

**Handbook for Pastoral Vacancy in the Congregation
(DRAFT)**

This handbook is provided as a resource to congregations who do not have a pastor serving under call. It is a work in progress. Your input is welcome. Please feel free to contact the bishop to discuss any part of it, whether it be with questions about implementation or suggestions for improvement.

Relationships

Significant changes in pastoral relationship accompany pastoral vacancy. Termination of a call to a congregation marks the end of the pastoral relationship between the departing pastor and the congregation (both as a corporate entity and as individual members). Friendships may continue, but the pastoral relationship, which is a relationship of function and duty, does not.

When a pastor terminates the call through retirement, resignation (whether to pursue another call or to go on leave), or demission (resignation from the ELCA roster of ministers of Word and Sacrament), the pastor states that he/she no longer intends to discharge ministerial functions in that congregation (congregation being defined in terms of membership, not facilities). If the congregation terminates the call, the congregation states that it no longer intends to receive from the pastor ministerial services. When the call is terminated for cause (discipline, mental or physical incompetency, or disqualification), the larger church has stated that the individual may no longer discharge ministerial functions in any congregation of the ELCA. In this light, it is incumbent upon the former pastor to refuse requests to perform ministerial functions for the congregation or its members except when such invitation is extended by the interim pastor of the congregation. By the same token, it is incumbent upon the congregation and its members not to call upon the former pastor for ministerial services except in consultation with and through the interim pastor in consultation with the Congregational Council. To press a former pastor to perform ministerial functions in the absence of the invitation of the interim is to tempt the former pastor to violate the constitution, such violation being subject to discipline.

†S14.19. Ministers of Word and Sacrament shall respect the integrity of the ministry of congregations which they do not serve and shall not exercise ministerial functions¹ therein² unless invited to do so by the pastor, or if there is no duly called pastor, then by the interim pastor in consultation with the Congregation Council.³

¹ "Ministerial functions" is understood in terms of *C9.03 of the *Congregational Constitution*. These ministerial functions include, but are not limited, the conduct of public worship, including preaching and Eucharistic celebration, baptizing, providing pastoral care, visitation of the sick, and the performance of weddings, confirmations, funerals, or memorial services.

² "Therein" refers to the congregation, which is defined in *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (hereafter *CBCR*) 9.11 as "A congregation is a community of baptized persons..." thus, indicating the membership not the facilities.

³ This provision can be traced back to the 1748 founding of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania and arises from the unpleasantness of the Tulpehocken Confusion.

40 Your departing pastor is asked to sign the Departure Covenant. By signing the Departure Covenant, your
 41 departing pastor signals his/her intent to obey the discipline of the ELCA in this matter. An officer of your
 42 council should attest that this document has been signed, and the congregation should be notified of the
 43 expectations that accompany this change in relationship. A template (Departure Covenant Letter to
 44 Congregation) is provided to facilitate this notification. N.B., failure or refusal to execute these steps does
 45 not change the discipline of the church. Likewise, previous lapses in discipline do not change the
 46 discipline.

47
 48 At the termination of a call, an interim pastor is normally appointed. That interim pastor (as described in
 49 the following section) assumes the pastoral relationship vacated by the former pastor.

50
 51
 52 **The Interim Pastorate⁴**

53
 54 The Types of Interim Pastor

55 The term, "interim pastor," causes great confusion. The term has been used in various ways at various
 56 times in various places among people of various polities. Consequently, there is a certain ambiguity
 57 surrounding the popular usage of the term. That is to say: What I think the term represents may not be
 58 the same thing you think the term represents. To impose some order upon this chaos, let us draw a
 59 distinction between the use of the term as employed in the governing documents of the ELCA and the
 60 various forms it may take in the field.

61
 62 An interim pastor, according the governing documents of the ELCA, is a pastor appointed by the bishop of
 63 the synod with the consent of the congregation at a time of pastoral vacancy.⁵ Since the governing
 64 documents do not specify the form of the pastorate, we may enumerate the possibilities as follows:

65

	Call	F/P-time	Council	Worship	Emergencies	Visitation
Type I	Synod	Full	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Type II	Synod	Part	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Type III	No	Full	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Type IV	No	Part	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Type V	No	Part	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Type VI	No	Part	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Type VII	No	Part	Yes	Yes	No	No
Type VIII	No	Part	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Type IX	No	Part	Yes	No	Yes	No
Type X	No	Part	Yes	No	No	Yes
Type XI	No	Part	Yes	No	No	No

66
 67 As you can see, there are many different forms that an interim pastorate can take. The one thing that is
 68 common to all is "council oversight," and, under that common responsibility, comes oversight of all things
 69 related to it. Even if the interim pastor does not lead worship, he/she still has an oversight function
 70 shared with the council.⁶ Let's talk about each of these areas in greater detail.

