

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS

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**A. INTERIM PASTORAL  
MINISTRY—SOME DEFINITIONS  
AND DESCRIPTIONS**

Interim pastoral ministry is a common need in every synod. Yet a variety of practices and understandings can be found in that regard.<sup>1</sup>

Some questions related to interim pastoral ministry include:

**1. Why do some ordained ministers engaged in interim pastoral service continue to be listed in “on leave from call” status?**

- a. Only service “under call” is recorded in the roster record.
- b. Service rendered by “on leave” clergy but under contract is not recorded.
- c. *Wherever possible, I believe that a Letter of Call should be considered from the Synod Council.* Such a call could be for either a “place-specific” interim pastoral ministry or a Letter of Call could be issued for a defined term on a “non-place-specific” basis.
- d. Such a step would reflect appropriately our “table of sources of call” (see continuing resolution 7.44.A96.b., sub-section 1.5) and would be in keeping with the Augsburg Confession (Article XIV): “It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.”
- e. Retired ordained ministers serving in interim responsibilities, however, may not

be placed under call. One cannot be both “retired” and “under call” at the same time. Interim service provided by a “retired” pastor always would be “under contract” or “agreement,” and not “under call.”

**2. Are term calls for interim pastoral ministry completely open ended? No.**

- a. The policy on interim pastoral ministry makes clear that such “not-place-specific” term calls may be for a duration of one to three years.
- b. Such term calls are subject to annual review (see Section III.F. of policy on interim pastoral ministry [below]).

**3. May a term call be issued for service in a specific congregation of the synod and only for that period of service? Yes.**

- a. A term call may be made co-terminus with the end of the need for that service.
- b. Further, a Letter of Call to interim pastoral ministry may be terminated by the Synod Council, as provided in churchwide constitutional provision 7.43.

**4. May an interim pastor under a term call from one Synod Council be placed “on loan” to another synod for interim pastoral ministry?**

- a. The answer appears to be “maybe,”  
(1) provided the original Letter of Call was not issued *for* a specific congregation in the synod originating the call, and

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<sup>1</sup> This detailed analysis related to interim pastoral ministry was provided to the Conference of Bishops at the October 1998 meeting. Because of the continuing need for clarity on the subject, the analysis is provided once again.

- (2) provided the service is rendered under a general “term call” that is not place “specific,” or under contract or agreement with the specific congregation.
  - b. There is a restriction. Only the Synod Council of the synod to which a congregation is related may issue a “place specific” Letter of Call within that synod.
    - (1) To give a theoretical example: The Northwestern Ohio Synod Council could **not** issue a “place-specific” Letter of Call to an interim pastor on the roster of the Northwestern Ohio Synod to serve in Holy Ghost Lutheran Church in the Minneapolis Area Synod.
    - (2) The Northwestern Ohio Synod has no jurisdiction or authority related to a congregation of the Minneapolis Area Synod.
    - (3) Only the Minneapolis Area Synod could issue a Letter of Call to interim pastoral ministry in a congregation of the Minneapolis Area Synod.
    - (4) Upon the issuance of that Letter of Call, the ordained minister would be transferred onto the roster of the Minneapolis Area Synod if not previously rostered in that synod.
5. **Do the constitutional references to “interim pastor” refer only to ordained ministers with specific training for interim pastoral ministry?** No.
- a. Section I.B. on “interim supply” and Section I.C. on “interim training” in the policy on interim pastoral ministry [below] spells out the distinction.
  - b. The term “interim pastor” is used generically for interim pastoral service.
    - (1) In a practical way, we may envision at least three types of interim pastors:
      - (a) An “**intentional interim**” served by a *specially trained pastor* who has a goal of attending to conflict or to handling specific transitional issues in a congregation’s life. Such service likely is needed following a long-tenured pastorate, a period of conflict, problems of misconduct, or other matters.
      - (b) A “**maintenance interim**” served by a pastor *with or without special training* to address transitional issues, while providing general pastoral leadership and care, assisting the congregation with preparation of its profile.
      - (c) A “**supply interim**” served by an available part-time, full-time, or neighboring pastor on the active or retired roster who provides pulpit-and-altar supply and general pastoral care while members of the congregation attend to preparation of the congregation’s profile and call process.
6. **Should only pastors who have had intentional interim pastoral training be appointed to serve as interim pastors?**
- a. Not necessarily.
  - b. The applicable constitutional provisions require interim pastoral care but do not specify a particular pattern of preparation or appointment from a specialized cadre of clergy.
7. **How is an interim pastor to obtain compensation and benefit coverage between assignments to interim pastoral settings?** The individual must plan accordingly because no general fund exists for open-ended funding of interim pastors.
8. **May anyone serve as an interim pastor?** Not necessarily.
- a. This church currently does not have a standard accreditation process for interim pastors in the way in which one exists, for example, for hospital chaplains.
  - b. The constitutional provisions, however, related to interim pastoral ministry require the consent of the synodical bishop for such service.

