## Appendix 3A – The Transition Process

**The Transition Process.** When a pastor leaves, the challenge facing the congregation is more than the calling of another pastor. The congregation needs to do the work necessary to lay the foundation for a successful next chapter of ministry. This Transition Process defines future directions and priorities for the mission and ministry of the congregation and culminates in the development of a "Ministry Site Profile" (MSP). The MSP describes in detail who the congregation is and where God is calling it to go in mission, and the qualities needed in the new pastor.

**Overview.** The Transition Process provides:

a. An opportunity to review, assess, and claim the priorities of the congregation

b. Information for the call committee about the congregation and a description of leadership needs which will guide their work

c. Direction for the synod staff in recommending candidates for consideration by the call committee

d. A picture of the congregation to the candidates as they consider serving the congregation.

**Formation of Transition Team.** The congregation council and interim pastor will work together to develop/appoint a Transition Team. This team will run an interactive mission exploration process for the congregation, compile data, complete the MSP, and possibly manage other transitional concerns. The exploration process is a work of discernment for the whole congregation during the interim period. The Transition Team, under the guidance of the interim pastor, leads that process, and could be any one of several groups:

a. A specially appointed task force

b. A long-range planning committee already at work in the congregation

c. The call committee (e.g., in a smaller congregation).

**Elements of the Process.** The transition process enables the congregation to listen to God, one another and the community, and specifically to:

a. Identify and address issues of conflict, grief and/or guilt that affect its life and ministry

b. Review its life and mission as the Body of Christ

c. Discuss its challenges/opportunities in the next 5-10 years

d. Evaluate its present strengths

e. Identify specific areas where it feels called to strengthen its ministry

f. Identify its present context for mission

g. Specify resources necessary to fulfill its mission, especially mission tasks in the community

h. Arrive at a common understanding of its mission

i. Identify the gifts that are most important for the next pastor to possess.

j. **Steps in the Process.** Each outlined step contains ideas and activities to engage the congregation in conversation and planning. These are shared here as resources that the Transition Team may employ as it takes on the task of listening to the community and making recommendations for the congregation's future mission and ministry. Further details are provided through the inter m pastor.

**STEP I: Internal Assessment – Who We Are.** The goal of the internal assessment is to name where the congregation has been, where it sees itself now, and identify possible directions for its mission and ministry. The congregation is invited to review the present focus of its life and mission and to decide whether this accurately reflects who they understand themselves to be. Members are invited into reflection and discernment to share their hopes and concerns for their future together.

a. Questions include:

- What is our history?
- What do we say about ourselves?
- How do others describe us?
- What are the gifts of this congregation?
- What is it important that we continue?
- What are our core values?
- What are we willing to give up to better carry out our key purpose?

b. Ideas for carrying out this work may include:

- **Create a wall of history.** To help visualize the history of the congregation, cover a large wall in paper and create a timeline from the beginning of the congregation to today with space for dreams for the future. Have people write important events and people in the life of the congregation or society at large on the wall. Explore your congregation's history by gathering in small groups to analyze what appeared on the timeline. "What do you see? What is missing?" Have each group describe the congregation based on these insights.
- **Community Interviews.** Interview community leaders on what they see are some needs, people such as school social workers, assistant principals, school nurses, local police, business owners, social service agencies, local politicians.

- **Community Development Reports.** Read and summarize key points from community development reports from county or city or regional government agencies, which often indicate trends and the government's plans for addressing them, such as housing policies and economic policies.

**STEP 2: External Assessment – Mission Possibilities.** The goal of this step is to discern the community you serve. You will take under consideration the needs in the surrounding community and mission opportunities in the wider church. You may wish to gather input from the congregation in small group cottage meetings.

a. Questions include:

- What are the assets and needs of our community?
- Who are the invisible people? (poor, lonely, homeless, hungry, angry, etc.)
- What services are needed and what services are available?
- What is God up to in our community?
- What is our outreach?
- What opportunities for partnership are available to our congregation: locally, synod wide, nationally and globally?

b. Ideas for carrying out this work may include:

- **Community map.** Create a community map of the neighborhood surrounding the church. What resources, needs do you see close by? Invite organizations and other groups in the community to come and share their assessment of the needs in the community.
- **Demographic Information.** Contact the synod staff about registering for the MissionInsite tool and learning about how to use it. This software mapping tool draws on detailed demographic information of the community that is more detailed and multifaceted than census data. Less detailed demographic data can be found at www.elca.org/research. Click "View Now" under "Demographic Reports." Type in the Synod ID (3G) and your congregation ID. If you do not know your congregation ID, call the synod office-we can look it up for you. Additional information on community characteristics is also available at www.census. gov.
- **Small Group Exploration.** Walk or drive through the community in small groups. Look for signs of hope and signs of despair in the community. Have conversations with people you encounter and ask:
    - What are the best things about living here?
    - What thing could be improved about life here?

