



HOW TO LEAVE WELL

A discernment resource for Rostered Ministers in the ELCA

1. A Rostered Minister's RMP (Rostered Minister Profile) should ideally be current

- Activate your RMP
 - Tune into your congregational life and what makes you wonder: Why is now the time I am most open to a change of call?
 - What is different from playing around, or simply up-dating your RMP to actually activating it? Ask yourself: What is triggering this? What is stirring in me?
 - Schedule a discernment conversation with synod staff

2. Through a discernment conversation with synod staff, inquire about open calls and seeing a congregation's Ministry Site Profile (MSP).

- Spend time in prayer over the paperwork as you listen to the Spirit's prompting

3. If and when you feel ready to have your RMP sent to a call committee for consideration, communicate that with the synod office.

4. If you are considering a call outside of the synod, keep synod staff informed of interviews and your intentions to accept a call or not if one is extended.

Communicating a timeline with synod staff is imperative as they help care for the congregation you will be leaving.

5. When you interview, tell your council president (or senior pastor if you are an associate) in confidence that you are interviewing.

- If you don't trust your council president, tell someone you do trust who serves on the executive leadership.
- Be prepared for the person you tell to ask questions.

6. It is an expectation that as you move forward in a call process to keep in good communication with your council president and synod staff.

- If there is a meet and greet scheduled, share the news in confidence with your church council leadership, or if you are part of a staff, consider sharing with them as well.

7. Once there is a favorable congregational vote to extend you a call:

- Communicate first to council president (as well as senior pastor if applicable).
- Next, communicate to your council.
- Finally, communicate to the congregation.

8. Once you decide to accept an extended call, communicate it out along with your last day.

- Constitutionally, it is an expectation to give a 30 day notice. These 30 days are for the congregation to plan a farewell, for you to have an exit interview, and for all to say goodbye well.
- You can plan to take vacation after the 30 days for transition time if you need it prior to beginning another call, or going on leave, etc.

9. What to include in a resignation letter:

- Clearly state the timeframe and what people need to know.
- Your last Sunday, last day in the office, and your last official day of call.
- An honest and truth-telling of a snap shot of your ministry together.
- Tell them thank you and that you love them.
- Name what your resignation means, especially when it comes to boundaries:
 - i.e. Can't preside over funerals or weddings, etc., but if there is ever an anniversary, I'll be glad to...
- Send out your resignation letter to each member by email or snail mail (or both depending on your context), and send a copy to the synod office for the official records.

10. Schedule an exit interview with your leadership. (Synod Resource Here)

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- You are responsible for your congregation and for leaving well.
- Your main focus is to care for and say goodbye to your congregation. Wrap up what you must: get the books in order, roster in order, procedures so when the next person steps in they can seamlessly continue the care for the people at the same level.
- Put together a folder for the rostered minister who follows you:
 - these are the people to visit
 - these are the people who frequently come in to seek help
 - if you need ministerial help, call ...
- Clean and organize computer files.
- Sort files.
- Make sure all records & parochial reports are updated.

- Remember to call Portico! This is your responsibility.
 - Think about how to not have a lapse in coverage of benefits if possible (utilize vacation if you are starting a new call, etc.)
- Think about how you might give voice to things that may cause dissension, but only if it can lead to healing and health in the congregation. Remember that *"Truth without grace is mean; grace without truth is meaningless."* -Pr. Chris Hodges, *The Daniel Dilemma*, p. xvii.
- Remember that your people may be feeling abandoned, hurt, sad, or angry. Let them feel what they need to feel.
- Remember that leaving a congregation is hard work. It is normal to feel excited, and at the same time, sad.



A HELPFUL (QUICK READ) RESOURCE



Running Through Thistles: terminating a ministerial relationship with a parish
by Roy M. Oswald
(Alban Books, June 1, 1998)

Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, pp. 28-29

5. Completion of responsibilities

The role of pastors in congregations to which they are not (or are no longer) called is governed by provision †S14.19. in the Constitution for Synods, which states, “Ministers of Word and Sacrament shall respect the integrity of the ministry of congregations which they do not serve and shall not exercise ministerial functions therein unless invited to do so by the pastor, or if there is no duly called pastor, then by the interim pastor in consultation with the Congregation Council.”