71
 72 Call: Does the interim pastor have a letter of call? This is probably not the first question that a congregant
 73 will ask, but it is very important to the pastor (and the larger church). Pastors in the ELCA are only pastors

⁴ Some elements of this section were updated on 20 February 2020.

⁵ *CBCR* *C9.06.

⁶ *CBCR* *9.03 and *CBCR* C12.04 (assuming the *Model Constitution for Congregations* is in effect).

74 of the ELCA so long as they are on the ELCA's roster of ministers of word and sacrament. To be on this
75 roster requires that the individual has a licit letter of call or that he/she has a synod council authorized on-
76 leave from call status. Why is this important? Because on-leave from call is time limited. When the time
77 runs out, the pastor is no longer a pastor. A congregation cannot issue a call for an interim pastorate.⁷
78 This is a constitutional point: If the congregation issues a letter of call, the pastor is not an interim; he/she
79 is simply the pastor, constitutionally speaking.⁸ If the interim is to be called to serve as an interim under
80 the constitution, it is the Synod Council that issues a letter of call.⁹ This will be fairly rare. When done, it is
81 a term call, usually not exceeding three years. An interim pastorate involving a letter of call requires the
82 consent of the congregation (normally conferred by the congregation council). When a letter of call is not
83 issued, the relationship can be contractual or more open ended. When a letter of call is not issued, the
84 assignment as interim pastor is "at will," i.e., at the pleasure of the bishop.¹⁰

85
86 Full-Time/Part-Time: It is rare that an interim pastor is engaged full-time. When full-time, unless there are
87 unusual circumstances, the interim pastor should be compensated along synodical guidelines. It is
88 assumed that at full-time interim is discharging all the duties normally associated with a full-time
89 pastorate. It may be helpful to use the standard *Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities*
90 *for Ministers of Word & Sacrament under Call* as a template. In special cases, e.g., when the interim pastor
91 is being asked to provide specialized interim services such as conflict resolution, redevelopment, post-
92 traumatic care, etc., he/she should receive compensation commensurate with his/her expertise and
93 service provided. When part-time, care should be taken to establish compensation appropriate to the
94 service to be rendered. Synodical guidelines for pastoral compensation, supply preaching, etc. may be
95 consulted. The synod office should be consulted when compensation is being discussed.

96
97 Council: Oversight is a requirement incumbent upon pastors and congregations alike in all congregations
98 where the applicable language of *The Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran*
99 *Church in America* is found in the local congregational constitution.¹¹ With council oversight comes
100 oversight of all worship, instruction, and pastoral care. Oversight does not mean that the interim
101 performs these duties but rather that he/she oversees them in conjunction with the congregational

⁷ To clarify the language: the congregation cannot call someone to be an interim pastor. The congregation may issue letter of call to a currently serving interim pastor (under certain circumstances), but, once that call is issued, the pastorate is no longer interim.

⁸ A congregation may desire to call a pastor for a specific purpose and for a specific period of time. Some may refer to this colloquially as interim ministry, given that the term has been frequently applied in the past (and still is) to ministry intended to assist the congregation with some special need (e.g., conflict resolution, transition following a long-term pastorate, revisioning, etc.), but the pastor would not be an interim under the constitutional definition. When a congregation desires to call a pastor for a specific period of time (e.g., a "term call"), *CBCR* *C9.11 applies.

⁹ *CBCR* 7.41.01.c.

¹⁰ An interim without a letter of call an extension of the bishop; this may be inferred by the appointing power of the bishop. We can see a vestige of this in the formerly used term, "vice-pastor." The vice-pastor was not the deputy of the pastor or the second in line or in command to the pastor (as is the vice-president), but rather the vice-pastor was the "vicar" of the bishop. Obviously this can be confusing as "vicar" is the term used for seminarian interns, and those more familiar with other denominations will know that the term can have many different meanings.

¹¹ *CBCR* C12.12.

