



# The Mysteries of the Ages:

## *ELM's Unofficial Guide for LGBTQ First Call Candidates*

*"...the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to God's saints." Colossians 1:26*

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# INTRODUCTION

*I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you... Isaiah 42:6*

This resource is intended for LGBTQ candidates for rostered ministry, to be a companion during the last part of your candidacy process through your first call. It's a collection of **tips, stories, prayers, scriptures, and ideas** from folks who've been there. It includes things we've learned from our successes and our "Oops, that was a terrible idea! No one else should do it this way!" moments. Maybe we can spare you at least a few of those. There are no hard and fast rules or magic "best practices." But we've collected some thoughts and experiences and hope it will be helpful as you navigate this mysterious, at times frustrating, and hopefully mostly faithful (and even inspiring!) process.

Settle in with your favorite beverage and imagine you are chatting with a trusted friend or colleague. Hopefully some of these words will speak to you. And then speak back - share with us what works or doesn't work for you. Add your stories and experiences to this ever-evolving resource. **Contact information is at the end.**

## WHO'S WHO

**Bishop**- Ecclesial head of the synod. There are 65 of them.

**Bishop's Assistant**- Each bishop has at least one assistant or associate who helps with mobility, each synod is organized differently.

**Call Committee**- This is the group of people (occasionally some churches use their council as the call committee) who have been carefully selected to interview candidates and make a recommendation for call.

**Call Committee Chair**- This is your primary liaison through the call process with a congregation.

**Candidate** - Fabulous you!

**ELM Seminary Advocate** – This is a staff of faculty person at a seminary or divinity school who ELM has connected with to serve as a liaison between ELM and the seminary, and to be an advocate for LGBTQ students.

**Regional Coordinator**- As part of the Assignment Process (aka "The Draft") they will contact you first, letting you know which broad area of the country (region) you'll be assigned to. Then they work with the bishops for the synodical assignments.

# APPROVAL

*O God, we've made it this far, don't let me fall into fear now. Guide my feet, my thoughts, my words, my heart, that I may be calm and pastoral in this conversation. Inspire our meeting, bless my committee, grant that our time together may be mutually encouraging and centered on your love for this world. Keep me in your care, keep my committee in your care, grant us your Spirit of creativity and vision as we discern together how your call might be lived out in my life. Amen.*

## Approval Essay

**Who sees it:** Candidacy Committee and maybe home synod bishop

**Writing your essay:** This is usually an essay format that challenges you to relate your theological expertise and real world experience. It's important to demonstrate humility and receptivity to the Spirit in this essay. Most synods will only be reading for theological competence to the degree that they want to see that what you've been learning in seminary will prepare you to be a good pastor and that you are in tune with what's happening in the world. Candidacy committees are composed of pastors and lay people from the synod who have an interest in helping the church produce capable and faithful leaders. It's a good idea to have someone read your essay before you submit it.

# PREPARING FOR ASSIGNMENT

A candidate is welcome to find out more information about any particular synod. You may contact the synod office in the interest of information gathering. It's even better if an ELM Seminary Advocate (if you don't know who this is for your school, contact ELM) or seminary staff/faculty member does this on your behalf because they can use the opportunity to share their personal experience of you with the synod staff member if they want. If you want to know more about a particular synod, ask. You can ask if they have first call opportunities, if they care about the ministry details that you'd like to see (social justice etc.), and how the synod has interacted with LGBTQ candidates in the past.

You cannot make deals with a synod representative before the assignment process. You cannot send your Rostered Leader Profile (RLP) to a synod representative prior to the assignment process, and may do so after the assignment process only with the permission of the synod to which you have been assigned. It is their job to get you interviews. If they cannot do that, you may need to explore other options.

**Internet Scrub.** Google thyself...even if you may have done so before. Try to get any semi-objectionable photos removed. If you have an old blog or e-journal or something, consider making those things private. Proceed as though everyone is going to be checking up on you, because they

will. It is good to maintain some sort of web presence. So leave up all the positive sorts of things (like news articles that mention your feats of wonder) and understand the public version of your Facebook page, the stuff everyone can see even if you aren't connected to them. This is one way people will feel like they get to know you, and part of that now is putting your best cyber-foot forward.

## ASSIGNMENT FORMS

Most forms tend to ask about relationships, but not identity. Especially if you are single, those reading your documents may not “read” that you are LGBTQ. You might need to be more explicit and creative about coming out.

It is no longer contrary to the rules of the ELCA to be LGBTQ and be in a partnered relationship. It is also not required for a congregation to abide by any denomination wide non-discrimination agreement. Some churches don't want certain categories of leaders for whatever reason. More and more churches are declaring themselves to be open to calling an LGBTQ candidate for ministry, but navigating the rules, some said, some unsaid, is important for maximizing your visibility without offending potential advocates.

You've probably had some experience coming out. Maybe you're even getting to be a pro at it. You will do yourself a favor by incorporating your sexual orientation and/or gender identity self-disclosure into a positive statement about your call: “My first sense of call to ministry came from other lesbians who always asked about my thoughts on God.” (This tells them that you identify as a lesbian AND that people find you spiritually insightful). Or, “Part of my calling is to reach people on the margins. As a gay man, I have often found myself on the margins of the church.”

See later sections about ways to talk about your family, however you define that.

