

Appendix 5B – Devotions for Call Committees

Prayer is vital for the call committee and the entire congregation throughout the call process. Each meeting should begin with prayer.

Call committee members are encouraged to commit themselves to pray for one another and for the work of the Holy Spirit among them as they seek to discern God's will for their congregation.

Petitions inviting God's guidance and the blessing of the call committee's efforts should be included during the prayer of the church at worship.

Other groups can be encouraged to pray for the work of the call committee as well, i.e. church council, committees and boards, small group gatherings, prayer chain members, etc. The call committee is serving on behalf of the entire congregation, and the results of their work will affect everyone.

Helpful Bible References during the Call Process
(New Revised Standard)

Jeremiah 29:11-12

"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you."

Matthew 28:19-20

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Ephesians 4:11-13

"The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ."

John 17: 14-26 (Jesus' high priestly prayer)

"I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their work, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that

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they may become completely one so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name know to them, and I will make it know, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Isaiah 55:3-11

"Incline your ear, and come to me; so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a Leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

Romans 10:14-15

"But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"

Suggestions for devotions using references:

1. Invite each person in your group to come up with a question about the text and discuss. This method offers new perspectives.
2. Use a study Bible to study the references using their questions (such as Serendipity).
3. Consider what these references say about the role of the Holy Spirit in the call process, your role on the call committee and the candidate's role in considering the call.

Six Devotions for Call Committees

Extending a divine Call for someone to serve as your pastor is not quite the same as merely hiring a person to fill a position on your staff. There is a greater sense that God's Spirit will be guiding your work, and that you will be attentive to the Scriptures and persistent in prayer as

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you meet together. One way to do this is to dedicate a significant amount of time, at least ten or fifteen minutes every time you gather, to reflect on God's Word and to ask for God's blessing.

In recent years congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have been encouraged to participate in the *Book of Faith* initiative, an effort to strengthen our peoples' involvement with the Bible. If your congregation is not yet part of this movement, now might be a good time to join. The vision statement for the *Book of Faith* initiative states the goal clearly:

*That the whole church become more fluent
in the first language of faith,
the language of Scripture,
in order that we might live into our calling
as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered,
and sent by the Word
for the sake of the world.*

The half dozen devotions which follow employ some of the principles promoted within the *Book of Faith* initiative. Your Call Committee will no doubt meet more than six times, but these may give you a good start at grounding your work in Scripture and prayer. They are all based on Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain" in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke, and they focus on some of the very issues which will occupy your attention:

WHO ARE WE?

WHAT IS OUR MISSION?

WHY SHOULD WE DO THIS?

WHEN WILL WE BE READY?

WHOM SHOULD WE CALL?

WHERE SHALL WE GO?

As you use them, take turns leading the prayer and reading the biblical text. Give adequate time for each committee member to make personal notes as you reflect on the passage, and then be sure to share your insights with everyone in the group. You can be confident that God's Spirit will inspire and inform all your deliberations!



(For more information, including a short introduction "A Path into the Bible, Our *Book of Faith*," click on the "program" tab in our synod's web site at www.mpls-synod.org, or consult the chief web-based resource at www.bookoffaith.org.)

WHO ARE WE?

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One of the tasks before our congregation while we are in the process of calling a new pastor is to reflect on who we are. This devotion offers some insight from Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain," insights which will allow us to define ourselves as a community of his disciples.

Begin with prayer.

Blessed Lord God, you have caused the holy scriptures to be written for the nourishment of your people. Grant that we may hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, comforted by your promises, we may embrace and forever hold fast to the hope of eternal life, which you have given us in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. [ELW Prayer #32]

Read Luke 6:20-26.

Then Jesus looked up at his disciples and said:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

"Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

"Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets."

Reflect on this reading.

When we read any biblical text we should ask whether it sounds like Law or Gospel. This is asking how it *functions* among us. If it shares God's promises and offers hope or encouragement or forgiveness, then it's Gospel. If it announces God's judgment and critiques or condemns us, then it's Law.

... LAW	... GOSPEL
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What sounds like . . .		
What this implies about us:		

Share with one another.

Starting with the chair of your committee and moving clockwise, let each person share one thought from your notes in the table above.

WHAT IS OUR MISSION?

It is good to be clear not just about our identity as a congregation, but also about our purpose for being here. Another passage from Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain" will help us get clarity about our mission in our community.

Begin with prayer.

Draw your church together, O God, into one great company of disciples, together following our teacher Jesus Christ into every walk of life, together serving in Christ's mission to the world, and together witnessing to your love wherever you will send us; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord Amen. [ELW prayer #278]

Read Luke 6:27-36.

