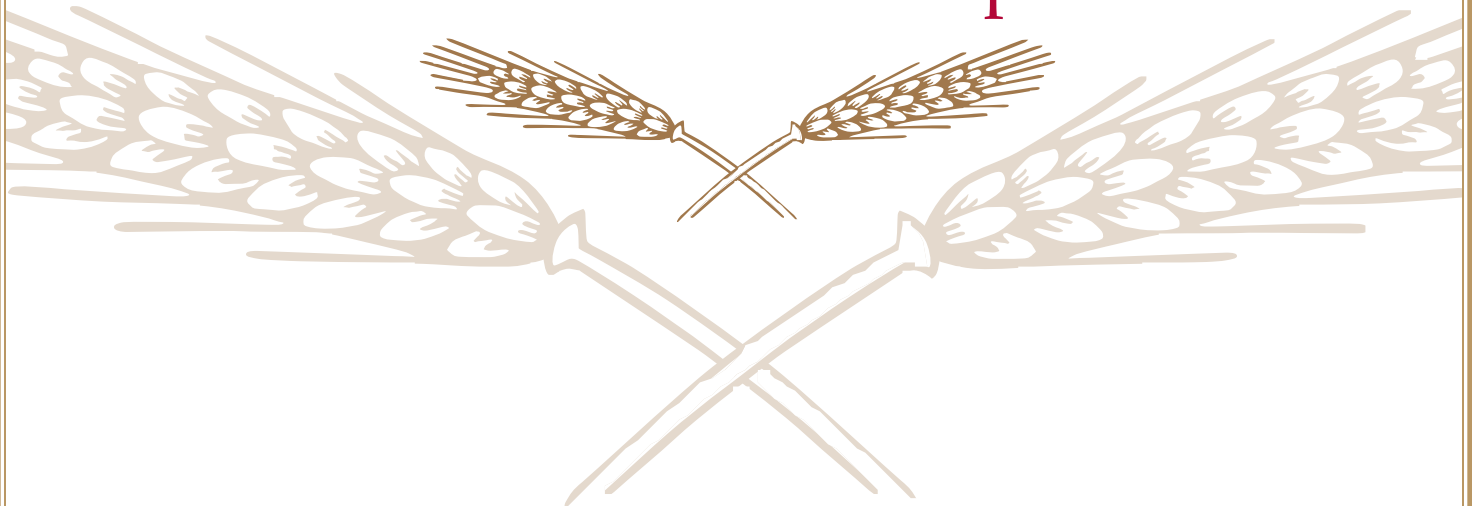


# Pastoral Leadership Transition Steps



Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod  
ELCA

A Resource for Congregations

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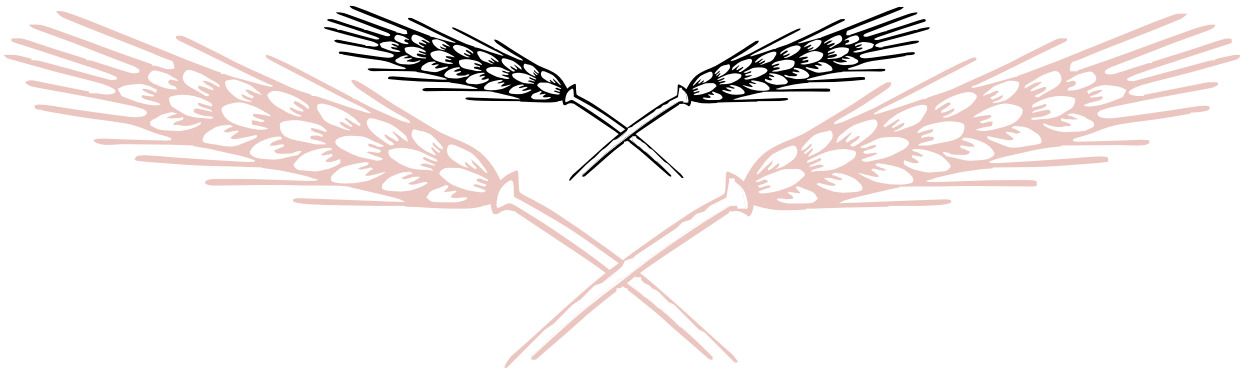
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Pastoral Leadership  
Transition Process

STEP ONE

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*The Process Begins*



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## STEP ONE

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# Process Begins

### I. Letter of Resignation

### II. Meeting - synod representative with Congregation President and Council

The Call Process Overview

Pastoral Transition In Your Congregation (Sample of letter from Council President to members of congregation)

### III. Closure with Resigning Pastor

A. Assistant to Bishop conducts exit interview with pastor and lay leadership (can be done the same evening as "II" above).