### RLP- Rostered Leader Profile

**Who sees it:** bishop, bishop's assistant, and congregation (certain parts about ministry preferences are only seen by bishop and bishop's assistant)

**Best place to self-disclose (this is where a bishop/congregation will look):** You probably need at least two places because congregations see part, and bishops look at a few other places. Here are some options in Part 3: Reflections on Ministry: Competencies - like “As a publicly identified lesbian leader I have experience...”; *Calling* - like “publicly identifying as a transgender Lutheran has given me special insight into my calling...”; *Denominational Relationship* - could be like “After the ELCA's inclusion of LGBTQ partnered clergy in 2009 I felt....”; *Personal Ministry Statement* could also include a coming out component.

**DON'T COME OUT IN ALL THESE PLACES**, just pick a few... (unless you want them to think that being gay is your only superpower). You have lots to offer!

**Don't** self-disclose solely in the Part 4: Candidate Commentary section...This section will get skimmed on the first readings. It may not be a good idea to come out in the Disclosure section because this pertains to potential ministry hindrances and being LGBTQ is a gift.

Also it's a good idea to self-disclose the Part 5: Additional Information section which bishops and bishop's assistants usually read or the last page Other Information section.

The **Personal Information** section can be tricky and somewhat degrading for LGBTQ married couples. Some activism in this area is needed! Some synods have made it clear that LGBTQ people in relationships need to select the "Publicly accountable lifelong Monogamous Same Sex Relationship" section in the drop-down box even if that relationship is a legal marriage. Use your best judgment here. The ELCA is trying to navigate uneven legal waters between different states' marriage laws. If you want to list "married" and "spouse" go for it...just be prepared for a synod or bishop's assistant to be a little confused and you may need to do some additional explaining.

**Geographic Preferences:** select the regions and synods that you'd like to end up in. Do not select all of them; that won't help you. (This corresponds to the Candidate Assignment Forms A, B, and R...see that section for more discerning advice.)

**Ministry Preferences** are very important. Don't select everything. Think "for my first call I'd like to be..." Fill in that, and give yourself a little wiggle room. There are more congregations that are smaller than ones that are larger available for first call candidates. The most important section will be the "ministry position" section. Do you want to serve on a staff or be on your own? Again, don't check them all. Be honest and discerning. Remember, if you want to be around other LGBTQ folks, you probably want to go to a medium city or larger...it's not that queer folks aren't in rural areas (we are everywhere!) but the likelihood of finding a stable and out/proud community increases in metropolitan areas.

It is a good idea to also self-disclose in your own words and discuss your willingness or unwillingness to go into not-explicitly-welcoming contexts in the "Other Information" section. Maybe something like "Because of my history of spiritual abuse from the church, I know that my thriving will depend on a setting that is explicit in its LGBTQ welcome." Or, "I recognize that Lutherans are not all in agreement about LGBTQ leaders in the church, but part of my personal call to ministry is to journey with individuals and congregations still in discernment. Sometimes that's difficult, but I have cultivated a strong support network."

Be Creative. When asked for your ministry gifts and strengths, be sure to list the things you actually excel at, even if it's not flashy. There is room to explain your choices, so feel free to write a little story about how your God-given gifts serve the Gospel well.

**Option to add additional info to RLP:** Sometimes call committees are confused when they don't see something written here. They might see it as you not really being committed or engaged - rather than the reality that you probably feel like you've been going on and on about yourself. There are lots of options for what to put there - a newsletter article, a statement about your great loves in ministry, an exposition on the bible verse that inspires you to this call. Just do something that shares your voice with a little more depth.

**REMEMBER:**

1) SPELL CHECK!

2) Make sure the document conveys who you are more than theological assertions. If you like to play dodgeball and frequent Barbie museums and you have seen all Planet of the Apes movies...that tells folks more about your personality than what your personal feelings are on substitutionary atonement.

3) Know where you want to go and what ministry setting you see for yourself. Be very honest. It might not happen, but it will help synod staff keep you in mind when those calls open up.

4) Have someone who knows you well read through your paperwork to see if you do a good job of introducing yourself through it. Keep in mind, this is the ONLY thing that congregations will see until they interview you.

5) Don't fill up all the space on every form. Be concise whenever possible. Answers should be more than a few words, but do not need to fill up every single box.

6) ELM has supporters who've offered to read your RLP and give you feedback as well. Contact Jen Rude if you want to be put in touch with someone.

## Candidate Assignment Forms (Form A-B-R):

**Who sees it:** bishops and bishop's assistants (but probably more assistants)

**Best place to self-disclose:**

Form A - The easiest way for partnered LGBTQ folks to self-disclose is to select that you are in a "Publicly accountable lifelong Monogamous Same Sex Relationship" from the drop-down menu. You may also choose to select "married" if that is true for you, but you may need to explain that at some point in your paperwork since there still seems to be an assumption that "married" means straight. Single LGBTQ folks and Gender-Queer folks: This form might be challenging for you. Don't worry, there are other forms.

Form B - These forms are put into a spreadsheet for the “draft” which indicates Home Synods, Restrictions, and Preferences. Section #2 (“Describe the ministry situation(s) and setting(s) to which you have the clearest sense of call and describe the gifts you bring”) is a good place to mention how being LGBTQ is awesome for ministry. This is one of the first places bishops and bishops’ staff will look when looking through candidate’s paperwork. This is a key section to really put your best foot forward. Grab the reader’s attention so they will then want to further explore your RLP.

