

A Brief Explanation of the Call Process

As told by the NOWLeading Podcast

A District President who also serves as a matchmaker? It's not the premise of a new reality show, but is actually what happens when a congregation goes through the call process.

"I've come to see this as my most important job, because I think there's no more important decision that a congregation can make than who their pastor is going to be," President Paul Linnemann said during an episode of the NOWLeading podcast (listen to the full episode below).

President Linnemann and his executive assistant Dust Kunkel talked about how the call process is similar to a matchmaking effort, because each pastor has different skills, abilities, experiences that they bring to the table. Linnemann seeks to find a good fit, doing his best to make sure that both parties (pastor and congregation) will be compatible together.

The call process is a multi-step effort:

First, congregations complete a [self-study](#) to better understand what their purpose is. The idea is that they will first start by taking a look at themselves. The goal is to answer the question: "Why has God put us here in this community?" rather than asking, "Who's going to be our next pastor."

"It's actually really important for a congregation in the call process to do their due diligence with [the self-study], to use this document as a way to take a snapshot of who they are in that moment and what they're looking for," Kunkel said.

After the self-study is completed, members can fill out a [nomination form](#) that is provided by the District Office. Note that each congregation has different rules for how this must be done. Then Linnemann receives the nominations and adds his own names that he finds while sorting through the nationwide database of all LCMS pastors. He does searches based on characteristics, and then reads a lengthy Self Evaluation Tool (SET) that each pastor has filled out; this helps him determine whether it would be a good match.

After this list is completed, he replies with a letter to the congregation, which has a few main components:

-- He makes observations on around 7-15 things that stood out to him in the self study. "I want the people that are on the ground in that area to get a sense that either I've gotten a picture of who you are, or if some of my observations aren't accurate, I would ask you to correct those," he said.

-- Then he writes a paragraph about each name on the nomination list, offering three specific pieces of information:

1. He will tell congregations if he knows the pastor personally
2. He will offer his take on the match: whether or not it's good, any areas of stress, encourage conversation around certain matters, etc.
3. The he will state that this person either "Would be a good fit for your ministry"; "Would not be a good fit for your ministry"; or "May be a good fit," with specific recommendations about things to explore to help discern whether the match is right.

"What's really important about our working together is that people – all of us – need to perform the ministry that we're given," Linnemann said. "And the ministry that we're given has to do with the call that we have. District Presidents are given the responsibility of dealing with call lists. And so I want to be faithful to that, and I want to do the best that I can for our congregations as they seek to call their next pastor."

For more information or additional resources, check out the [Call Process](#) on the NOW website.