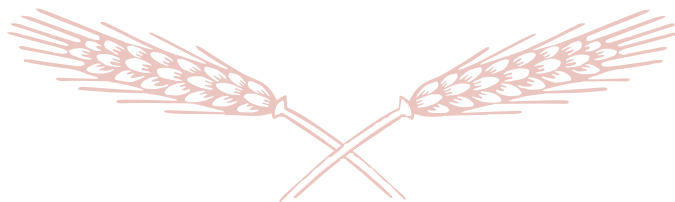
1. Sample - exit interview questions

2. Receipt form - letter from bishop and 2 copies of the form

B. Congregation holds Farewell Celebration

C. Pastoral separation information

1. Letter from bishop to congregational members



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## SAMPLE LETTER

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### Sent From Council President to All Members of Congregation

When a pastor resigns to accept another call a variety of feelings are likely to be experienced. Some members may feel angry, hurt or rejected. Others may feel sorry for the congregation but happy for their pastor. Whatever your feelings you should know that your pastor prayed and thought considerably about you and the new opportunity before deciding to accept the challenge.

Here is an overview of some of the activity which will be going on during the time your congregation is without a pastor.

#### 1. The Ongoing Program

It is very important for our congregation to keep itself vitally alive during the time of a pastoral transition, therefore, you should participate fully in the work of our congregation during this time.

- A. *Pray* - Ask that the presence of the Holy Spirit may be felt by all who are part of the process in selecting a new pastor. Pray especially for the Congregation Council, the Call Committee, the Committee of Deans, and the synod staff.
- B. *Worship* - Services of worship will be conducted as usual. Preachers will be assigned each Sunday by the synod. Plan to attend worship regularly.
- C. *Other Matters* - In consultation with the council, the synod will appoint an interim pastor. The interim pastor will visit the hospitalized, conduct funerals and weddings, administer Holy Communion to the shut-ins, teach confirmation classes, attend council meetings to offer guidance and do whatever else may be requested. Your council will do everything it can so that your church life will not suffer during this period of time.

#### 2. Gathering Information

It is the responsibility of the Office of the Bishop to recommend particular candidates to be interviewed. The council will help the bishop become more familiar with the needs of the congregation and the synod representative in conjunction with the conference dean will gather information from three sources:

- A. From the Congregation - Shortly, a questionnaire will be mailed or distributed to all members of the congregation. Each member should fill out the questionnaire and return it as directed. All responses will be compiled and carefully studied.



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- B. From Selected Groups - The council will invite a cross-section of members to meet informally with the Interim Pastor to talk about the needs of the congregation. The results of the conversation will be compiled and carefully studied.
  - C. From the Congregation Council - the synod representative will meet with the council to collect information about the needs and the goals of the congregation.

After the information has been collected and evaluated by the council, the Committee of Deans, composed of nine pastors and the synod staff, will select candidates for the consideration of our Call Committee.

### **3. Call Committee**

The Call committee is appointed by the congregation council. Its chief task is to identify a pastor who will provide the best possible leadership for our congregation. It is recommended that the committee will be composed of five persons whose opinions are respected by the congregation (one member of the committee may be a member of the congregation council).

After interviewing the candidates recommended by the Office of the Bishop (more than one interview is possible) and observing them conduct worship and preach, one candidate whom the Call Committee judges to be the best qualified is interviewed by the congregation council. If the interview with the council is positive, the candidate will conduct worship and preach in our congregation. Following the liturgy at an officially called congregational meeting, an election will be held.

If the candidate receives a favorable vote, a call will be extended. If the call is accepted the new pastor will probably arrive to serve our congregation in four to six weeks.