- c. Interim service should not be treated as a way to “stay on the roster” in view of the “three-year limit.”
- d. Persons who have not served *at least three years* in a regular congregation call normally are not eligible for interim pastoral ministry.
- e. Previously ordained ministers not currently on the roster of ordained ministers may not serve under call or contract as interim pastors. For service as interim pastors, such individuals first would need to be reinstated through the candidacy process.

9. **Could a churchwide listing be developed of interim pastors, including such information as their potential for mobility or their particular skills for situations of special need?** In my opinion, “No,” unless or until a churchwide system of accreditation and accountability were developed. Perhaps such a system could be similar to that which exists for certification of chaplains. Some questions:
- a. Would such a churchwide accreditation process for trained interim pastors be helpful for synodical bishops?
  - b. If developed, what elements should be included in any churchwide accreditation process for trained interim pastors?
  - c. Would synodical bishops be interested in and willing to make recommendations in regard to those who should participate in interim training and accreditation?

10. **For wise and necessary reasons, provision is made for the interim pastoral care of congregations between the service of regularly called pastors.** Specifically, we read in the *Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*:

**\*C9.06. At a time of pastoral vacancy, an interim pastor shall be appointed by the bishop of the synod with the consent of this congregation or the Congregation Council.**

**\*C9.07. During the period of service, an interim pastor shall have the rights and duties in the congregation**

**[emphasis added] of a regularly called pastor and may delegate the same in part to a supply pastor with the consent of the bishop of the synod and this congregation or Congregation Council. The interim pastor and any ordained pastor providing assistance shall refrain from exerting influence in the selection of a pastor.**

Similar language is found in the *Constitution for Synods*:

**S14.17. During service to a congregation, an interim pastor shall have the rights and duties in the congregation of a regularly called pastor. The interim pastor may delegate the same in part to an interim supply pastor with the consent of the bishop of this synod. The interim pastor and any ordained ministers who may assist shall refrain from exerting influence in the selection of a pastor. Upon completion of service, the interim pastor shall certify to the bishop of this synod that the parochial records, for the period for which the interim pastor was responsible, are in order.**

A careful review of these constitutional provisions reveals:

- ➔ **The possibility of interim pastoral service:**
  - a. The term “interim pastor” applies both to:
    - (1) an ordained minister selected to fulfill such responsibilities on a full-time basis or a part-time basis, or to
    - (2) a specially trained ordained minister for specialized service in interim situations.
  - b. Such service may be rendered
    - (1) By contract or agreement;
    - (2) Under a specific *call* (named place for specified period) *from the Synod Council* of the synod to which the specific congregation is related; or
    - (3) Under a “not-place-specific” *term call from a Synod Council* for interim pastoral ministry in various settings throughout the duration of the term call.

- **Source of Call:** The *source of call* for interim pastoral ministry is always and only the *Synod Council* (churchwide continuing resolution 7.44.A96.b., sub-section 1.5.).
- **The manner of selection and appointment (\*C9.06.):**
  - a. "...an interim pastor shall be *appointed by the bishop* of the synod [to which the specific congregation is related]"
  - b. "...with the *consent* of this congregation or the Congregation Council."
- **Scope of responsibilities (\*C9.06. and S14.17.):**
  - a. "During the period of service, an interim pastor shall have the rights and duties *in the congregation* of a regularly called pastor...."
  - b. Possibility of delegation: An interim pastor "...may delegate the same [responsibilities] in part to a supply pastor...."
  - c. Such delegation requires approval: "...with the consent of the bishop of the synod and this congregation or Congregation Council."
- **Protection of the call process (\*C9.06. and S14.17.):** "The interim pastor and any ordained pastor providing assistance shall refrain from exerting influence in the selection of a pastor."
- **Care of records (S14.17):** "Upon completion of service, the interim pastor shall certify to the bishop of this synod that the parochial records, for the period for which the interim pastor was responsible, are in order."