Under the #3 Availability Section, you will get conflicting advice. Some synod bishops and staff members believe that choosing “open to all” is the best option and advocate for this. They do so out of the hope that more candidates will be “open to all” and that this shows a greater openness to God’s call. However, often our experience has suggested otherwise. It’s up to you. But it’s probably best if you do not select “open for all” unless you are HONESTLY open to going absolutely anywhere. Let’s get real, you probably aren’t. If you select that, your paperwork essentially goes to the bottom of the pile along with other candidates who will be sorted after everyone else has been assigned. You are MUCH better off selecting preferences, including identifying three synods within each region. That puts your paperwork in front of 9 people immediately. Think through this and learn about potential synods and their ministry prospects and concerns. #3 gives you an opportunity to describe your sense of call. This is probably another good place to self-disclose. Since this form will probably be seen prior to one’s RLP if you’re in the hands of an “unfriendly synod,” self-disclosing here might get you traded to a friendlier team.

Check the list of Reconciling in Christ Synods online - <http://www.lcna.org/ric/ric-synods>. Consider synods that know you through candidacy, internship, seminary, etc. If your seminary doesn't have a good first call advocacy program, then you may need to take the initiative and contact synods yourself to see if they have any potential first call placements and how they have benefited from LGBTQ clergy before. It’s acceptable to solicit general information from particular synods. If something is unclear, then you might contact the bishop’s assistant or a pastor in that synod for more info. (In general, it’s always better to have someone advocate FOR you.) Ask around, your colleagues in Proclaim are a great source of knowledge and encouragement.

### Form R

This form should NOT be the first time the bishop learns about this restriction request. If you are requesting a restriction, please contact the bishop’s assistant for a meeting and talk to them about the reasons you are considering restricting. They will likely tell you that restriction means waiting a lot longer for a call. That’s true, but it will move faster if you’ve demonstrated your ability to work within the system and communicate clearly. The “Candidate Commentary,” like the similar section in the RLP, is often skimmed or skipped in the initial reading. It might be a good place to elaborate on how your sexual orientation has affected your call, but it’s also a good idea to highlight the MANY gifts you bring to ministry.

# **AFTER YOU ARE ASSIGNED:**

*Shepherding God, you guide your church through paths of right relationship for your name's sake. Even when we sheep run off on our own plans and expectations, you draw us back and send us on your way. As we wait for guidance, for communication, for paperwork and clearer direction, grant us calm and patience, peace and endurance, that this liminal time be fruitful, grounding, and not too long. Bless the parish to which you have called me, those who will guide and midwife the process of birthing our new ministry together, and the administration within both the bishop's office and the call committee, which seek to follow your leading. Remind me of my gifts for ministry and the training and support I have received, that I may be encouraged in the waiting time, and help me know your creative Spirit at work even in the middle space between Assignment and Interviewing. Amen.*

“How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,  
who brings good news, who announces salvation,  
who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’ ”  
Isaiah 52:7

## **Interacting with the Bishop/Synod Staff**

It's a good idea to think about how you'd like to self-disclose your sexual orientation when speaking with a bishop's assistant. It's good to be prepared for the “well, we don't have any calls for you” response...but there is still hope. Invite them to get to know you. If you are able, attend a synod assembly or arrange at another time to meet with the bishop's assistant in person. This might help them know you as a candidate they are eager to help find a call.

If a bishop's assistant or bishop doesn't ask about your sexual orientation, you might consider taking the initiative to speak about your experience as an LGBTQ person in seminary, internship, candidacy, etc. It will put them at ease to see that you can “handle” potentially awkward conversations. It will also give them some ideas about how they might introduce you to potential call committees. “While at seminary she met her wife Amy.” “He transitioned genders 20 years ago and accepted God's call to the ministry after finding a welcoming congregation 10 years ago.” “They told me that identifying as gender queer has really helped them see more of the spectrum of Christian experience; you'll want to be sure to hear more about that when you interview them!”

Once a month, reach out to the bishop or bishop's assistant and ask about any new churches in interim, new calls, etc. This demonstrates your continued interest and also helps you get to know the synod staff over time.



**From one who has been there:**

This time can be maddening. I kept a document called “When Things Change” - a place where I could just write down all the ways I would make things better. That seemed to help me feel proactive and not stew in my own frustrations.

-Caleb Crainer

*“Yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.” Luke 18:5*

What if they aren’t responsive? Different synod staff members serve as point people - sometimes the bishop, or the bishop’s assistant. Try connecting with someone different if you aren’t getting responses. Make phone calls in addition to emails - they’ve gotta be in their office at some point!

**Connect with Proclaim members in this synod**

After you are assigned, connect with other Proclaim members in that area. They can help give you the inside scoop and it’s never too early to start building deeper collegial relationships. Check in with ELM staff if you’re not sure who’s in your synod.

Proclaim member Javen Swanson developed an excel spreadsheet system for keeping track of the various open calls, contacts with synod, etc. Make one that works for you. Here are Javen’s columns to get you started:

<b>Congregation Name</b>	
<b>Role</b> - i.e. solo, associate, etc	
<b>Full Time, Part Time</b>	
<b>City, Synod</b>	
<b>Notes</b> (i.e., looked through their website on 5/1/14, emailed bishop’s assistant on 5/2/14, 5/7/14 - rec’d response, “this congregation is just starting an interim, check back in 2 months,” etc)	
<b>Last contact</b> with synod office	
<b>Next contact</b> with synod office (reminds you to check back in at a certain time!)	
<b>Status</b> (i.e. pre-Ministry Site Profile, writing Ministry Site Profile, etc)	
<b>Contacts in congregation</b>	
<b>To-Do’s</b> (i.e. ask John to submit my name to call committee)	

**Home Synod.** If you are assigned to your home synod that may be because they know and love you the best and that's terrific. It may also be because no other synod felt they had a good match for you at this time. You may ask your synodical mobility representative or the bishop about why they took you and what your prospects look like. (They should tell you this anyway.)

