

# Call Lists and Accompanying Information

[Presented to the Metro North-South Pastoral Conference on November 14, 1988]

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The highest of positions is residency in the kingdom of God. This unique position of every believer is inherent with both privilege and responsibility. Privilege of being God's child. Responsibility to give testimony to the truth of salvation in our Lord Jesus. This position demands the best we have in every respect. Yet, because the saints are also sinners, there will be imperfection, mistakes and sins connected with the execution of the position.

Consequently in all areas, including that of calls and accompanying information, there is no perfection. Congregations may fail in assessing their needs correctly. District presidents may inadvertently include men without the specific qualities that seem to be needed. Voters may be influenced to call a less desirable person for an improper motive. The called person may have failed to take into account all needs in the decision process. Circumstances may change, people may change, needs may change and what was once considered good, becomes less so.

However, as long as the earth remains the church will exist. As long as the church exists, there will be need for the public ministry. As long as there is a public ministry, there will be *call lists and accompanying information*, the topic of this paper. We shall look at this topic by examining:

## I. The Need For Call Lists

The church has but one ministry. Jesus said it, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19,20). In order that this may be done he has made the church, "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9). The believer testifies both individually and collectively. Individually, in his daily and private life, he testifies and witnesses to that which he has seen and heard by faith. In order that this might be done decently and in order on a wider basis, believers collectively use the Lord ordained public ministry. "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers..." (1 Cor. 12:28). The person in the public ministry testifies in behalf of those who have collectively asked, called, him. The difference then, is this: The individual Christian testifies on his own behalf in his personal and private life. The called individual ministers on behalf of those who call him, in public.

St. Paul writes, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?...Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ," (Rom. 10:14, 15, 17). There is a need. A need to have someone preach. Someone who has been called to do that. But who is to do it? How is he to be selected?

When we examine the various scripture references where individuals were chosen to serve in the public ministry, we do not have a well defined and spelled out manner in which it is to be done. When we read the account of Matthias being chosen to replace Judas, Acts 1:21-26, we note several things.

There was a need. Judas was dead.

They were to choose from their midst one who had been with the disciples and Jesus "the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's

baptism to the time Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

“They proposed two men: Joseph...and Matthias.”

“Then they prayed.”

“Then they drew lots, and the lot fell to Matthias.”

From this we note, there was a need; there were qualifications; nominations were made; prayer was offered; lots were cast. We are not told *why* it was necessary to fill Judas’s position, or *how* the nominations were proposed, (were more than the two qualified?) or *what* mechanics were used in the drawing of lots.

In the account of choosing the seven, Acts 6:1-7, we note, a need, “widows were being overlooked”; qualifications, of being able to “wait on tables...full of the Spirit and wisdom”; the selection, “they chose” seven; they were installed into office, “the apostles prayed and laid their hands on them.” Again, we are not told how they were chosen.

Acts 14:23 indicates that “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church.” Again, how this was done is not told us. Elders were to be appointed by Titus, Tim. 1:5, but nothing is said about how. Nor are we told how the individual in 2 Cor. 8:19 “was chosen by the churches to accompany” Paul’s party with the offering.

We can say that as there was need the church in various ways chose individuals to fill that need. That is what the church continues to do. The church needs pastors, teachers, elders, evangelism, stewardship, building, constitution and cleaning committees. The church chooses them and, because the Lord would have all things done in an orderly manner, it determines an orderly way to do it, then does it.

As the church chooses these men it can rightly be said that they have been chosen by God, as is indicated to the elders in Acts 20:28, “Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” Through his church the Lord calls those to serve in the public ministry as the need arises. How that is done in our midst can be seen in:

## **II. The Make-Up of the Call Lists**

The church in our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, has determined that an orderly way of making call lists in the area of pastors and teachers, is to give that responsibility to district presidents. Congregations with membership in our fellowship agree to this process. When the need arises they turn to the district president and seek his help in presenting a call list which is nothing more than a list of men he considers qualified to meet the needs of the call as presented by the congregation.

