

Practice on Congregational Voting and Call Approval

Purpose

This practice establishes procedures for ensuring alignment between a congregation's giftedness and their call from God for the future and the unique talents and giftedness of Ministers of Word and Sacrament (MWS) during the pastoral call process, while promoting discernment and unity within that process.

Guiding Principles

1. **Recognition of Unique Talents, Giftedness and Calls:**
Each Minister of Word and Sacrament is endowed with unique gifts and talents for ministry and abilities to lead, and each congregation within God's kingdom has a distinct call, giftedness and talents for the future. The Committee on Ministry (COM) seeks to honor and assist in matching these attributes through discernment and collaboration.
2. **Role of the Committee on Ministry (COM):**
The COM facilitates the process by which a congregation calls a minister, ensuring both the congregation and the candidate are supported and that the call is grounded in prayerful discernment.

Procedures

1. **Approval of Candidate Proposal:**
When the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) identifies a specific Minister of Word and Sacrament as their candidate:
 - a. The PNC and the candidate shall meet with COM and request the COM's approval to present this candidate to the congregation for a vote.
 - b. The COM shall approve this request before the PNC requests the Session to call a congregational meeting.
 - c. Once the COM approves, the Session may call a congregational meeting.
2. **Presence During Congregational Vote:**
At least two members of the COM (not from the calling church) or their designees shall be present at the church during the congregational meeting in which the vote on the candidate's call is conducted. Their role is to observe, answer questions, and support the congregation throughout the process.
3. **Duties of the Moderator:**
Prior to the vote, the Moderator shall explain the process to the congregation:
Members will be given a written ballot.
Do not indicate your name or other identifying information on the ballot.
The ballot will have 2 boxes for your vote. One box is "I approve the call of _____ as Minister of the Word and Sacrament for my church."
The second box is, "I do not approve the call of _____ as Minister of the Word and Sacrament for my church." Sometimes this motion includes approval of the terms of call or that may be a separate motion.
The Moderator also explains that 90% approval is required in order for the call to advance. If there is 90% or more, the moderator will ask the candidate if they accept the call. If that is affirmative, then the moderator will announce the result to the congregation.
In addition, the Moderator will explain that if more than 10% of the congregation present and voting, votes "no" to the proposed call, the process shall not proceed.

The moderator will advise the congregation that a period of discernment needs to take place in order to ensure the viability of the call.

4. Threshold for Further Discernment:

- a. After the congregational vote is tallied and before any announcement is made, if more than 90% of the congregation present and voting approves the call, the Moderator shall ask the candidate if the candidate accepts the call.
- b. If the candidate accepts the call, the Moderator shall report the results to the congregation.
- c. If more than 10% of the congregation present and voting votes “no” to the proposed call, the process shall not proceed. Additional steps must be taken to ensure the viability of the call.
- d. The COM shall advise the PNC, the Session and the candidate of the need for discernment to address the viability of the call.
- e. Inquiry of the candidate and the PNC shall be made to determine if the candidate and the PNC wish to proceed with the call.

5. Discernment Process and Way Forward:

The PNC, Session and candidate will engage with members of the COM to explore the viability of the call, taking into consideration context, size of the congregation, etc.

- a. The PNC, the Session, and the candidate shall engage with representative(s) of COM in individual periods of discernment. There shall be joint periods of discernment with representative(s) of COM.
- b. If, after thorough discernment, the PNC, the Session, and the candidate believe that the call is viable and can move forward, the PNC shall submit to the COM a plan in writing that explains how the call is viable, how the candidate will address any issues raised during the discernment process, and any other information requested by COM.
- c. The proposed way forward, developed through this discernment, must be submitted for approval by a majority vote of the COM before the call can proceed.

Accountability and Review

The COM is responsible for ensuring this policy is upheld and for guiding all parties in a spirit of unity, faith, and mutual understanding. Periodic reviews of this policy will be conducted to ensure its effectiveness and relevance.