102 council.¹² The constitutional provision related to a pastor's attendance at council meetings also applies to
103 interim pastors. Consult the section under "Polity Concerns" found later in this document for details.
104

105 **Worship:** This is probably the first concern of a congregation entering vacancy: Who is going to lead
106 worship? An interim pastor might be engaged to lead worship, but the more common pattern is to have
107 an interim who is already serving his/her own congregation on Sunday morning. Of course, nothing would
108 prevent a congregation that is vacant from changing its worship time so as to eliminate any scheduling
109 conflict. When the interim does not lead worship, the interim still has oversight of worship (shared with
110 council). This will usually mean that one member of the congregation will be appointed to schedule supply
111 preachers, but the interim pastor has the prerogative of setting parameters (e.g, who may be used for
112 worship supply and how).
113

114 **Emergencies:** This represents emergency pastoral care (e.g., death, non-elective hospitalizations, and
115 other crises). It is very important for a congregation entering vacancy to think proactively about
116 emergencies. Having a plan in place is a better approach than waiting for the emergency to take place and
117 then scrambling to address it. Remember to include in such a plan the mechanisms employed for notifying
118 the interim pastor about the emergency.¹³ Some emergencies can be very time consuming. When one of
119 these arises, care should be taken to ensure that adequate care can be provided to those in crisis and that
120 the interim is appropriately compensated. When a death occurs, we find this category intersecting with
121 worship. It is important to remember that prerequisites may not adequately compensate the interim for
122 his/her time and expertise. Depending upon the arrangement with the interim (when the interim is not
123 full-time), it may behoove the congregation to provide additional compensation for funerals. Weddings
124 are not emergencies. Nevertheless, most of what has been said here applies, keeping in mind that
125 weddings are probably the most time-consuming part of any pastor's work. This is part and parcel of a
126 full-time pastor's work, but a part-time interim may find him/herself investing a significant portion of
127 his/her time to pre-marital preparation and the wedding weekend itself. What has been said about
128 compensation in this paragraph applies even more so to weddings.
129

130 **Visitation:** Frequently, this is not the first question asked by a congregation entering pastoral vacancy or
131 even the second, but, given enough time, the care of shut-ins, the routinely hospitalized, and the
132 institutionalized (e.g., nursing home and assisted living residents and the incarcerated) becomes a more
133 obvious concern. Sadly, this should be one of the first concerns for a congregation entering vacancy as the
134 immobile and institutionalized are completely dependent upon the church coming to them because they
135 cannot get to church on their own. Historically, the most typical interim arrangement (one where the
136 interim is the full-time pastor of his/her own congregation) has not included visitation of the shut-ins.
137 While this was often tolerated because the duration of the vacancy was expected to be relatively short,
138 care of the shut-in should be rethought and brought forward in our consciousness because we can longer
139 assume that a new call is just around the corner. Among the questions related to the care of the immobile
140 and institutionalized are questions related to Eucharistic ministry. How often should the immobile and
141 institutionalized be communed? Who will administer communion to them? Furthermore, not all ministry
142 to the immobile and institutionalized needs to be Eucharistic. How often are they visited simply to share
143 in the mutual conversation and consolation of the saints? Whether the interim is to be directly involved in

¹² *CBCR* *9.03 and *CBCR* C12.04.

¹³ A pastor can only provide pastoral care if the pastor knows about the specific need for pastoral care. A regularly serving pastor may have developed an intelligence network, but an interim pastor is, most likely, completely ignorant. A congregation should assume that the interim pastor doesn't know anyone, doesn't know their histories, and might not even know where the preferred hospital is located. A classic problem is the pastor being given the name of a person in the hospital, but the name is really a nickname; the hospital receptionist may very well say, "No one here by that name," because of HIPAA rules on confidentiality.

144 this visitation ministry needs to be addressed. Regardless, the interim has oversight duties related to this
145 ministry.

146

147 Appointment and Termination of an Interim Pastor

148

149 *C9.06. At a time of pastoral vacancy, an interim pastor shall be appointed by the
150 bishop of the synod with the consent of this congregation or the Congregation Council.

151

152 As the constitutional provision above indicates, an interim pastor is to be appointed by the bishop, but
153 this appointment power does not give the bishop *carte blanche* to appoint indiscriminately. First, the
154 bishop can only appoint someone in one of three categories:

155

- 156 • someone on the ELCA roster of ministers of word and sacrament
- 157 • someone of equivalent ordination and in good standing in a full-communion denomination¹⁴ or
- 158 • someone of equivalent ordination and in good standing in a church that confesses the Unaltered
159 Augsburg Confession upon recommendation of the bishop and consent of the synod council¹⁵

160

161 Second, the bishop cannot appoint an interim without the consent of the congregation. Usually, the
162 congregational council is the appropriate consenting agent, but, in some cases, it may be the
163 congregational meeting.