**Visit.** If you don't live in the synod (or near the synod office) where you are assigned, go visit (ELM can help with homestays!) so you can meet with synod staff in person. See if you can get invited to synod assembly as first call candidate (and ask them if they might pay for your registration and/or travel – it's worked before!)

## **WAITING TIME**

*Ok, here we g--- no? Um, hey God, remember me? Remember that whole 'call' thing we talked about? Any time now! Show me the giftedness of this time, that it not be wasted in fear or self-doubt. Show me the blessedness of wanting, the strength of desiring, the beauty of longing, that I may remember, when my future ministry threatens to weigh me down, how much I am called and sent, how deeply I am blessed to serve, and how central your love is to the whole of my life. May my waiting and wanting be a blessing to those around me as they serve in ways I need to serve, may my zeal to answer your call be fed by your Spirit in my day-to-day living, may my colleagues who wait with me also be encouraged, for we are not solitary in our wishing and hoping to follow. Thank you for this time, even when it sucks, and show me what you're up to, even if only the slightest shadow of it. Amen.*

**Spiritual practices while you wait** - Centering prayer. Find a clergy lunch group or text study group. Explore your neighborhood for places to pray or places that need prayers. Connect with a local parish or community ministry you want to support. Don't put your spiritual and ministerial life on hold while you're waiting. Get to it, encouraging and empowering the folks you meet along the way to be disciples so when you leave for your first call you'll have even more good experience to take with you and you will have been doing ministry all along.

**Patience is a virtue; a nasty nasty virtue.** Because of a lot of reasons (economy, shifting landscape for church, church staff downsizing, etc), first calls are not always available in a timely manner after graduating from seminary. So, as you submit your paperwork, also submit some résumés for alternative employment while you wait. Lots of people (gay and straight) wait for a whole year...so it's helpful to have a game plan for the in between time.

**Do Ministry.** Somewhere. Pulpit Supply, local clergy gatherings and text study. These connections can be very life giving while you wait, and adds to your own experience. Sometimes our partner denominations have pulpit supply opportunities too. Let area clergy, of any denomination we've got shared pulpit with, know that you're trained and available. See if retired clergy will pair up with you

– you preach and they preside. And some small parishes are using pre-consecrated elements to allow their deacons to lead worship where churches are shorthanded (a bit ‘hocus-pocus,’ but if the opportunity is there!). Contact ELM’s Program Director Jen Rude to get listed on the Proclaim Pulpit Supply page on ELM’s website - [www.elm.org/proclaim-pulpit-supply](http://www.elm.org/proclaim-pulpit-supply).

**Network.** Some folks find a call through external processes (e.g. At a synod event they happened to meet someone from a church call committee that wasn’t considering a first call pastor, but then decided to ask the bishop for their paperwork.) Checking in with the Proclaim community might also unearth some alternative call possibilities.

Don’t be afraid to give the bishop’s assistant a call every couple weeks if you haven’t heard anything from them. This will alleviate some of the building anxiety and remind them that you are committed to the process.

*God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*  
1 Corinthians 1:9

## **PLAN B**

**Have a Backup Plan.** Your Plan B should keep you housed and fed for 6 months to a year while you wait. All of these processes take time. Your seminary and synod will NOT be diligent about helping you during this time. So you've gotta have a plan. As a church interview process unfolds you can always inform them of your current working situation and agree on an appropriate start date should they decide to call you. In the meantime, take care of yourself and take the opportunity to learn some new avenues for self-care...you'll need them now and in the future.

**Putting together your Plan B.** Some folks in the process seem to get ordained before they’ve even graduated, others wait for years until they have to renew their candidacy again. Stay connected with your candidacy committee, let them know where you are and what you’re thinking and what’s up in your prayer life. Health insurance can be anxiety producing, but breathe deeply and often and look into options while you still have seminary insurance and the seminary financial aid folks at hand. Seek out local health clinics with sliding scales. Searching out and navigating these systems will serve you well in your ministry!

**Plan B’s that have worked for folks.** Retail, part-time jobs, living with parents, living on spouses’ income, moving into a co-op, summer camp, etc. This seems to be becoming a tougher time for everyone waiting for call. Parishes are smaller and unable to support full time ministers, but they still have vital ministry to do. The church is experiencing a great deal of change right now, so a lot of people are anxious about the future, with or without the conversations about LGBTQ folks in leadership. Consider your position to be one of extreme giftedness for this time, because we’re all going to have to get used to being witnesses from the outside, doing ministry in new ways.

**Jumping Back In.** You may re-enter the assignment process if you would like to try to be assigned elsewhere, though there are no guarantees.

After a period of time without interviews or movement, you can talk with the bishop of the synod where you were assigned about a possible contingency arrangement to extend your paperwork to nearby synods or other synods that might have potential calls.

If they know they don't have a place for you to interview, they may agree to share your paperwork with colleagues in other synods. You can request to be "released" after 6 months if you think there is nothing happening. This might work out or it might backfire. If you have a good feeling about the synod and feel like the bishop's assistant is getting to know you, it's probably best to stay put. Then the pressure on THEM to get you an interview increases. This will hopefully work in your favor as you seek a first call!