In November 1996, after recommendation by the Division for Ministry and review by the Conference of Bishops, the Church Council adopted the following policy related to interim ministry:

*GUIDELINES RELATED  
TO INTERIM PASTORAL MINISTRY*

Congregations periodically experience transitions in pastoral leadership. Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America provide for the care of congregations during a time of pastoral vacancy through the appointment by the bishop of the synod of an ordained minister to provide pastoral care on an interim basis. An interim pastor is appointed by the synod bishop with the consent of the congregation or the Congregation Council (\*C9.06. in the *Model Constitution for Congregations*). Pastoral care then is provided on a contract basis, either through appointment or a term Letter of Call.

The following policy statement describes the guidelines by which interim ministry is provided to congregations.

**I. Congregations in Transition**

- A. Because of the importance of the ministry of Word and Sacrament, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seeks to ensure appropriate pastoral leadership for congregations during a time of pastoral vacancy. Interim ministry is provided by synods during the time of transition following the completion of service by the congregation's former pastor and prior to the calling of a new pastor. This also is provided for in a congregation served by a multiple staff when a congregation's senior pastor leaves, or when an associate pastor or other pastoral staff leaves. The interim period is thus a time in which pastoral care is provided a congregation by the synod as the congregation moves through a process of self-study and change toward new pastoral leadership.
- B. A congregation facing the normal range of congregational concerns related to a pastoral transition may be served by an interim pastor without formal training. The synodical bishop arranges for the congregation to receive Word and

Sacrament leadership during the period prior to the regular calling of a pastor through the appointment of an interim pastor.

1. An appointed interim pastor assumes the rights and duties in the congregation of a regularly called pastor and may delegate the same in part to an "interim supply pastor" with the consent of the synodical bishop (S14.17. in the *Constitution for Synods*).
  2. The interim pastor normally serves the congregation in a contracted and compensated arrangement.
- C. A congregation in a situation of significant concerns and stress related to a pastoral transition may benefit from the leadership of an experienced and trained interim pastor. Situations in which this is particularly appropriate include the transition following a long pastorate, a congregation facing new mission opportunities and/or a changed context for ministry, a transition following the resignation of a pastor related to disciplinary action by the synod, or a transition marked by significant discord or upheaval within a congregation.

## II. Appointed or Called Interim Ministry

- A. An interim pastor may either be appointed by the synod bishop or may serve under a term call extended by the Synod Council (Bylaw 7.41.11.b. in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*).
  1. Calls to interim ministry may not be extended by a congregation.
  2. A pastor serving either under appointment by the bishop or under a term Letter of Call normally serves the congregation in a contracted and compensated arrangement.
- B. Unless previously agreed to by the Synod Council, an interim pastor is not available for a regular call to the congregation served during this time of transition and shall refrain from exerting influence in the under call (ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 7.43.).

selection of a pastor (\*C9.07. in the *Model Constitution for Congregations*).

## III. Guidelines for Called Interim Pastoral Ministry

- A. A called interim pastor shall provide a minimum of a half-time ministry (at least twenty hours per week) to the congregation with commensurate compensation in accordance with synod guidelines, and consistent with the ELCA guidelines for shared-time calls.
  1. A call to interim ministry shall be primarily for the benefit of the congregation served, not for the status of the ordained minister.
  2. Such a call may either be a term call to a specific congregation, or a term call to interim ministry in the synod. The determination of this will be with the concurrence of the congregation being served.
- B. Prior to being eligible for a call to interim ministry, the pastor shall normally receive appropriate training for interim ministry. The Division for Ministry will review interim ministry training programs and serve as consultant to synods in evaluating such programs.
- C. Only pastors who have served in a regular called congregational ministry for a minimum of three years are eligible to serve in a called interim ministry.
- D. The interim ministry agreement between the congregation and the called interim pastor will specify compensation, benefits, and the specific goals and expectations related to the period of interim ministry. The Letter of Call issued by the Synod Council may include salary and benefit matters. Normally, however, matters of compensation and benefits are stipulated in the interim ministry agreement with the congregation.
- E. In issuing a call to interim ministry, the synod assumes no responsibility for guaranteeing continuous employment, compensation, or benefits for the pastor
  1. Compensation and benefits are normally provided entirely by the

