

Bethel Church Open Forum Notes

Date: July 5, 2026

Topic: Pastoral Call Process & Characteristics of the Next Pastor

Attendance

- **Council Members:** Ellen Aist (President), Angela Brown (President-Elect), Dave Tribby (Treasurer), Janice Martinson (Communications Officer), Veronica Lentfer (Member at Large), Greg Steinke (Member at Large).
- **Congregation Members:** Anne Marie Kenitzer, Drew Brown, Joanne Stensaas, Jim Lentfer, Patrice Sera, Sam Sudarsanam, Rachel Sudarsanam (and Marcus), Minnie Sudarsanam, Dave Arnold, Lori Callahan, Brad Martinson, Susan Leavitt, Doreen Baldwin.

Part 1: Discussion on the Call Process

The congregation discussed the structural differences and timelines of the traditional call process versus the newly proposed process.

Process & Timeline Comparisons

- **The Traditional Process:** Typically takes 1 to 2 years to complete.
- **The New Process:** This streamlined approach accelerates the initial phase. The Church Council functions as the call committee and takes responsibility for updating the Ministry Site Profile (MSP). The Synod then provides candidate names directly to the Council for interviews. Following the interviews, the Council decides whether to extend a term-call or request additional candidates. The first set of names could be received for interviews within two weeks of the MSP submission.
- **Voting Structure:** Under the new process, there is no congregational vote before the initial 3-year term begins. A formal congregational vote occurs at the end of the 3-year term to decide if the term will transition into an official, permanent call.

Terminology Definitions

- **Call vs. Contract:** Clarification was sought regarding the operational and legal differences between a pastoral call and an employment contract.
- **Bridge vs. Interim Pastor:**
 - *Bridge Pastor:* A contracted leader who manages standard pastoral duties while the church actively goes through the call process.
 - *Interim Pastor:* A leader assigned by the Synod who handles regular duties while specifically helping the congregation address and heal any existing problem areas.

Questions & Operational Feedback

- **MSP Distribution:** Will the Ministry Site Profile (MSP) be posted nationally or worldwide? Will it remain posted continuously until a term-call is formally accepted?
- **Track Record:** What is the historical success rate and track record for this new call process in other churches?

- **Statement of Intent:** For a pastor entering the 3-year term, could we implement a required "statement of intent" 3 months before the term ends? This would give the congregation adequate time to prepare next steps if the pastor chooses not to stay.
 - **Data & Technology:** Where does the data from the online form go? Can an automatic email notification be set up to alert Council members (or a specific subcommittee) whenever a form is submitted?
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Part 2: Desired Characteristics for Our Next Pastor

Attendees shared specific qualities, skills, and leadership styles they hope to see in Bethel's next pastoral leader:

- **Preaching & Care:** Delivers high-quality sermons and possesses a caring, accessible nature for emergency pastoral responses.
- **Relational Engagement:** Actively and genuinely connects with members, visitors, and campus partners (such as building renters), focusing on true relationship-building rather than just an intellectual approach.
- **Equipping Laity:** Desires active lay participation in worship service leadership and focuses on equipping the congregation to serve.
- **Collaborative Leadership:** Acts as a collaborative partner who shares decision-making with the Church Council rather than operating as the sole decision-maker.
- **Trust in Staff:** Allows independence for church workers and staff. For example, trusting the organist to select service music appropriate for the day's theme without micromanagement.

Addendum: answers to the questions posed during the July 5th meeting:

- **MSP Distribution:** Will the Ministry Site Profile (MSP) be posted locally, nationally or worldwide?
Nationally.
- Will it (the MSP) remain posted continuously until a term-call is formally accepted?
Yes.
- **Track Record:** What is the historical success rate and track record for this new call process in other churches?
This process has been used successfully once as it is a new process.
- **Statement of Intent:** For a pastor entering the 3-year term, could we implement a required "statement of intent" 3 months before the term ends? This would give the congregation adequate time to prepare next steps if the pastor chooses not to stay.
This should be an informal process between the council and the term-pastor.
- **Data & Technology:** Where does the data from the online form go? Can an automatic email notification be set up to alert Council members (or a specific subcommittee) whenever a form is submitted? (answered within the Council)
The Council members read each reply that is submitted. The replies are stored on a google drive.