## **INTERVIEWS**

*"... for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." Isaiah 56:1-8*

Congratulations! Your name has been given to a congregation and they have decided to interview you! It's not a done deal yet, it's important to keep your hopes in perspective, but it's also a good time to start thinking about how to present your authentic self.

**Practice.** Seek out a trusted friend to debrief with, get feedback, help discern, etc. Maybe a colleague, a friend, or even a counselor. It can be very helpful to practice interviewing with this person. Do you fidget? Do you say "um" too much? Someone's gotta tell you. Also, before your interview make a plan to debrief your interview with a trusted friend after the fact. It will help to have someone on hand to talk through what happened and how you felt about it, etc.

**Investigate.** Learn AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE about this congregation. Contact all their references (and send them a thank you note). The call committee will hear back or ask the references if you've contacted them. Read through the congregation's website, Facebook page, etc. Try to discern what is important to them.

During the interview it can be good to refer to how your specific skill set matches what they have included in their congregational profile. Perhaps while talking about your internship project experience highlight how that corresponds to some of the things you've understood about their community.

**Interview Practices.** Synods and congregations will vary widely in their interview practice. Some will bring you in for a full day, including dinner and a tour of the community. Others will expect a

mere hour from you. If you have the option, urge greater human connection. Ask if you might have a meal together as a committee. Be curious about their community, and ask for a walking tour. Pray together (and be prepared to lead that prayer). It is especially helpful if to ask what prayer requests the committee members have. For example, perhaps the community has just experienced a death, or difficulty that has affected them deeply. They'll appreciate your concern, and they'll need the prayers.

Some call committees are very prepared; others are more nervous than you are. Be prepared to help lead the committee through the interview process, but don't demand this role. If they are anxious, they'll appreciate your confidence and willingness to guide them.

**Boundaries.** What's appropriate to respond to, what's not, and how to respond. If they want to ask you about how you met your spouse, that's probably understandable...but if they want to ask you which one of you is the "man" of the household, that's not appropriate. It's ok to say things like "I think we can save that question until we get to know each other a bit better." Or "I think we've crossed a pastoral boundary and as a candidate, I think it's important to get back to talking about ministry." Be prepared to be asked questions about your family and their involvement and make a plan for how you want to respond.

**Questions.** Generate a few questions for the committee about their experience and congregational priorities. Their ultimate question will be "Is the Holy Spirit calling us to partner together in mission and ministry?" This is important for you to ask yourself as well. You are being interviewed, *and* you are interviewing the call committee. Ask yourself, What do I need to know? And make a list of a few questions their paperwork or website etc. has raised for you.

Likely, you have about 10 minutes to ask questions in your 1st interview (do your homework on this congregation and highlight things that interest you about them). For example:

- "Your website has many pictures of people eating together, are meals and eating together central to this community? Who's the cook?!"
- "St. Pauline's sounds like a really warm and friendly congregation. Has it always been that way or did you have to work on specific things to make the community more inviting?"
- "I saw in your Congregational Profile that y'all have a strong affinity for ministers with liturgical proficiency. I love liturgy, and I'd be interested to hear more about the ways in which worship really matters to the church."
- "What has been the highlight and the biggest challenge in the last few years?"

**Spouses/Family.** Many folks choose to include family details in the side stories that happen at various points during the lengthier interview process. For those who are single, you already know what kind of culture exists in churches for single folks. The call committee might want to know

about your plans for dating, interest in "settling down," etc. What they may be afraid of (consciously or unconsciously) is the stereotype of gay-frivolous-sexual-behavior. When confronted with these questions, try not to get defensive. Instead, consider it a teachable moment, acknowledge the stereotypes they may have, and then politely also acknowledge your respect for your role as a representative of the church. If you feel like it you might set a boundary about trusting each other as a potential future relationship may unfold.

From one who has been there:

I had dinner with the call committee first thing when I arrived for my interview and I just talked leisurely about my life with Laura as it is a part of my life and nothing to hide.

- Sara Cogsil

You may ask about spousal and familial roles with previous pastors if you feel the question needs to be asked. "Could you tell me about the previous pastor's spouse and their involvement in the church?"

Be up-front and honest. If you don't have a family, but it is something that is very important you, feel free to let them know.

From one who has been there:

I was honest in sharing with my congregation that at some point in the future Laura and I would like to have a family.

- Sara Cogsil

First call, sole candidate is different than if there are multiple candidates interviewing (multiple factors about whether you are chosen or not, may not be about you AT ALL). You can ask the bishop's assistant if they could tell you approximately how many other candidates they are interviewing if you want to know. If you're the only one, they will probably tell you.

**Rejection.** Sometimes they might not move you on to the next round. This can be devastating. This decision may not have anything to do with you personally. On the other hand, it might. If you want, you can ask for feedback from places you interview if you don't move forward in process. Thank them for taking the time to interview you and ask if they have any suggestions or feedback you might consider as you meet other committees. Just make sure you don't come across as whiny or "sour grapes." Asking for genuine feedback lets them know that you're willing to be a partner in ministry...and if their other candidates don't pan out, they might come back to you, and if not...then you might get some helpful tips.

**Skype** or some other video conference thing is probably going to be the way you'll interact with a committee far away. You might Skype first with a bishop or bishop's assistant too. Consider a few things: 1) Practice Skyping with a friend if you're not familiar. Make sure you are comfortable with the technology. 2) Background should be boring but not bare, lighting should be tested. 2) You should look nice (clericals perhaps) 3) Remember to look at the camera instead of the screen and Smile!...maybe put sticky notes up near the computer camera to remind you where to look and to smile.