164

165 Additionally, the interim cannot be appointed over the objections of the proposed interim or, if the
166 interim is currently under a letter of call, the objections of the proposed interim's congregation (or calling
167 authority).

168

169 An interim pastor is not eligible for call to the congregation in succession with the interim appointment
170 unless "regularization" (conversion to a regular call) has been stated as an explicit possibility at the
171 initiation of the interim pastorate.¹⁶

172

173 When the interim pastor is under a formal contract for a specific period of time, the contract's provisions
174 will govern the termination of the interim.

175

176 When the interim pastor is not under a formal contract for specific period of time, the interim serves until
177 terminated by any one of the following: the bishop, the interim, or the congregation (in a manner
178 consistent with the parliamentary authority of the church).

179

180 Those provisions related to financial obligations and parish register management found in the required
181 provisions of Chapter 9 of the congregation's constitution shall apply.¹⁷

182

¹⁴ CBCR 8.62.10ff. It should be noted here that not all United Methodist Church pastors have the same ordination. "Local" pastors are not considered to have equivalency and are not, therefore, interchangeable under the full-communion agreement. Also, not all Methodists are UMC, not all Presbyterians are PCUSA, not all Reformed are RCA, not all Episcopalians are TEC any more than all Lutherans are ELCA. Full-communion agreements are with specific denominational polities, not with the tradition writ large. If you have a question, ask the bishop.

¹⁵ CBCR 8.64ff.

¹⁶ CBCR *C9.07.

¹⁷ CBCR †S14.23 and CBCR *C9.08.

183 In the Absence of an Interim Pastor

184 While not explicit, it may be inferred from the governing documents of this church that, in the absence of
185 an appointed interim pastor, the bishop is the interim pastor. There are obvious problems with the bishop
186 fulfilling that role. This bishop cannot, usually, fulfill the expectations of even the Type XI interim, the
187 least time-intensive type, because of geography, travel, and the various commitments of the of the
188 episcopal office. It may be possible for a short period of time but certainly not for an extended period of
189 time without some serious modification of method and expectation. The possibility does exist, however,
190 of a congregation contracting with the Synod for pastoral services to be provided to the congregation by
191 the bishop or other synod staff on a longer term and/or greater time-commitment basis.

192

193 During the initial months of a vacancy in the absence of an appointed interim pastor, the bishop
194 discharges the interim pastor duties as a Type XI interim. The bishop may engage others to assist in
195 providing council oversight and other vacancy ministries (e.g., emergency ministry). Those so engaged (or
196 their congregations) shall be compensated for their services by the vacant congregation on a basis agreed
197 upon by the bishop and the vacant congregation. Should such a condition persist for more than a few
198 months or should an agreement on compensation or duties be unattainable, the matter shall be referred
199 to the Synod Council.

200

201 Others Assisting the Interim Pastor

202 While it may not have been recognized, the common historic pattern of the “vice-pastor” (i.e., an interim
203 serving his/her own congregation such that he/she is not able to preach and preside in the vacant
204 congregation because of a conflicting schedule) always engaged others to assist the interim pastor in the
205 form of supply preachers. Now facing the shortage of individuals available for interim appointments and
206 also facing the lengthening duration of vacancy periods, we will likely find ourselves increasingly parceling
207 out the various ministries that need to take place during a vacancy period among multiple people. The
208 appointed interim will always have responsibility for council oversight (and all that that entails under the
209 governing documents), but someone else may be the person who directly discharges shut-in ministry,
210 another person, emergency ministry, yet another, catechetical ministry, etc.. In some situations, it shut-in
211 and emergency ministry might be better delivered by divided it up among multiple people on the basis of
212 geography, timing, or expertise. Planning and coordinating multiple people will need to be done
213 proactively and with care. In any of these situations, compensation should be considered and included in
214 the planning. Additionally, others assisting in this work may or may not be rostered in the ELCA, ordained,
215 etc., but their ecclesiastical standing needs to be consistent with the service to be rendered.