Ministers of Word and Sacrament who have completed their pastoral call to a particular congregation change their role in how they relate to that congregation, and care should be taken to provide for an orderly transition. Certain ministerial functions are specific to and performed on behalf of the congregation, not the individual, and are therefore the responsibility of the minister of Word and Sacrament serving under call (or one appointed by the synod bishop or contracted by the Congregation Council for such ministry). Although to be regarded as affirmations of the pastor’s past service to the congregation, requests from members for the former pastor to preside at weddings, baptisms, funerals, and the like should be politely refused. Regardless of whether the pastor has accepted a call to another congregation or another expression of this church, the completion of pastoral responsibilities must be marked clearly and carefully.

The following guidelines are for pastors, the congregations they served, and synod bishops in understanding the new status of a pastor who has resigned a call. They are intended to affirm the past ministry of such pastors, to give directions which seek to avoid some pitfalls that can present themselves during transitions, and to point to constructive and healthful interactions in the future.

- Upon the effective date of the resignation, the minister of Word and Sacrament is no longer a pastor of the congregation and therefore must discontinue the functions of the pastoral office in that congregation.
- Care must be taken by the pastor to assure that the parochial record of pastoral acts conducted within the congregation is up to date. As required by *C9.14. in the Model Constitution for Congregations and †S14.21. in Part One: Ministers of Word and Sacrament — Page 29 the Constitution for Synods, the secretary of the congregation shall attest in writing to the bishop that the record was received, in good order, before the departing pastor can be installed in a new charge or be granted retired status. Attention also must be given to “make satisfactory settlement of all financial obligations” to the congregation before departure (*C.9.08. and †S14.22.).
- Prior to, but as near to, the effective date of the resignation as is practicable, the minister of Word and Sacrament may make use of the rite of “Farewell and Godspeed” during which the pastor may return to representatives of the congregation the signs of the ministerial office that were given at the pastor’s installation.
- If invited to exercise a ministerial role by a member of a congregation to which they were formerly called, ministers of Word and Sacrament should indicate that they are not (or are no longer) authorized to take such a role. If invited to exercise such a role by the current pastor, care must be taken to assure that the parameters and limited scope of the activity are clear.
- As part of the bishop’s pastoral care, especially during times of transition, a synod bishop or a member of the bishop’s staff is encouraged to discuss these guidelines and their implications either in person or in correspondence.

Thanksgiving at the Conclusion of a Call

This order is appropriately set within the service of Holy Communion on the final Sunday of a minister's service under call in a congregation. The order follows the prayer after communion.

This order may be led by a pastor of the congregation (unless the pastor's call is the one concluding), another rostered leader, a representative of the congregation, or a representative of the synod.

Address

The person whose call is concluding and representative/s of the congregation come before the assembly.

A pastor

A representative of the congregation addresses the pastor whose call is concluding with these or similar words.

Name, on date of call, we of name of congregation called you to be pastor in this place: to proclaim God's word, to baptize and teach, to announce God's forgiveness, and to preside at the Lord's table. With the gospel you have comforted us in times of sickness and trouble, and at the death of our loved ones. Sharing our joys and sorrows, you [and your family] have been important to our life together in the church of Jesus Christ, in our service to this community, and in God's mission to the whole world. [As you leave this community of faith, we say farewell, and we pray for God's blessing.]

A deaconess, diaconal minister, or associate in ministry

A representative of the congregation addresses the person whose call is concluding with these or similar words.

Name, on date of call, we of name of congregation called you to serve among us as a *deaconess / diaconal minister / associate in ministry*. *Here a description of the particular ministry may be included.* Sharing our joys and sorrows, you [and your family] have been important to our life together in the church of Jesus Christ, in our service to this community, and in God's mission to the whole world. [As you leave this community of faith, we say farewell, and we pray for God's blessing.]

The leader addresses the assembly with these or similar words.

People of God, members of name of congregation,
do you release name from service
as your *pastor / deaconess / diaconal minister / associate in ministry*?

