

A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE DIVINE CALL

The congregation extends or issues “divine calls” to pastors and teachers. This article is intended to review what a call is and how the calling procedure works.

While every Christian has the call to proclaim Christ to the world, in order to serve in the **public** ministry (generally speaking, pastors and Lutheran school teachers), a specific call is necessary. The prophets and apostles were called directly by the Lord himself. This is termed an “immediate call.” But since the Day of Ascension, the Lord calls pastors and teachers through his church. This is termed a “mediate call.” No one, then, should preach or teach in the Christian congregation without having been called by that body to do so. (For example, your pastors are called to shepherd and counsel the flock of St. Paul’s, not the members of other congregations unless proper arrangements have been made to do so. Also, when there is a substitute pastor or teacher, although no formal call is issued, it is understood that the substitute is being called to teach or preach only for that day or specified period of time. Sometimes this is referred to as a “limited call.”)

Although a call is issued through the Christian congregation (mediately), it is still divine. In Antioch the Holy Spirit commanded the congregation, “*Separate for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them*” (Acts 13:2). Scripture also uses the term “choose”: “*And [Jesus] chose twelve of them, whom he designated apostles*” (Lk 6:13). The Lord, through his believers, chooses or selects certain men and women (who have been specifically trained and possess certain qualifications as determined by the calling body) to serve in the field of the public ministry.

The divine call is not a human arrangement. It was established by the Lord for the accomplishment of his will. Once again, he does this calling through his church.

The divinity of the call is of great value to the pastor or teacher as well as the congregation. Those called by the Lord for service will not seek their own honor, but the honor of him who called them. They will understand that their position is not an earthly “job” or “occupation,” but is as the term says, a “calling” -- where one’s service is done to please God first and foremost by remaining faithful

to his Word. The divinity of the call also helps pastors and teachers to persevere in spite of difficulties, treat one another with respect, and encourage one another in spite of human failings.

Because of this divine call, the congregation will diligently hear their pastor and act on the Word that is preached, entrust their children to their teachers, and accept their preaching and teaching as God’s Word. They will acknowledge that their called workers are sent by God and have not been “hired.” The congregation will then treat these workers with respect, even though weaknesses and failings may be recognized. They will accept their Christian admonition and correction as laid out for the church in Matthew 18 and reasserted in the constitution of the congregation.

When a congregation wishes to issue a divine call, it is given a list of names of prospective candidates through the District President. (The current president of our Northern Wisconsin District is the Rev. Joel Zank of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Appleton [as of 2020].) In the case of extending a divine call to a prospective teacher, the list of candidates originates in our synodical offices in Milwaukee through the Commission on Parish Schools. They have records of those who are properly trained and certified through our Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod to teach in our schools.

When a list is presented to the congregation brief and basic information is provided. It is to help indicate teaching preferences and particular areas of ability to help guide the congregation in its decision. It is not a “resume” for hiring, nor is it a job application. It is not a document that needs to be independently researched. It is not a guide to have members call around to “check out” a person beforehand, which can, in fact, be very subjective and cause the 8th Commandment to be broken. The person being called does not need to be known by everyone or even anyone in the congregation. The voters are simply asked to make as wise a decision as possible with the information at hand **under the guidance of the Holy Spirit**, who is among the congregation at the meeting. Then the members are asked to trust the Holy Spirit to lead the person issued the divine call to make the best decision for God’s kingdom. If it happens later, as it does in some instances, that the calling body and worker have some problems to iron out, this does not change the truth that the Spirit has guided the deci-

sion. We firmly believe, as Paul says in Romans 2:28, that *“in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* Even difficulties, under the power of God, lead to eternal benefits.

When a called worker who is already serving one congregation receives a call to serve another, he or she needs to make a prayerfully and carefully deliberated decision under the Spirit’s guidance. In effect, until a decision is made, the worker is holding two calls. Ultimately this question must be answered: Where can this individual, with his/her God-given abilities and gifts, best serve the Lord in his church? Decisions are not to be made based on selfish reasons. Being called from one church or position to another is never considered to be a “promotion.” One cannot be promoted any higher than to serve the Lord as a called worker in the public ministry in whatever capacity that might be.

When a called worker receives a divine call, the calling body sends a call form and cover letter explaining the nature of the call and defining the support pledged by the congregation to the worker. The worker is then to notify the calling body and the District President that the divine call has been received and deliberations have begun. Normal response time for deliberating a call is three to four weeks, although under certain circumstances it may take a little more or less time.

When a worker declines (does not accept) a call he/she notifies the calling body about the decision, but has no obligation to reveal specific reasons. A congregation will trust that his/her reasons for declining the call are Spirit-led and valid. When a call is accepted, the worker will seek to serve cheerfully under that divine call as it has been issued to the very best of his/her ability.

Divine calls may be terminated by the calling body only for very specific reasons set forth in Scripture. Workers may resign their calls, but our synod has guidelines to follow when such an event occurs.

This document is intended to help us understand a little better, or review what we already knew about, the divine call. Not all church bodies follow these same procedures. But we pray that God will lead our WELS to continue to do so in a way that pleases him until he returns on the Last Day.



Below are the words of solemn promise the congregation makes to a teacher, as provided in the official WELS printed call form:

“On our part we solemnly promise:

1. To receive you as a servant of Jesus Christ for our children.

2. To accord you the honor and love that we owe you as a servant of Christ.

3. To support your work among us with our prayers and personal assistance.

4. To send our children to school punctually and regularly.

5. To aid you in maintaining the proper Christian discipline.

6. To provide for your proper maintenance according to our ability in compliance with the Word of God, and for the present to pay you promptly and regularly a salary of \$_____ per _____, and (whatever other benefits apply).

May the Lord lead you to accept our call as coming from him and bless your labors among us for the growth of our Christian elementary school to the glory of his name and the salvation of many souls.”