## MEETING THE CALL COMMITTEE

*God, you know how I've waited for this and wanted this. Help me listen for your call, to trust that you will bring leader and parish together, and that it may be here or it may not be, but that this time is holy because you are here. I am your pastor, these are your people, may we be church together in this time, to your glory. Amen.*

Often, if a committee isn't able to meet a candidate in person in the first round, then for a second interview they will pay for the candidate to come visit with the committee at the congregation or ministry. This is not when a candidate would meet the whole congregation. This is an opportunity to meet just the call committee in person and maybe preach at a nearby church ("neutral site") just for them to observe.

**Names.** This is a secret bonus for you: Names are super important! Unfortunately, not everyone is gifted with remembering names. Jot down the names of folks on the call committee, and maybe a note about them. Try to learn who they are. If you call them by name during the interview, that will speak highly of your attention and care. ALSO, you can totally look everyone up on Facebook later...because they have looked you up for sure!

The call committee may use this opportunity to make a recording introducing you to the council. So, think about a few of the main things you'd like to say. Maybe mention a couple things you've observed about the congregation and how you see yourself fitting in with their mission and ministry. Remember to smile!

From one who has been there:

I proactively talked about my experience as an out gay man during the call process interviews. Even though the committee didn't bring up my being gay, I knew it was important for us to talk about, and so I initiated those conversations. I think one of the reasons the committee chose to recommend me for the call was my forthrightness and gentleness. They appreciated my questions and being able to share their experiences as I listened.

- Caleb Crainer

## RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL

The call committee makes a formal recommendation to the church council. It varies, but the council may or may not have read all your paperwork. They are usually given at least a brief biographical sketch/résumé and perhaps a recorded message introducing yourself to the council, along with the committee's formal rationale for recommending you. If the council votes to present you to the congregation, then the end may be in sight. They will set a date for you to meet the congregation. At this point the call committee and the church council are on your team!

## MEETING THE CONGREGATION

*I am (uncertain/excited/terrified/etc) and could really use your help here! Stir up your spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and holy fear and joy, that we might worship and discern wisely, trusting you to guide our ministry in whatever shape it takes today. Amen.*

While some candidates do preach or conduct a small service during this visit, the call committee is supposed to prevent this from being a “trial sermon” or “free-for-all interview” for the congregation. Remember, you’ve already been through those hoops. This visit is essentially for getting acquainted with folks, so enjoy it. And maybe write down names and impressions of folks afterwards, because that will be fun to look back on.

Decide in advance how you will talk about your sexual orientation and/or gender identity and your family - practice with some trusted colleagues or friends so it feels natural. Help folks see this part of you as a gift, and not a liability! For example: “My husband was raised in a very conservative Christian household and isn’t interested in being super active in the church, but he is excited to meet you and ease into a more nurturing community.”

Connect your coming out story and call story, if they’re connected. “God was like, Hey, you. Yeah, you. Yes, Really, you....and I was like, me? and God was like, wurk.”

Mostly smile and try to call people by names if you can. The congregational vote requires a ⅔ majority to pass. It might be worth talking with the bishop’s assistant about what a closer vote might indicate (more about this in next section).



From one who has been there:

When I was first coming out, a friend gave me some good advice: 'You don't come out once. You are always making decisions about coming out in every new context.' The call process made that very clear. I made the decision to share it at each stage in the process – call committee, council, and congregation. I was committed to being open and honest while also keeping the focus on finding a good match in terms of ministry and mission. The synod staff was incredibly supportive.

In both congregations where I interviewed with the call committee, I came out during the official interview so that the call committee would hear it all at once. I gave us plenty of time to talk about mission and ministry before it came up, but I also made sure it wasn't just thrown in at the end in a way that wouldn't allow us to talk about it. In the interview with the call committee of the congregation I now serve, there was an immediate affirming response and it was seen as a potential way to strengthen their public witness to inclusion.

I came out in a similar way to the church council during my interview with them and received a similar response. When it came time to meet the whole congregation I preached in worship then began answering questions after the service. I was very aware as each hand was raised that I needed to find an opportunity to share my sexual orientation. Several questions in, someone asked if I would be bringing a family with me if I were called. I shared that I had recently become engaged and that I wanted them to know that I was gay and was engaged to another man. I shared his name and that his occupation was music therapy. There were maybe about 3 seconds of silence before the same person asked a follow-up question: "Well, is he going to sing in the choir?"

I almost laughed out loud, partly in relief and partly in response to the way that despite the challenge to traditional gender roles, the important question was whether the pastor's spouse would sing in the choir.

- Steven Wilco

# DISCERNING A FIT

*Oh, God, you know how I want a call. A genuine call, not just a job. Help me listen for your voice and follow your leading here. Help me ask good questions and listen well. Help me keep my focus on your kin[g]dom regardless of how this process leads. Thank you for these people and this ministry, which you have already been present in and will be present in long after I am gone. Thank you for these conversations. Thank you for your promised Spirit. Into your hands we have already been given - grant us the Grace to trust your guidance. Amen.*

*“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Matthew 18:20*

% vote - what is the threshold that would indicate the health of the call? In general, a vote of  $\frac{2}{3}$  (of those present and voting) is needed from the congregation to issue a call. If it's close to  $\frac{2}{3}$ , be aware that there are potentially some big challenges ahead. Have some clarity ahead of time of what is workable for you. Some folks like to have this conversation with someone from synod staff ahead of time so you're all on the same page.