216

217

218

Worship during Vacancy¹⁸

219

220 Oversight

221 Oversight of worship is jointly exercised by the interim pastor and the congregational council.¹⁹ The spirit
222 of this shared oversight should be collaborative and mutually respectful for the sake of our common goal,
223 namely the salvation of God’s people and their edification and advancement in sanctification. All involved
224 should keep in mind the right division of Law and Gospel, the distinction between essentials and
225 *adiaphora*, and the ordering of *adiaphora* for the sake of good order and charity. In some cases, local
226 custom may be at variance with the norms of the church. In these cases, the distinction between
227 essentials and *adiaphora* is especially important. The interim pastor, being bound by his/her ordination
228 vows, is expected to address these cases with charity yet firmly. At the same time, the interim pastor is
229 not to impose merely aesthetic preference upon the congregation. The congregational council, bound by

¹⁸ This section, "Worship during Vacancy," was redrafted on 3 May 2019.

¹⁹ *CBCR* *9.03.a.1-3; *CBCR* *9.03.b.1; *CBCR* C12.04.

230 the constitution of the church, should to be equally diligent in supporting right and edifying practice,
231 being mindful of the authority of the Lutheran Confessions in these matters.²⁰

232

233 Preaching

234 When an interim pastor does not preach or arrange for supply preachers, an authorized member of the
235 congregation shall arrange for supply preachers within the parameters set by the interim. Unless
236 indicated otherwise by the interim, the following are accepted sources for supply preachers:

237

- 238 • The synod's approved list of supply pastors and deacons
- 239 • The synod's approved list of Bishop's Lay Worship Leaders
- 240 • Pastors, deacons, and lay preachers on the approved supply preacher lists of our neighboring
241 synods
- 242 • Professors and staff of the ELCA seminaries
- 243 • Students of the ELCA seminaries who have been approved for such service by their respective
244 seminaries
- 245 • Pastors of full-communion partners who have equivalent ordination (with the prior approval of
246 the bishop)
- 247 • Deacons of The Episcopal Church (with prior approval of the bishop).
- 248 • Pastors of church bodies that subscribe to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession but are not in full-
249 communion with the ELCA who have equivalent ordination (with the prior approval of the
250 bishop)

251

252 Compensation shall be provided consistent with the supply preaching guidelines of our synod.

253

254 When a supply preacher cannot be secured, the reading of a sermon or other edifying work is an
255 acceptable and venerable tradition among American Lutherans, particularly in our mountains and valleys.
256 The interim pastor (or bishop) may be consulted for a list of recommended resources.

257

258 The Eucharist (The Sacrament of the Altar)

259 The Eucharist shall only be presided over by a pastor of the ELCA (on the roster of ministers of Word and
260 Sacrament and in good standing). With prior approval of the bishop, a pastor who holds equivalent
261 ordination and is in good standing in either a full-communion partner or a church body that subscribes to
262 the Unaltered Augsburg Confession may preside with the prior approval of the bishop. No pastor or
263 congregation has the prerogative to authorize lay Eucharistic presidency.²¹

264

265 Keeping in mind that, although salutary and commended, weekly celebration of the Eucharist is not
266 required; the principal assembly of the faithful is not defective for lack of the Sacrament. When, however,
267 the Sacrament cannot be made available to the congregants for an extended period of time at the regular
268 Sunday morning assembly, the congregation may gather at a time other than Sunday morning when a
269 supply pastor (who is not available on Sunday morning) might be engaged; there is no law against
270 celebrating the Eucharist on any night of the week or day other than Sunday.

271

²⁰ In those cases where significant disagreement arises over worship practice, it is helpful to take a step back and analyze the practice in question. Does the practice comport with the Confessions? Is there justification for it in the local setting? This may require that those involved, interim and council engage in a study of the Confessions and liturgical history and practice. At the same time, study of the local history and culture is required. Prudent decisions are unlikely when there is ignorance of any of these facets.

²¹ *CBCR 7.31.09.*

272 Reservation of the Sacrament for the purpose of communing the assembly is not encouraged. The
273 bishop’s authorization is required for communion with reserved Sacrament, and those disciplines outlined
274 by the bishop in such an authorization shall be employed.

275

276 Baptism

277 Under non-emergency conditions, only a pastor of the church baptizes. In an emergency, per the tradition
278 of the church, anyone can baptize, but it must be understood that emergencies are infrequent and
279 unexpected.²² For example, a baptism planned for Sunday morning at worship is, by definition, not an
280 emergency; one does not plan an emergency.