We do, and we give thanks to God for our ministry together.

The leader addresses the person whose call is concluding.

Name, do you recognize and accept
the completion of your ministry with name of congregation?

Response: I do, and I give thanks to God for our ministry together.

Thanksgiving and Sending

The presiding minister leads the assembly in prayer.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, through your Son Jesus Christ
you gave the holy apostles many gifts and commanded them to feed your flock.
You equip your people with abilities that differ according to the grace given to them,
and you call them to various avenues of service.

We give you thanks for the ministry of name among the people of God in this place.

You watch over our going out and our coming in:

bless this time of ending and beginning.

You surround your people in every time and place:
keep us close in your love.

You accompany your people in times of joy and times of trial:
prosper all that has been done to your glory in this time together;
heal and forgive all that has fallen short of your will for us.

Help name [and *her/his* family] and all of us
to live with courage and gladness in the future you give to us.

As *they have* been a blessing to us,
so now send *them/us* forth to be a blessing to others;
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Blessing

The presiding minister, or the pastor whose call has concluded, proclaims God's blessing in these or similar words.

The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.
The Lord look upon you with favor and ✠ give you peace.

Amen.

A sending song may be sung.

Dismissal

The assisting minister may send the assembly into mission.

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

NOTES ON THE SERVICE

This order may be adapted for use in settings other than ministry in a congregation.

At the conclusion of a call to a rostered leader other than an ordained pastor, Farewell and Godspeed may be used instead of this order. Farewell and Godspeed may also be used at the conclusion of a lay professional worker's time of service.

The bracketed words at the end of the initial address may be omitted when the person is continuing in the membership of the congregation. The address may be adapted as appropriate when this order is used on the occasion of the retirement of a rostered leader.

When a representative of the synod leads this order, the representative may address the person whose call is concluding and the assembly with these or similar words. This address may precede the blessing.

Your sisters and brothers in the name of synod
and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
give thanks to God for the ministry you have shared.
We promise you our continued support and prayer.
Rejoicing in the blessings of God in this congregation
and in the ministry of name,
with hope in God's abundant grace in years to come,
I announce that name's service as position in this congregation
is now concluded.

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South Dakota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

EXIT INTERVIEW WITH CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS

Name of Congregation & City: _____, _____

Name of Pastor: _____

Name of Interviewer: _____ **Date:** _____

Attending:

Plan a special meeting with your exiting pastor, including appropriate leaders of the congregation and the church staff. Make it informal and open, understanding it to be a learning and growing experience for everyone. Some possible questions to discuss might include:

When you accepted a call from us _____ years ago, what were the compelling reasons for your coming here? What was so attractive to you in this parish at that time?

In your ministry here, did you find what you expected? In what ways has the congregation changed during your tenure?

What things have given you the sense of greatest fulfillment? With what are you happy or pleased?

What things have frustrated you? What things have blocked your effectiveness among us? With what are you unhappy or disappointed?

What do you consider our strengths and weaknesses as you leave?

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

What elements present in your new call have influenced you to make a change at this time?

What type of ministry do you feel we need? What areas of ministry and program do you feel we should retain and continue? What present and new areas should get emphasis in the future?

What do you feel that we, the congregation, can do to strengthen and support the incoming pastor? Include suggestions for changes in job descriptions, policies, and procedures.

Are all of the congregational records (constitution, etc.) up to date? If not, what might be our next steps?

What can we do to help you and your family in the transition soon to take place? How can we best celebrate your ministry among us?

Additional comments from Council:

This would be a good time to look into the development of a Mutual Ministry Committee that could offer more support to the pastor and/or staff.

To make the interview a two-way experience, offer the departing staff member a chance to ask questions, which could include the following:

As you think back, what were your hopes and dreams when I began my ministry here? How were they met?

Share with me my strengths and weaknesses as you see them. What suggestions might you have for me as I transition into my new call or retirement?

What do you think were the highlights of our ministry together?

How might I assist you most effectively as we say good-bye? What unfinished matters should I work on, as I spend the majority of my time with the people of the congregation?