- What could the church do to help make life better?
- Consider how your congregation is in partnership with the neighborhood and other organizations- how is your relationship with your community multi- directional (or how could it be)?

Share observations and wonderings about what the congregation might be able to address.

- **Outreach List and Event.** List current outreach efforts and intentions of the congregation. Evaluate the church budget as a way of assessing the congregation's commitment to outreach. Have a "mission day" to highlight your partnerships with the ELCA, synod and community.

**STEP 3: Assessment.** The goal of this step is to assess the information gathered in Steps 1 and 2. As you seek to define the top mission priorities of the congregation, do not only consider the needs and desires of the existing membership; think also about the people who are not yet a part of the congregation.

a. Questions include:

- What have we learned about our mission and ourselves?
- What is the relationship of the congregation with the community?
- Has our mission changed?
- What new people is God calling us to reach, and how might we begin to connect with them?
- How will the congregation look in 5-10 years if God has God's way with us?

b. Ideas for carrying out this work under the guidance of the interim may include one or more of the following:

- **Guided Discussion.** Create a small task force to condense information into 3 or 4 realistic potential themes. Then hold a series of discussion table conversations guided by trained table leaders, with the goal of identifying the one main theme or direction.
- **Vision Summit.** Hold a one-day event of highly structured conversation around key themes that democratically narrow and focus the congregation's purpose and direction.
- **Survey.** Survey ideas and attitudes regarding the congregation's future, using a validated research tool, such as the Vitality Survey available through the synod's Director of Evangelical Mission (DEM).
- **Agape Meal.** Hold a Lenten or other special mid-week series focused on specific issues facing the congregation's future, embedded in worship, prayer and holy conversation. Make this a comfortable atmosphere of food and spiritual conversation about God's calling for the congregation.

- **One-on-One Interviews.** Train a small team to use identical scripts to interview other members one-on-one, focusing on a carefully designed research question.
- **Work Session.** Hold a work session to look at church bulletins, newsletters, annual reports, and financial reports, to answer the following kinds of questions: What do these say about how we have been living out our mission? What is missing based on what we learned about our community?

**STEP 4: Develop a Mission Plan.** Develop a clear definition of mission and ministry on behalf of the congregation, including a vision and a specific strategy for working toward it.

a. Questions include:

- Who are our mission partners?
- What is our mission focus now?
- Where is God leading us into the future?

b. Ideas for carrying out this work may include:

- **Position Paper.** Based on the discernment and listening phase, write a brief, one-page "position paper" that is presented to members and interested parties for comment. Set up a formal process for receiving comment. Host a town forum to receive comments.
- **Ministry Development Plan.** Under the guidance of the interim pastor, create a ministry development plan, to be publicly reviewed and adopted at a congregational meeting.

**STEP 5: Determine Leadership Needs.** The goal of this step is to take what is learned through listening to God, one another and the community, to identify the characteristics and gifts for ministry sought in the next pastoral leader. Keep in mind that most people will think primarily in terms of worship and their own personal relationship with the pastor. Think of a leader not only ministering to the needs of the existing congregation; consider where God is calling you and what kind of a leader can help you get there. Such a candidate may not look or behave like previous pastors, but may look or behave more like the people you are trying to reach.

a. Ideas for carrying out this work may include:

- **Job Description.** Using the Council and/or personnel committee, create a job description for the pastor position, with specifics unique to the congregation (i.e., those expectations, responsibilities and relationships beyond what is found in the constitution and standard form letter of call).
- **Survey.** Survey the congregation to identify the characteristics of the pastor they seek using the *Ministry Tasks* and *Gifts f or Ministry* section of the MSP form. Be

sure to identify the congregation's calling/direction for the next years before identifying qualities to lead there.

