**? The number has increased—two in 1996, 13 in 1999, 14 in 2002 (STAR). These congregations averaged



1,061 baptized members with a 30 percent worship attendance and benevolence of 12 percent (ELCA Yearbook 2002).

Are fewer pastors moving **within** the synod? No, moves from one synod congregation to another average between 15 and 16. Figures for recent years jumped around—17 moves last year, 12 the year before, then 22 (STAR).

Are pastors moving **into** the Northeastern Iowa Synod from other synods? Yes, usually more pastors move in than out (174 in and 152 out during the past 10 years). However, this year, only 13 transferred out while 15 transferred out (STAR). Rev. Carl Richard Evenson coordinates Regions 5 and works with ministry needs of its 12 synods. When asked if the nation's economy hampers mobility of pastors, he said, "Economy does not seem to be a factor in how many pastors want to move from synod to synod. A problem occurs, however, when pastors want to move but are not well known in other synods. Overall, they are not getting as many calls as they'd like, and they are not getting them as quickly."



EVENSON

How many **rostered persons** begin service in the synod? Fifty-four ordinations were held the past 13 years, three consecrations (diaconal ministers), and six installed as associates in ministry (STAR).

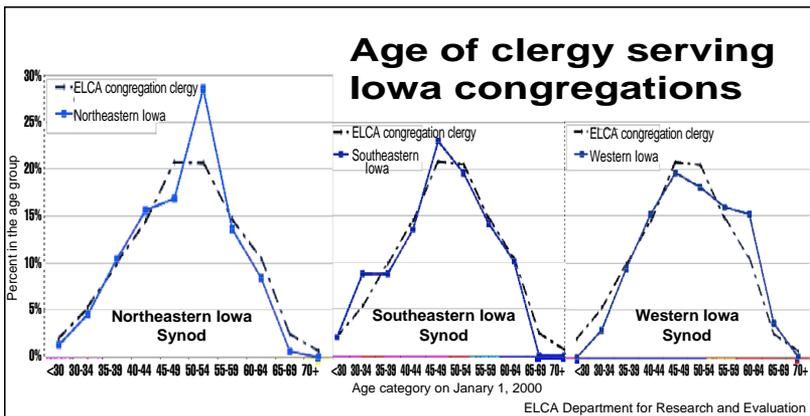
INSTANT ANSWERS

What are steps in the synod call process?
Which synod congregations are in the call process?
What does the synod constitution say about the call process?
Who is on the the synod list of supply pastors?

Visit the synod's web site

<www.neiasynod.org/call_process>

or call 319/352-1414



How many **candidates** are approaching ordination? The Northeastern Iowa Synod last August had 31 candidates, which translates into 6.5 candidates per 10,000 members. The parallel figure for all Region 5 synods is slightly higher (6.9) and the ELCA average higher yet (8.5). The synod in Region 5 with the most candidates is Southeastern Iowa with 66 candidates or 13.1 per 10,000 members. The other Iowa synod, Western Iowa, is lower with 16 candidates or 3.9 per 10,000 members (Division for Ministry report).

What about **retirements**? The past 10 years, 72 synod pastors retired. Retirement numbers are 180 percent greater than the 40 ordinations (STAR).

Are Northeastern Iowa pastors **older** than average? Yes, Northeastern Iowa congregation pastors' age brackets peak at 50-54 years; the ELCA and Southeastern and Western Iowa synods peak younger, at 45-49 years (ELCA Department for Research and Evaluation). Sixty percent of the synod's pastors are 50 years of age and older; a year and a half ago, only 54 percent were (synod statistics).

Let's talk about—

- How the call process works
- How to get youth on their faith journey
- How to target community mission with *Percept*
- How to do strategic planning

Invite synod staff to call or visit
 Phone 319/352-1414
www.neiasynod.org