Jesus said: "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ***Do to others as you would have them do to you.***

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is

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that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ***Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.***

Reflect on this reading.

Another approach is to distinguish between general principles (in ***bold italics*** above) and specific actions. In the chart below, list some of the specific actions Jesus suggests for each principle. Then check those which you think are still applicable today.

	<i>Do unto others . . .</i>	<i>Be merciful . . .</i>

Share with one another.

If one member of our group can tally the results, we can see which if any of Jesus' suggestions could still be part of our church's mission today.

WHY SHOULD WE DO THIS?

It is one thing to define our mission as a congregation; it is another thing to understand the cause and the purpose for our work. Again, Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain" will be our guide.

Begin with prayer.

Almighty God, your Holy Spirit equips the church with a rich variety of gifts. Grant that we may use them to bear witness to Christ in lives that are built on faith and love. Make us ready

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to live the gospel and eager to do your will, so that we may share with all your church in the joys of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. [ELW prayer #279]

Read Luke 6:37-38.

Jesus said: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Reflect on this reading.

In English we can answer the question "why" in two ways. On the one hand, we can give the **cause** of our action. ("Why did you go to the store?" "Because my wife sent me.") On the other hand, we can list the **purpose** of our action. ("Why did you go to the store?" "In order to buy a loaf of bread.") With Jesus' words as a guide, let us try to explain the cause and the purpose for our congregation.

CAUSE	PURPOSE

Share with one another.

If we divide our group in two, one side could compose a formal statement of the *cause* of our work; the other, a summary of our *purpose*.

WHEN WILL WE BE READY?

Some members of our church may want us to move quickly toward calling a new pastor; others may want us to take our time and be thorough. Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain" may help us set a good pace.

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Begin with prayer.

O God, give us grace to set a good example to all among whom we live, to be just and true in all our dealings, to be strict and conscientious in the discharge of every duty; pure and temperate in all enjoyment, gracious and generous and courteous toward all; so that the mind of Jesus Christ may be formed in us, and all may know that we are his disciples; in whose name we pray. Amen. [ELW prayer #328]

Read Luke 6:39-42.

Jesus also told them a parable: "Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye', when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."

Reflect on this reading.

Jesus' humorous exaggeration about wiping the sawdust out of someone else's eye while you have a 2x4 stuck in your own may not tell us exactly when we should call our next pastor. But if there is serious disagreement about which candidate we should call, his parable may be helpful. Try to get some clarity about your own log and/or your neighbor's speck.

THE LOGS IN MY OWN EYE	THE SPECKS IN MY NEIGHBOR'S EYE
✓	✓
✓	✓
✓	✓

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Share with one another.

Without getting too personal, share one item in each square with your entire group.

WHOM SHOULD WE CALL?

Sooner or later we will have to settle on the name of a specific man or women and recommend that name to our congregation. Once more Jesus' words may help us be clear about how we make this decision.

Begin with prayer.

Ever-living God, strengthen and sustain our pastors and bishops, that with patience and understanding they may love and care for your people. Grant that together they may follow in the way of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. [ELW prayer #262]

Read Luke 6:43-45.

Jesus said: "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks."

Reflect on this reading.

We really don't think that our next pastor will be an evil person. But he or she will bring both positive and negative qualities. Which is true for all of us. Can you name some?

	POSITIVE QUALITIES	NEGATIVE QUALITIES
OUR PASTOR		

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MYSELF		
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Share with one another.

Let's go counter-clockwise this time, starting with the secretary. Name the very best and very worst quality in each column.

WHERE SHALL WE GO?

Our work as a Call Committee will not be completed in six sessions. But when our work is done, we will have to face again the question of where we will be going, what we will be doing, when our new pastor arrives. Jesus' story about the two builders, which concludes his "Sermon on the Plain," will help us keep our priorities straight.

Begin with prayer.

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. [ELW prayer #431]

Read Luke 6:46-49.

Jesus said: "Why do you call me Lord, Lord', and do not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house."

Reflect on this reading.

If you're going to build in a flood plain, better have a solid foundation under your house! It's not just a matter of honoring Jesus as our Lord, or even listening to his teachings; rather, it's about whether we actually do what he says. Let's get as clear about this as we can.

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JESUS' TEACHINGS	OUR ACTIONS
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.

Share with one another.

Once again, let's share the best pair of teaching-and-acting suggestions we have listed. Go from oldest to youngest this time.