

## Calling a Pastor

### The Rights & Privileges of a Congregation

There is much confusion in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod these days about just who it is that God has set in place as His means of determining which pastors should serve which congregations. In some districts of the LCMS, congregations have been given the impression that they may only choose a pastor with the approval of the District President (DP) or his emissary, and that all information concerning pastors under consideration must come from the District President's office, and if no information is provided the congregation must drop such pastors from their Call List.

District Presidents, primarily, have been given the task of providing information on pastors as requested by calling congregations. However, they do not have the right to refuse such information or to impose artificial stipulations for obtaining it, such as a demonstration of prior experience with the candidate. The Bylaws of the LCMS only require that a District President be "consulted" and that his opinions be "considered." Beyond that, he has no right to dictate anything to the congregation other than what the conditions of membership in the LCMS Constitution and Bylaws indicate.

All District Presidents of the LCMS should understand this, yet a good number are not in compliance with the ruling of the LCMS Commission on Constitutional Matters rendered nearly a decade ago concerning this matter. As you can see from it (back page), there is nothing in the Constitution or Bylaws of the LCMS that prevents the pastors of the Synod from providing such a service, whether on the local, district, or synodical level—though such a service is generally delegated to the DP as part of the duties of his office. Thus, if your District President does not comply with your request for information in a timely manner, (and, therefore, has not complied with the CCM's ruling of 3/9/97), he is abusing his office and should be rebuked for such abuse. He (and everyone else) must recognize that the duty and privilege of Calling pastors does not reside in the man-made office of District President, but in Christ's holy Church as manifest in the local congregation. In carrying out this duty and privilege faithfully, you are not only synodically-mandated to seek the advice of the District President, but free to ask advice of anyone and everyone who might be of service to Christ's Church and Gospel.

### 1997 CCM Ruling

On March 9, 1997, the Commission on Constitutional Matters considered [this question]... "Is the District President constitutionally empowered to edit a vacant congregation's call list by refusing to provide personal information on some individuals, even when that information is specifically requested by the congregation?"

In response to this question, the answer is no, except that he has a right to delete any information which might subject the District President or the district to legal liability.

You also asked, "Can a congregation rightfully call an individual whose name does not appear on a call list received from the District President?"

Since the Synod is only advisory to the congregation with respect to self-government, the answer to this question is yes, provided the individual is in good standing on the synodical roster, i.e., neither restricted or suspended.

Finally, you asked, "Do the Synodical Constitution and Bylaws in any way preclude the participation of the ministerium in the call process, i.e., the suggesting of names to lay members of a vacant congregation?"

In response, the Commission would observe that this matter of advising congregations in the calling of pastors and teachers is specifically assigned to the District President as part of his calling, his *kleros*.

While the Constitution and Bylaws do not specifically preclude the ministerium from participation in the call process, they nowhere identify this activity as part of their calling, their *kleros*.

*"We dare never give them occasion to think: 'If you want to get a pastor, you'll have to support the president...' No, a congregation should and must know that there is no need to fear that we will touch its right; it must decide whom to call, and we have nothing to say about that. We merely say: 'If you want to act with foresight, wisdom, and humility in dealing with such a sacred matter, then get advice from the best advisors—and as a general rule those are the District presidents. But we do not insist that you must go to the president.'"*

CFW Walther, 11<sup>th</sup> Synodical Convention, 1863

*This is presented by The Augustana Ministerium. If you have any questions, see the website at [augustanaministerium.org](http://augustanaministerium.org) to obtain contact information.*