**STEP 6: Putting together the Ministry Site Profile (MSP).** The goal of this step is to write and submit the Ministry Site Profile for the congregation. This document is used throughout the ELCA by congregations who are seeking a new rostered minister.

a. Accessing the computer form:

- The MSP is available online at www.elca.org
- Click on the *Call Process* button in the upper right portion of the screen. Then click on *Ministry Sites* in the blue box on the left.
    - Explore the resources available here for creating the profile including a sample version of the MSP.
- To access the online MSP to submit to the ELCA database, you will need to create an account including an email address and password
    - Keep a record of the email and password, share with all who will be working on the online MSP, and track for future reference.

**Creating the Ministry Site Profile (MSP).** This document has five sections, divided into smaller parts:

a. **Who We Are** (items 1-5). *This section tells the story of your congregation and community through data and commentary.* Congregation Statistics are available at www.elca.org. At the bottom of the page, click on *Find a Congregation.* Search for your congregation and then click on its name in the search results. Click on *full trend report for this congregation.* Be mindful of your congregation's process for recording membership or attendance statistics. Talk to the people responsible for these numbers. When was the last time the membership rolls were updated? How accurate are your church records? Does the congregation file a parochial report annually (Remember, the ELCA report is only as good as the data reported to it by the congregation.) What is the policy for maintaining accurate records? An interim pastor can help if work needs to be done in this area.

b. **Our Vision for Mission** (items 6-9). *This section describes the characteristics of your congregation and your purpose, giftedness and mission.* Note that the congregation's response to Item 8 will be publicized on the ELCA Call Process website among descriptions of call openings in the synod, so this should be prepared with great care.

c. **Leadership Needs** (items l 0-17). *This section presents the gifts and skills needed in your next ministry leader.* The MSP also needs to address compensation, benefits and pastoral expenses (including moving expenses) that the congregation can offer. Salary and benefit recommended considerations are matters that will need to be negotiated between the candidate and representatives of the Congregation

Council, with input from the call committee chair, recognizing that the ultimate responsibility for the budget lies with the congregation. The synod publishes compensation guidelines annually and are posted on www.mpls-synod.org which should inform all these conversations.

d. **Commentary** (item 1 8). *This section allows you to add any additional information that will help communicate who you are and where you believe God is calling you. .* Remember, the call process is one of mutual discernment, and this section helps you complete the story. The optional "Seven Reflections" are another helpful way for you to portray the congregation fully.

e. **Completion of Profile** (items 1 9-21). *This section provides details for the next steps in the process, forms for references, and contact information for your call committee.*

- Item 19: Describes the discernment process of the congregation including how this profile was reviewed and adopted by the congregation.
- Item 20: Call Process Contact Person is the name of the synod staff person who is working with your congregation's call process.
- Item 21: Reference's Recommendation. Choose someone outside your congregation who can speak to your mission and ministry. Consider asking former pastors, neighboring pastors, or people who used to work for or belong to the congregation but are no longer involved.

Once you have completed the form, save a copy for your records and 'Submit' it for activation by the synod staff.

**Communication to Congregation.** All through the transition process, the congregation should be fully informed in multiple ways, perhaps including a highly visible time line that can track progress through each step. As the Transition process is completed, a report is shared with the congregation in advance of the Ministry Site Profile conversation with the bishop. The report contains a summary of the material collected in the exploration process, a copy of the Ministry Site Profile, and copies of any other documents or materials that will be illustrative of the conclusions. The congregation is invited to come together for a conversation with the bishop to discuss the MSP. Date and time for this meeting is arranged by contacting the Executive Assistant to the Bishop at the synod office.

**MSP Conversation with the Bishop.** The congregation should be invited to attend a one hour conversation with the bishop about the MSP and how it reflects the congregation and its mission. The bishop will lead the conversation. A summary of the important points in the MSP should be available to the congregation. The purpose of this meeting is to gain clear congregational buy-in, and ensure a common ground of understanding between congregation, synod, and call committee. The call committee's presence at this meeting is vital so they can understand the background to the formulation of the MSP.

**Multiple Pastor Situations.** The call process may differ when there is more than one pastor, as the remaining pastor(s) responsibilities may change dramatically during the interim. In a case where there is an associate pastor or deacon, the matter of their continuation after the departure of a lead pastor is discussed in their call package. For example, an associate pastor's call may be co-terminus with a lead pastor's call, perhaps including some fixed period thereafter. If there are no termination provisions, it is still advisable for the associate pastor to prayerfully consider whether it is best for the congregation for the associate pastor to seek another call. Only in rare circumstances and in consultation with the synod staff should an associate pastor seek the senior position.