Set your own priorities in advance- are you willing to take anything? Would you rather wait longer to get a more ideal spot? What are you willing to be flexible on? Are you open to a less than full time call?

Does this feel like a good fit? Are you excited about the possible partnership in ministry together? Do your gifts match the visions of this community? What does your heart, gut, soul, mind say?

Sometimes the fit will feel perfect! Or close to it. This will feel like it's the right fit at the right time and you can't believe you've finally found each other! You're excited. They're excited. And you're ready to move forward.

Sometimes after an interview it will seem like it's a bad match. And while a congregation might have a receptive call committee for LGBTQ candidates, you may pick up some serious “red flags” about accepting the call. Pray about it. Talk about it with trusted colleagues. Be honest with the synod mobility person about your concerns.

Generally, folks advise to proceed through a process; if it's a bad fit, chances are that will become clear to the call committee as well. It's best to “trust the process” so bishops and bishop's assistants see that you understand the reality of placements. Plus the extra interview experience will help you next time.

It's easier to leave a bad call than it is to be ordained in the first place. Once you're ordained, you have more agency in a second call process. Of course, no one wants you to accept a call that is clearly bad, but it is very important to participate as fully as possible. Also be sure to communicate honestly with the bishop's assistant. This will help them better select potential matches in the future.

Say you do accept it, and for whatever reason your call isn't working out. There are several channels you probably need to avail yourself of before calling it quits. First, your pastoral mentor. If you don't have one, get one. Find a pastor in the synod you respect, and ask them...or ask the synod office to select someone for you. This person will be crucial in helping you evaluate normal (albeit outrageous) stresses of being a pastor versus genuine long term problems. Second, your mutual ministry committee. This committee is formed from congregation members of your choosing who can help you in how you relate to the congregation, provide valuable feedback, and keep the gossip loop as closed as possible. Third, synod staff...they have tons to deal with, but part of their job is to support you in your ministry. Telling the bishop's assistant or the bishop that things are challenging and asking for their guidance is a really savvy maneuver.

If it's a bad fit, try to learn as much as possible about why. Become a detective. As you explore you might identify deeper reasons...future congregations and synods will be curious and you'll want to say that you learned valuable lessons that you'll take with you into future ministries.

Ultimately, if it's a terrible fit, and you've tried everything then there's no shame in looking elsewhere. After you are ordained, you can send your RLP wherever you want. So, maybe check the ELCA website or synodical websites for lists of open calls (they aren't the most accurate lists by any means). Don't tell your current call that you're looking elsewhere. If you are extended a call elsewhere, and you choose to accept it, THAT is the time to tell them you will be leaving and give them the timeline. Don't linger, but have enough time for good closure and to help them make initial plans for after you leave.

Typical first-call positions last 3-5 years, FYI.

# NEGOTIATING

If a call and compensation package is extended to you, you have a brief window for negotiating some points. Review the synod compensation guidelines. If the dollar figure is below the standards, you will want to talk with the synod staff or congregational references about what the congregation is capable of paying. Keep in mind that even if you don't want money to be a make or break issue, that your strongest negotiation moment is before you have accepted the call. In some congregations, salary will never again, after that initial package, keep pace with cost-of-living increases, so it is important for your financial health and the congregation's financial health to begin in a healthy place.

From one who has been there:

A suggestion (if this is your approach to giving): One thing that I always communicate openly is that my plan is to tithe. Thus, however they increase my salary, it is an increase to the church general offering as well. – Joy McDonald-Coltvet

You should also have appropriate time off, a clear understanding of parental leave and/or sabbatical policies (if any). If no policies currently exist in writing, ask if there is openness to following synod recommendations for these, and continuing education/professional expenses as reimbursable expenses. This means that if a congregation is in a very tough financial place, the pastor has the opportunity to restrict his/her own spending and thus participate in any budget keeping measures that might be needed. In regards to rationale for continuing ed, a good teaching is that as pastors, we need to continually be learning along the way in an ever-changing church and culture, and that we will commit to sharing with our congregation what we're learning along the way.

If there is not openness to thinking creatively and intentionally about compensation now, be careful about your expectations for the future. Typically, a congregation's use of money reflects their value system. This can change along the way because of your leadership; however, you want to be free to preach about money and ask for money for God's mission in this place, and you probably don't want people to see your stewardship sermons as self-serving. So, it's best if you are able to go into a call with a sense of "enough"—that you are being paid enough, that you will have enough time away, and that you feel enough sense of respect (reflected in the package) as you go into it.

## **SHARED TIME. What if it is a part time package?**

Some calls are less than full time packages. The roster manual calls this “shared time.” It might be shared with an opportunity to have more time for yourself and family. It might be shared with another position. It might be shared with an opportunity to do more learning, like grad school or intensive Spanish. It might be shared with another congregation. It might be shared with stronger lay leadership.

Sometimes with shared time calls it is more difficult to determine what is “fair” or “just” in terms of compensation. Sometimes congregations want to get all they can for the dollars they pay, but balancing time to find other work to pay the bills is important as a shared time pastor. Talk with Proclaim colleagues, other colleagues, and the synod office to see if they have resources to navigate this complicated process.