281

282 Although rightly commended, the administration of Baptism within the context of the principal worship
283 assembly of the congregation is required neither by canon nor by Confession. When a supply pastor
284 cannot be engaged for a Sunday morning Baptism, a Baptism at some other time should be arranged.
285 Except in unusual circumstances, the day and time of such a Baptism should be announced at the
286 preceding principal worship assembly of the congregation, invitation to attend being made to the
287 congregants.

288

289 Confirmation

290 Confirmation may only be administered by a pastor of the church. While many congregations have
291 associated confirmation with one or another holiday (e.g., Pentecost, Reformation Sunday, Palm Sunday,
292 etc.), confirmation may be administered on any day. Confirmation may only be administered with the
293 concurrence of the interim pastor and the congregational council.²³

294

295 Confession & Absolution

296 Confession & Absolution is practiced among us in many forms. The Brief Order of Confession and
297 Forgiveness is the one most commonly experienced by our congregants given its regular use as part of the
298 Sunday service. The Service of Corporate Confession and Forgiveness, what was once called “the
299 preparatory service” or the “penitential service,” is less well known, though elements of it appear in the
300 context of the Maundy Thursday liturgy. The Order for Private Confession and Forgiveness is probably the
301 least known, and many mistakenly believe that Lutherans jettisoned this practice in the Reformation,
302 even though the *Augsburg Confession* explicitly states that this should not be allowed to fall into disuse.
303 Lastly, those familiar with Compline know of the short confession included in the prayer office.

304

305 Neither the Service of Corporate Confession and Forgiveness nor the Order for Private Confession and
306 Forgiveness should be presided over by anyone other than a pastor of the church. Should an individual
307 desire private confession, the interim should be notified.

308

309 Weddings

310 Weddings within the congregation²⁴ are to be discharged by the interim pastor or his/her appointee. If
311 the congregation has wedding policies, the interim pastor should be advised and given a copy at his/her
312 orientation to the congregation.

²² Emergency Baptisms must employ the Trinitarian baptismal formula and water. An emergency Baptism should only be performed by someone other than a pastor *in extremis* (i.e., when a pastor is not present and death is imminent). All emergency Baptisms should be reported to the interim pastor as soon as possible following the administration.

²³ *CBCR* *C8.03.

²⁴ As previously mentioned, “congregation” is defined in terms of membership, not building. If a member of the congregation is getting married during the vacancy, the interim pastor has the same prerogatives as a pastor under regular call to the congregation. A departing pastor should consult with the incoming interim or the bishop about those weddings that were scheduled prior to the termination of call. Of

313

314 Funerals

315 Funerals within the congregation²⁵ are to be discharged by the interim pastor or his/her appointee. Unlike
316 weddings, which are governed by state law with respect to the qualifications of the presiding minister,
317 funerals may be performed by any person designated by the interim pastor.

318

319 Forms for Worship

320 The most common service used among our people on Sunday mornings is titled, "Holy Communion." This
321 may be confusing because this is the name given to the service in both the *LBW* (a.k.a., the Green Book)
322 and the *ELW* (a.k.a., the Cranberry Book) even when the Eucharist is not celebrated.²⁶ The technical term
323 for the worship service for Holy Communion but without Holy Communion is "ante-communion" (or
324 "before communion"). It is unfortunate that this practice ever developed, but it has been among us since
325 colonial times, a product of necessity. This ante-communion may be used in the absence of a pastor, and
326 it may be the easiest thing to use, given familiarity. Your congregation should know, however, that there
327 are other forms for worship that are more appropriate for times when the Eucharist is not to be part of
328 the worship gathering .

329

330 Service of the Word: Service of the Word is appropriate whenever preaching is part of the worship
331 gathering but the Eucharist is not. There are significant differences in the details of this form as presented
332 in the *LBW*, *WOV*, and *ELW*.²⁷ If your congregation would like explore this option, please contact the
333 bishop for advice and assistance.

334

335 Morning Prayer (Matins): The Matins service is found in *SBH*, *LBW*, and *ELW*. Again, there are significant
336 differences between them, but the purpose and nature is the same, a substantial service of corporate
337 morning prayer appropriate for Sundays and other days of the week. Preaching may be a part of it (or the
338 reading of a sermon or other edifying work), but the service can be used without preaching. It can vary in
339 mood from quietly contemplative to quite festive depending upon the options selected. If your
340 congregation would like explore this option, please contact the bishop for advice and assistance.

