



## **How do pastors get a "call," and what do you do when you get one?**

By now most of you have learned that I have received a "call" to serve as pastor of a congregation in Wood River, Nebraska. I've fielded a number of questions about the call process, so I'll attempt to answer some of them here.

What is a "call?"

In plain English it is an "invitation" to serve as pastor of a specific congregation. A congregation issues a "call" to a specific person when they have a "vacancy" to fill. A "vacancy" occurs when a congregation's pastor either leaves to serve another congregation or to enter retirement. Sometimes congregations that have one pastor will decide they have gotten to the size where they need two pastors (as is the current situation at Redeemer in Willmar). That congregation will issue a "call" to a specific person to be an associate pastor at their congregation.

"How does a congregation choose who to call?"

A congregation first needs to do a "self-assessment" to determine their strengths and weaknesses. They need to determine a vision for their future and the special characteristics a pastor need to help them build on their strengths. A list of possible pastors to call is compiled based on suggestions of congregation members and from their district president. Information about the ministry interests and abilities of the pastors on the list is then compiled and reviewed by a "call committee." In the process of determining which person on the call list to issue the invitation to, some congregations will conduct interviews (usually by phone) to further determine which pastor will be the best fit with their situation and needs. The call committee presents the list of pastors along with information about each pastor to the congregation to vote on. The congregation seeks the Lord's guidance in prayer throughout this process and finally makes a choice of which candidate to issue a call to.

As with any invitation, the pastor who receives the call has two options: Accept it or decline it.

"How does a pastor decide whether to accept or decline a certain call?"

Through *much* prayer. As with anything in the church, the question to ask is not "What do *I* want?" (Most pastors would love to have a congregation in Hawaii, but there is only one LC-MS congregation there, and I've heard that its pastor has no intentions of leaving any time soon). The question to always ask is "What does *God* want?" The answer to this question comes through much time spent seeking the Lord's guidance through prayer, consultation (with the calling congregation, the members of one's current congregation, and the Circuit counselor) and in self-reflection (answering questions like "What special desires and talents has the Lord given me? Do these talents and desires fit with what the calling congregation seeks? Do my talents/desires still fit with the congregation I am serving? Is the Lord calling me to develop certain talents and gain certain experience?"). In short, the decision to accept or decline a call depends on the direction of the Lord.

"How long will it take you to decide?"

A time-frame of between two and four weeks normally allows for all questions to be asked and answered. That would mean I should have reached a decision by mid-July.

How should the pastor's current congregation be involved?

When a congregation's pastor gets a call, it can be a good time for self-assessment for that congregation. A good time to once again ask "What is God calling *us* to do?" "What is our vision for ministry?" Above all, it is a time for the congregation to pray for their pastor to be guided to the decision God seeks. So, I greatly value your prayers and input as I seek the Lord's direction for my ministry.

Thanks for asking,  
Pastor David

**Send your questions to [pastor@livingwordlutheran.net](mailto:pastor@livingwordlutheran.net)**