## **ACCEPTING THE CALL**

You will have a certain amount of time to make a decision about accepting the call. Pray about it. Talk about it thoroughly with spouse, friends, etc. If you accept the call, then here are the next steps:

- CELEBRATION!
- Once it’s public, tell ELM and your Proclaim colleagues – we want to celebrate with you!
- Ordination (usually at home or seminary or at the new congregation or at synod assembly or somewhere else that has been meaningful for you along the way). Your new bishop will be on hand to do the actual ordination, but you can invite your own preacher and presider if you want and if it’s okay with the bishop.
  - Albs cost \$150-\$300 btw, stoles can be expensive too, but if there are quilters in your home congregation, this could be a neat project for them.
  - ELM has beautiful worship banners for Proclaim that you may want as part of your service. Be in touch and we can mail it to you.
  - Some people in Proclaim have mentioned ELM in their service bulletin or included ELM in their offering as a way of showing how ELM has supported them on their path to ordination. You can contact Jen Rude if you want examples of what others have done.
- Moving. The congregation pays for you to move. If possible, take time to select a good housing option so you aren’t trying to move again soon after you land there.
  - Start Day/First Sunday. It’s probably gonna be a little awkward. Think about how you want your first sermon to help you enter into the community, share the Good News, and begin your partnership in ministry together. Perhaps the council or call committee chair could lead a liturgical welcome at the baptismal font for you and your family before you begin presiding on your first Sunday.
  - Installation. This will probably happen after you’ve officially started. Although sometimes

ordination and installation happen on the same day. This is a party for the church to celebrate your leadership and this beginning new partnership. Your new bishop or bishop's assistant will be there and often preaches.

## **FIRST 6 MONTHS**

*"Who knows? Perhaps you have come....for just such a time as this." Esther 4:14*

Don't let your head fall off. Pray. Reach out to others. Enjoy the ride. And here are a few tips that might come in handy:

### **A new partnership:**

- It's not about you; it's about the congregation. Find out what makes them tick, learn about these people you're in partnership with, what is the culture and history here, etc.
- Don't assume everything is about you when things go wrong (or right!).
- Don't change a million things right away (worship, etc) - they existed before you got there, enter into this community to observe and learn.
- If you do institute changes, they will be seen as symbolic of your leadership, so think through them and what you hope to convey/accomplish. If possible gain support from committees and the council before any noticeable changes so that they experience you as a partner in ministry.

### **Who are you following?**

- Who are you following in ministry and what was their relationship to the congregation? Be aware of feelings about your predecessor - did they leave on good terms, were they beloved, was there a lot of conflict, etc.
- How are they grieving their previous pastor? How is it expressed? Is there anger? Sadness? Frustration? Feelings of abandonment?
- It may take them some time to warm up. It may be because of grief and not because you're LGBTQ, for example.

### **Getting to know the congregation:**

- Establish relationships within the congregation. In some places inviting yourself over works well. Being a change agent is easier in the later months if you set a strong relational foundation in the first several months.
- Take notes, observe and ask questions. The reality of a call may be different than what you expected and that's okay.

From one who has been there:

During my first two months I hosted a 'Conversations with the Pastor' series encouraging individuals to meet with me for drinks or coffee. Sign-ups were online, on paper, or via e-mail. I used remaining call committee budget money to buy everyone a drink too. It was a great way to get to know parishioners.

-Jason Glombicki

**Support:**

- Get into a clergy support group/text study - like, immediately. It's a great way to get to know area colleagues and develop supporting relationships.
- Meet other clergy in churches nearby. Are there queer clergy from other denominations around?
- Therapy is a thing lots of pastors do on a regular basis. It's very healthy to be cared for in a similar way that you yourself are offering to care for others.
- Consider spiritual direction. Lots of folks find that to be a vital source of strength for ministry.

From one who has been there:

I am part of a women's clergy writing group where the rule is only one person per denomination so it really can be supportive and not overly focused on denominationalism.

- Sara Cogsil

**Mutual Ministry Committee:**

- Set up a mutual ministry committee (discussed above). OR...

From one who has been there:

Since a Mutual Ministry Committee didn't exist when I began, we created a 'Transition Committee' made up of call committee members who I had already built a relationship with and knew me from the process. This committee helps give me support, feedback, and historical information about the church to consider. This is SUPER helpful as a solo pastor. The idea is that after a year we'll transition to a Mutual Ministry Committee with other non-call committee members included. I think it's a great way to start a Mutual Ministry Committee with those who are invested in your success.

-Jason Glombicki

### **Nourish your spirit:**

- Some days you will feel like you have 30,000 things to do. Other days you will feel unsure about what to do. Learn a routine that works for you. Take time to settle in.
- Focus on the skill set for which you have been called. Don't get too overwhelmed with the secondary stuff that is part of ministry.
- Sabbath!! Like seriously, take a damn day off. REALLY OFF, no church work.
- Pray and read scripture. It can seem so obvious, but it can also be so hard to find the time without intentionality.

*Blessed are you, Lord God, Queen of the cosmos, however frustrating and compelling you and this call may be. Blessed are you for keeping the wheels turning, for being our sanctuary and the fire within. Blessed are you in the dark of confusion and in the light of joy. Blessed are you in the questions and in the space between questions. Blessed are you for holding on to us every time we feel like letting go or falling apart, and for setting us free from every constraint that would keep us from living fully in your love. Blessed are you for all of the expressions of creativity you have surrounded and filled us with, for the reflections of yourself which sparkle and whisper and are a wonder to behold. Blessed are you. Blessed are we, for we are yours.*

## **CONTRIBUTORS**

Thanks to these folks for sharing their wisdom, stories, ideas, thoughts, and their awesome selves to make this resource happen:

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Proclaim Members who Shared Experiences

All those who read various drafts and shared their feedback and wisdom.

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