### **4. The Process Takes Time**

The process used in calling a new pastor may take six months or longer. Gathering and evaluating the data, selecting and interviewing the candidates can be very time consuming. Your committee will wish to be thorough so be patient and understanding. Pray that God will work through this process and lead us through this time of pastoral transition.



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# EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*(Meeting of departing Pastor, Congregation Council  
and Asst. to the Bishop)*  
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The questions will be asked by the Asst. to the Bishop:

1. (To Council) What's one word to describe your pastor?
  
2. (To Council) What stands out most for you about your pastor's ministry?
  
3. (To Pastor and council) What have been the highlights of your ministry?
  
4. (To Pastor) Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?
  
5. (To Pastor) What concerns do you want to share with me and the leadership concerning the future of this congregation?
  
6. (To Pastor and Council) What are areas of greatest concern that should be covered by the Interim pastor?
  
7. (To Pastor and Council) Are there any last "thank yous" anyone wants to say?



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## MEMORANDUM

To: Secretary, Congregation Council

From: Bishop

Subject: Receipt Form

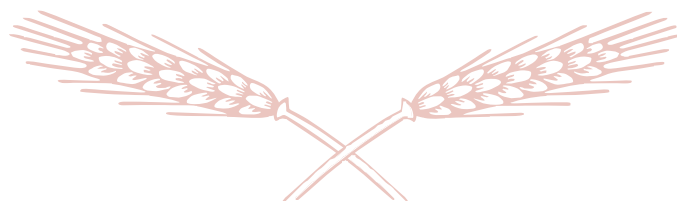
Synod Constitution requires that the secretary of the congregation shall certify that records have been received in good order from a departing pastor.

Enclosed are Receipt Forms for use in meeting this requirement. Please complete the forms and send one copy to me.

If you have any questions, please call me.

/wl

enclosureS



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# RECEIPT FORM

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Congregation \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Pastor \_\_\_\_\_

**This is to certify that all church records as shown below are up-to-date and have been placed by the pastor in the care of the secretary of the congregation.**

Parish register - membership, baptisms, deaths, weddings

Audit reports - annual financial audit

Official minutes - congregational meetings

Official minutes - congregation council

Legal file (to include):

Congregation constitution

Charters

Mortgages

Deeds

Tax records (including tax exempt numbers)

Others (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
SECRETARY

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE



*one copy for the congregation's files*

*one copy for the bishop's file*

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## ENCOURAGING BOUNDARIES:

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### Accepting the End of a Pastorate

One of the hardest things we have to do in the life of a congregation is end a pastoral relationship with someone we have cherished. Whether a pastor retires or resigns to accept a new call, the moment comes when his or her call officially ends. At that moment this individual, although loved and respected, is no longer the pastor of the congregation. This is hard for members to accept . . . it is equally hard for pastors to endure.

The Synod encourages this transition by providing for the appointment of an interim pastor (who only serves as the pastor of only your congregation) or a vice-pastor (who is under call to another congregation but also assumes temporary responsibility for the pastoral office in your congregation). This is the only person who is authorized to provide for pastoral acts within your congregation. A former pastor should not be asked to conduct a pastoral act after his or her call has ended. Should the participation of a former pastor be desired, the interim pastor (or vice-pastor) should receive the request and the interim pastor shall determine what is appropriate.

Members of the congregation encourage a smooth transition by not asking the former pastor to make return visits. Frequent visits by the former pastor make the time of transition more difficult. How can a former pastor hope to move on to the next step in his or her journey while continually returning for a wedding or a funeral? How can this pastor not offend someone by accepting one invitation but rejecting another?

After a new pastor has been called and has had a chance to become properly integrated into the life of the congregation, the new pastor may be open to inviting a former pastor to return and share in a pastoral act. Such a request should always be initiated by a contact with the new pastor. The timing must never be forced.

Most members of the congregation never stop to think about the implications of asking a former pastor to return. It could be the source of an unintended hurt or the occasion for painful misunderstanding. The Synod encourages the congregational Council to consider printing the letter from the Bishop which follows this page in an attempt to interpret this important issue for your parishioners.

