

Meeting Notes: Forum with Pastor Charlane Lines

Date: July 12, 2026

Topic: Pastoral Call Process for Bethel

There were 30-40 people attending this forum.

1. Welcome and Synod Updates

- **Synod Greetings:** Pastor Charlane extended warm greetings from Bishop Jeff and the synod office.
- **Role:** Pastor Charlane works directly in Congregational Mobility and Care.
- **Bethel's Status:** The synod is working experimentally with Bethel on this transition. The process is a three-year **Term Call**, not an Initial Call.
- **Theology of Transition:** The synod trusts that God is already actively at work in this process.

2. The Transition Process & Timeline

- **The Process:** To expedite the call process, the Council will promptly submit the Ministry Site Profile (MSP) to the synod office. The synod will then cross-reference our MSP with the Rostered Ministry Profiles (RMPs) of available pastors. Once potential matches are identified, the synod will provide a slate of candidate names to the Council for interviews.
- **Precedent:** This specific transition route was successfully used by St. Mark's in Pleasant Hill in 2025.
- **Ministry Site Profile (MSP):** A previous attempt did not submit the MSP, and the process did not succeed. The MSP remains a vital, mandatory part of the process.
- **Speed of Transition:** While the typical "in-between" period lasts 18 months or more to help less healthy congregations heal, Bethel is a healthy congregation. Therefore, the process should move much faster.
- **Pastor's Requirements:** Candidates will complete a Rostered Ministry Profile (RMP).
- **The 3-Year Term:** This duration is standard policy, similar to the "first call" requirement. It provides an ideal timeframe to move past the initial "honeymoon period" and assess the fit.

3. Candidate Matching & Recruitment

- **Narrowing Skills:** While resumes list many talents, Bethel must narrow its focus to the top 3 core skills within its own MSP. Pastor Charlane will personally call and interview candidates to assess their personalities.
- **Search Scope:** The search is ELCA-wide but looks locally first. The priority is finding the right fit over a fast, easy find.
- **Parsonage Expectation:** Living in the parsonage is highly important for Bethel, but the congregation should not automatically dismiss local candidates who already own a home. Alternative uses for the parsonage can be explored if needed.
- **Outside Candidates & Social Media:** If Bethel has a specific candidate in mind or

wants to advertise on social media, they may do so. However, all interested candidates must ultimately contact Pastor Charlane to go through the official synod process.

- **The Slate:** Because a Term Call is a synod placement, the synod will provide a slate of at least three names at a time for consideration.

4. Future Outlook & The Pastor Shortage

- **The Lutheran Landscape:** The ELCA has declined from over 5 million members at its formation to roughly 2.8 million. However, Lutheranism is thriving globally, particularly in the Global South.
- **Clergy Shortage Realities:** The current shortage means the future will likely feature more lay leadership and fewer, but more robust, congregations. Synodically Authorized Ministries (SAMs) are launching to support community-gathering spaces that focus on faith components without full congregational structures.
- **Pastor Longevity:** The typical pastoral tenure is 5–7 years, often shortened by a highly mobile society, spousal careers, or shrinking church budgets. Pastor Charlane noted that 10 years is generally the ideal maximum tenure to prevent leadership lethargy.
- **Church Mergers:** Mergers rarely succeed when suggested by the synod. They are highly successful when initiated by the congregations themselves, particularly when a local pastor proactively builds a relationship with a neighboring church.
- **Global Candidates:** While global options exist, they are highly complex due to visa logistics. The local synod does not currently have access to global databases.
- **Engaging Younger Generations:** Reaching Gen X and younger generations requires focusing on hands-on, meaningful projects that matter to the community.

5. Next Steps & Action Items

- **Congregation Input Deadline:** All input from the congregation must be submitted within **two weeks** (by July 26, 2026).
 - **Post-Term Plan:** After the three-year term, both parties will evaluate the partnership. If mutually successful, the congregation will vote to extend the call.
 - **Open Communication:** The congregation is warmly invited to reach out directly to Pastor Charlane with any further questions.
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