

GUIDELINES FOR PASTORS CONSIDERING THE DIVINE CALL

1. Receiving a Call

When a pastor receives a call, he should acknowledge it by letter/email. It would be best for the pastor to wait until he has received the call documents before writing such an acknowledgment. Copies of this correspondence should be sent to his district president, the president of the district in which the parish holds membership, the parish's vacancy pastor, and his circuit counsellor. The pastor should notify the parish he is presently serving, and do so to the largest gathering of members, probably at a worship service. The pastor should contact the district office to inform them of the appropriate time to post the information on the district website.

2. Considering a Call

Whenever a pastor considers a call, there is an appropriate tension between wanting to decide quickly and taking enough time to determine the will of God. The work of the Spirit may be hindered as much by making too hasty a decision as by taking too much time in the consideration of a call. What is best for the present parish, the parish calling him, as well as the well-being of the pastor and his family, are all important components of a decision to accept or decline a call.

More often than not, our Lord makes His will known to us through those around us. Consequently, as a pastor considers a call, he will need to consult with the following people or groups of people: the parish presently served, the calling parish, his family, trusted colleagues, and those who know the congregations involved, for example, the circuit counsellor and the district president. It is important that the pastor keep himself open to the counsel and advice of his colleagues. Those who offer such counsel need to be available, open and honest.

As a matter of policy, the pastor elect should announce a "target date" for reaching his decision. Experience suggests that three to four weeks is an adequate amount of time for prayerful consideration and for discussion with the appropriate people. The point is not to tie the hands of the Spirit, but to respect the integrity of the parish by responding to the call in a reasonable and responsible manner.

Experience also suggests that if a pastor cannot decide to take a call, he should decline it. If a pastor has doubts about accepting a call, he should decline it. In either case, the commitments and responsibilities of his present call should prevail.

3. Declining a Call

When a pastor declines a call, he should formally notify the calling parish of his decision. Courtesy suggests that a telephone call to the appropriate representatives of the calling parish be made giving his decision and indicating that a formal letter will follow. It is not always necessary to give reasons for declining the call. However, do not send a letter chastising the congregation for any problems you see there. If you have concerns, share

them with that district president. All of the official call documents should be returned to the calling congregation.

The pastor should formally notify his present parish of his decision, again before the largest number of people. Copies of any correspondence should be shared with the same people with whom he shared the receipt of the call. Your letter should not chastise the congregation for problems you see there.

4. Accepting a Call

When a pastor accepts a call, he should notify the calling parish of his decision. This formal notification should be by letter. The "Acceptance" portion of the "Supplement to the Diploma of Vocation" should be included with this letter. Courtesy suggests that the letter of notification be preceded by a telephone call to the appropriate representatives of the parish. He should give some indication about the date on which he will terminate his present ministry and arrive in his new parish.

If the call is to another district, the pastor should formally request that his district president transfer him to the new district. Arrangements for the installation date should be made in consultation with the chairman of the parish, the elders, the vacancy pastor, the circuit counsellor, and the district president. The president of the district in which the calling parish is a member should be requested to authorize the installation. The district president must give permission to whoever will be performing the installation.

The pastor should notify his present parish that he has been led to accept the call. He should formally request a peaceful release from his call as of a specific date. A letter from the parish to each member may be helpful at this point. While the pastor should not "run away," it is usually best if he plans to leave for his new field as soon as arrangements can be made. The present parish should be notified of the time or the date of the last service. The circuit counsellor will arrange a meeting with the chairman of the parish, and elders to discuss arrangements for vacancy, and to make plans for the pre-call meeting, which will include the district, president.

The departing pastor should not attend meetings of the parish in which the matter of calling the next pastor is discussed. The pastor should not name his own successor. The vacancy pastor and circuit counselor shall submit any prospective pastors' names to the district president. If the departing pastor has any suggestion of names, he should forward them to the district president, not to the parish. If there are any problems in the parish, these should be shared with the district president and reconciliation attempted before calling.