341

342 Evening Prayer (Vespers): For evening non-Eucharistic worship, this is the most common form, and many
343 of our congregations have used it. It is found in *SBH*, *LWB*, and *ELW*, though the details vary from one to
344 the other. *Holden Village Evening Prayer* has become very popular. *Holden* should only be used after
345 consultation with the bishop with respect to modifications that should be made to correct for liturgical
346 and theological problems in the text of the prayer office.

347

348 Compline: Would that Compline were a regular part of our congregational life! This is a beautiful prayer
349 service. It is simple and unadorned. It is appropriate as a way to close off an evening council meeting,
350 Bible Study, etc..

351

352 Order of Service

course, if the member's fiancé(e)'s pastor is conducting the wedding at a site other than the
congregation's church building, the question is moot.

²⁵ See the preceding footnote.

²⁶ In the older books, the general order for Sunday morning worship was simply called, "The Service," or
the "Morning Service." "Holy Communion" was appended to that service.

²⁷ For the curious, a form of this (under two different names) can be found in the *Book of Worship with
Tunes* (1888).

353 If multiple supply preachers are to be engaged, it is strongly encouraged that a standard liturgy, i.e., a
354 liturgy found in *SBH*, *LBW*, *WOV*, or *ELW*, be used, and that the rubrics be followed, noting appropriate
355 employment of propers.²⁸ Supply preachers should not be expected to provide “Children’s sermons.”
356

357

358

359

Polity Concerns²⁹

Congregational Meetings and Council Meetings

361 As mentioned in under the “Council” section under the “Interim Pastorate” heading, a council meeting
362 may not convene in the absence of the interim pastor unless the interim pastor approves the agenda in
363 advance and, in such a circumstance, no business other than that on the pre-approved agenda may be
364 conducted---understand, discussion may take place, but actions (votes) on non-agenda items are not in
365 order.³⁰ The interim pastor has all the same rights and duties with respect to council meetings as the
366 regularly called pastor of the congregation in question.³¹ The interim pastor may ask another pastor, a
367 serving seminarian, or a lay member of the Synod Council, or someone else appointed by the bishop to
368 take his/her place, in which case additional items may be added to the pre-approved agenda, but the
369 substitute shall have only voice in the meeting.

370

371 The Congregation Meeting is another matter. The Model does not include a provision requiring the
372 pastor’s presence. Your local constitution might. Be sure to verify which case applies. Even if it is not
373 required, it may not be wise to convene without the interim pastor, and certainly not wise to construct an
374 agenda without consultation with the interim pastor.

375

Parochial Reports

377 Parochial reports still need to be filed during pastoral vacancy. The interim pastor should be consulted
378 about the best approach to completing these.

379

Synod Assembly

381 Congregations still send voting members to Synod Assembly. A proven method for selecting voting
382 members for Synod Assembly is for the Congregational Meeting to elect them at the same time
383 Congregational Council members are elected. If that is not done, Congregational Council should start
384 thinking about appointing voting members to Synod Assembly by the end of February.

385

Review of Membership

387 Unless the congregation’s constitution lacks the provision found in the *Model Constitution for*
388 *Congregations*, the council is responsible for an annual review of the membership roster.³² This should be

²⁸ “Propers” refers to those elements of the service that change based upon the day or the season, or, to put it another way, those elements that are proper for the day as opposed to those that are ordinarily done most days. For example, the Lenten verse (gospel acclamation in the *ELW*) is proper to Lent, but the *Kyrie*, part of the ordainary of the mass, is done, ordinarily, every Sunday.

²⁹ In all matters related to polity, one must verify whether the local congregation’s constitution is identical to *The Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, latest edition. Some provisions are required, others are merely recommended. It is possible, though unlikely, that your congregation may be slightly different. Everything herein assumes that the provisions in *The Model* are in force in your congregation.

³⁰ *CBCR* C12.12.

³¹ *CBCR* *C9.07.

³² *CBCR* C12.07.

389 done as soon as possible as an accurate census of the congregation will assist in the development of the
390 Ministry Site Profile that will be used in the call process. The council should undertake this in consultation
391 with the interim pastor. Vacancy is an appropriate time to rectify the membership roster, removing those
392 who are no longer members of the congregation. Many council members have been surprised to discover
393 how many of their members have moved from the area, have joined other congregations, or (and this is
394 not a joke) have died. Advice on the conduct of a membership roster review is available from the Synod
395 Office. Note well, before proceeding with any votes related to calling a new pastor, the voting
396 membership roster should be in good order. Only those meeting the standards for voting membership
397 may vote in the Congregational Meeting.³³

398

399 Stewardship

400 Council should be prepared for shifts in giving. While costs will most likely decrease during vacancy, laxity
401 in maintaining income levels may place the congregation in a difficult position when the next pastor is
402 called and expenses return to normal levels. Council should conduct a review of stewardship patterns
403 (again, to help in the preparation of the Ministry Site Profile) and monitor them throughout the vacancy.