- congregation or ministry setting being served. Where possible, continuity of Board of Pensions health benefits will be advocated by the synod.
2. It is explicitly understood that the synod is the calling body and not the employer of record at any time during the service of an interim pastor under call from the Synod Council.
- F. Calls to interim service within a synod may be issued for a one to three-year term of service, with an annual review by the Synod Council or its designated committee.
1. If a pastor under a term call to interim ministry has not served in a congregation during the preceding twelve months, however, the call may be terminated by the Synod Council.
  2. A term Letter of Call issued by the Synod Council may also be coterminous with the duration of service within the congregation served (ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 7.43.).
  3. The term call may be terminated by action of the Synod Council.
  4. A pastor may resign a call to interim ministry at any time.
- G. Initial issuance of a call to interim ministry by the Synod Council shall be upon the recommendation of the synodical bishop. The initial interim ministry agreement with a congregation may be reviewed by the bishop or synod staff prior to the acceptance of the contractual arrangement by the interim pastor.

#### **IV. Guidelines for Appointed Interim Ministry**

- A. An appointed interim pastor is authorized to provide Word and Sacrament ministry to a congregation by the synodical bishop with the concurrence of the Congregation Council.
1. The interim pastor assumes the rights and duties in the congregation of a regularly called pastor.
  2. The appointed interim pastor may delegate the same in part to an interim supply pastor with the consent of the

- synodical bishop (S14.17. in the *Constitution for Synods*).
- B. A retired pastor or pastor on leave from call who serves an interim ministry is recommended by the bishop and signs an interim ministry agreement with the congregation which provides for the compensation, benefits, and the specific goals and expectations related to the period of interim ministry.
  - C. Normally, only pastors who have previously served in a regular called congregational ministry for a minimum of three years will be eligible to serve in an appointed interim ministry.

#### ***Some points in the policy on interim ministry merit emphasis:***

1. **Matters of compensation must be addressed in employment agreement:**
  - a. As indicated in Section III.D.: “The interim ministry agreement between the congregation and the called interim pastor will specify compensation, benefits, and the specific goals and expectations related to the period of interim ministry....”
  - b. If the synod is the salary paying entity in an ongoing way, the Letter of Call issued by the Synod Council may include salary and benefit matters.
  - c. If compensation and benefits are provided by the congregation only for the period of service, such a commitment is stated in the agreement between the interim pastor and congregation. As indicated in the policy, “Normally..., matters of compensation and benefits are stipulated in the interim ministry agreement with the congregation.”
  - d. Section III.E.1. of the policy on interim ministry indicates: “Compensation and benefits are normally provided entirely by the congregation or ministry setting being served. Where possible, continuity of Board of Pensions health benefits will be advocated by the synod.”

2. **Clarity needed related to “employment” relationship:**
  - a. As indicated in Section III.E. of the policy on interim ministry: “In issuing a call to interim ministry, the synod assumes no responsibility for guaranteeing continuous employment, compensation, or benefits for the pastor under call (ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 7.43.)”
  - b. Section III.E.2. of the policy statement declares: “It is explicitly understood that the synod is the calling body and not the employer of record at any time during the service of an interim pastor under call from the Synod Council.”
  
3. **Letters of Call issued by the Synod Council for interim pastoral ministry are to be viewed as “term calls”:**
  - a. As provided in Section III.F. of the policy on interim ministry: “Calls to interim service within a synod may be issued for a one to three-year term of service, with an annual review by the Synod Council or its designated committee.”
  - b. Duration of term call:
    - (1) Section III.F.1.: “If a pastor under a term call to interim ministry has not served in a congregation during the preceding twelve months..., the call may be terminated by the Synod Council.”
    - (2) Section III.F.2.: “A term letter of call issued by the Synod Council may also be coterminous with the duration of service within the congregation served (ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 7.43.)”
  - c. The Synod Council has the authority to terminate a Letter of Call to interim ministry (ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 7.43.).