404

405 Constitutional Updates

406 If the congregation has not regularly updated its governing documents, vacancy is an appropriate time to
407 do so as part of the preparation for calling a new pastor. The Synod Office is prepared to offer assistance
408 in the form a “constitution workshops” to congregations that request it.

409

410

411

412 **Questions?**

413

414 Should congregational leadership have any questions, contact the bishop at Bishop@WW-WMD.org. In
415 emergencies, contact the Bishop at 304-680-5388.

416

Desunt cetera

³³ By way of example, there was an incident in which a call vote on a new pastor was attended by more people than had showed up at Christmas Eve and Easter services. Some regular members reported that some of those voting hadn't darkened the door of the church for several years. The congregation, not being prepared for this eventuality, was effectively thwarted in its desire to call as pastor by those who had no right, under our constitution, to participate in the call vote. Unless a congregation can verify the list of those properly enfranchised, it risks being victim to the unscrupulous.

417
418 **Appendix: Applicable Provisions of ELCA Governing Documents**

419 8 January 2018

420 (DRAFT)

421 †S14.23. During service to a congregation, an interim pastor shall have the rights and duties in the
422 congregation of a regularly called pastor. The interim pastor may delegate the same in part to an interim
423 supply pastor with the consent of the bishop of this synod. The interim pastor and any rostered minister
424 who may assist shall refrain from exerting influence in the selection of a pastor. Upon completion of
425 service, the interim pastor shall certify to the bishop of this synod that the parochial records, for the
426 period for which the interim pastor was responsible, are in order.

427
428 *C9.06. At a time of pastoral vacancy, an interim pastor shall be appointed by the bishop of the synod
429 with the consent of this congregation or the Congregation Council.

430
431 *C9.07. During the period of service, an interim pastor shall have the rights and duties in the congregation
432 of a regularly called pastor and may delegate the same in part to a supply pastor with the consent of the
433 bishop of the synod and this congregation or Congregation Council. The interim pastor and any rostered
434 minister providing assistance shall refrain from exerting influence in the selection of a pastor. Unless
435 previously agreed upon by the Synod Council, an interim pastor is not available for a regular call to the
436 congregation served.

437
438 *C9.03. Consistent with the faith and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,

439 a. Every minister of Word and Sacrament shall:

- 440 1) preach the Word;
441 2) administer the sacraments;
442 3) conduct public worship;
443 4) provide pastoral care;
444 5) seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the ministry of the Gospel;
445 6) impart knowledge of this church and its wider ministry through distribution of its communications and
446 publications;
447 7) witness to the Kingdom of God in the community, in the nation, and abroad; and
448 8) speak publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, calling for justice and proclaiming
449 God's love for the world.

450 b. Each pastor with a congregational call shall, within the congregation:

- 451 1) offer instruction, confirm, marry, visit the sick and distressed, and bury the dead;
452 2) relate to all schools and organizations of this congregation;
453 3) install regularly elected members of the Congregation Council;
454 4) with the council, administer discipline; and
455 5) endeavor to increase the support given by the congregation to the work of the ELCA churchwide
456 organization and of the *(insert name of synod)* Synod of the ELCA.

457
458 C12.12. A quorum for the transaction of business shall consist of a majority of the members of the
459 Congregation Council, including the [senior] pastor or interim pastor, except when the [senior] pastor or
460 interim pastor requests or consents to be absent and has given prior approval to the agenda for a
461 particular regular or special meeting, which shall be the only business considered at that meeting. Chronic
462 or repeated absence of the [senior] pastor or interim pastor who has refused approval of the agenda of a
463 subsequent regular or special meeting shall not preclude action by the Congregation Council, following
464 consultation with the synodical bishop.

465
466 †S14.19. Ministers of Word and Sacrament shall respect the integrity of the ministry of congregations
467 which they do not serve and shall not exercise ministerial functions therein unless invited to do so by the
468 pastor, or if there is no duly called pastor, then by the interim pastor in consultation with the
469 Congregation Council.