Whom shall the district president place on the call list? He may choose any Christian who has the necessary qualifications. This would include such things as the same fellowship, gifts, talents and ability needed to fill and execute the needs of the call. This is determined on the basis of his personal faith and attitude, on his training and on his experience, be that as a vicar or student teacher or through service in various congregations or areas of other responsibility. But in actuality, just how do our district presidents make up the call lists at the present time?

In preparation for this paper, I polled the district presidents of our Synod. One of the questions I asked was, “How do you formulate call lists for pastors?...for teachers?” What follows is a listing of the things they do as they prepare a list. Though all do not do all of the things listed all of the time, it is more than noteworthy that the majority of the district presidents do most of the things mentioned most of the time. These, then, are their answers to the question, “How do you formulate call lists?”

I pray that the Holy Spirit will lead me in making a proper list.  
I try to determine precisely what the needs are for the congregation.  
I try to determine the gifts and abilities of men who could meet the congregation's needs.  
I seek this knowledge from my personal experience with and knowledge of the men, from other district presidents, from circuit pastors, and others within our Synod.  
I check our Synod's computer database, the Seminary's biographies, vicar report and the card file all district presidents have available to them.  
I go through the roster of the WELS pastors.  
I check to see what call they have, what calls they have had, what calls they have recently returned.  
I check the statistical report of the congregations the men have at present.  
I reduce the list from anywhere between 10 and 100 to the four that will be used on the list.

When it comes to the lists for teachers, the district presidents rely heavily on the Board for Parish Education. The district presidents give such input as they wish to the Board for Parish Education and ask them to supply names of people who will fill the needs.

The Board for Parish Education was kind enough to send me a statement as to how they supply names to the district presidents and on what basis they determine the names of people that are to be sent. The following is the Board for Parish Education statement.

**Responsibility:** The district presidents are responsible for filling requests from calling bodies for lists of candidates for a position in the public ministry. The district presidents also act as the Assignment Committee to assign graduates from DMLC and WLS to their first positions in the public ministry.

Since the BPE has up-to-date information about teachers, the district presidents ask the BPE staff to complete call list requests for their approval. They then forward the lists to the calling body making the request.

**Elementary Teacher Information:** Information used on call lists is gathered from several sources. For teachers with little teaching experience the biographical material developed on each and the school visitors' reports are used to assess teacher qualifications.

The biographical is developed by Dr. Martin Luther College faculty members on each graduate based on their college and student teaching experiences. The biographical contains such information as personal characteristics, student teaching strengths and weaknesses, and skills attained in music (organ playing and choir direction) and athletics (coaching and physical education).

New teachers are visited twice in their first year of service. They are visited once each in their second and fifth year of service and once each fourth year thereafter. Visits are for at least half a school day. Conferences are held with the teachers prior to the classroom visit and again after the classroom visit. Evaluations are then completed by the visitor.

Teachers complete a teacher information form each year. On this form they are given the

optional opportunity to rate their abilities in a number of skills categories. This information is weighed against the DMLC and school visitors' information as call list requests are completed.

As a teacher gains experience, the DMLC biographical information is relied on less and the school visitor's information is relied on more in the completion of call lists.

Further information is gained through personal contact as the BPE staff meets and works with teachers at conferences, workshops, in committees, and in one on-one discussions and consultations.

**Secondary Teacher Information:** The secondary teachers complete an information form each year. They are also given the opportunity to rate themselves. For the secondary teachers, however, there is no school visitation program from which the BPE can gain information about teaching skills. Lacking a school visitation program, the Association of Lutheran High Schools adopted a program developed by representatives of the ALHS and the BPE. This program consists of up to three persons in each high school (principal, vice principal, and a teacher) completing a Secondary Teacher Profile Sheet on each teacher in the school. The teacher is given a ranking in a number of areas under the main headings of Teaching Ministry, Personal Qualities, and Professional Qualities. The information on these sheets is weighed against the teacher's own rating of his abilities as a name is considered for placing on a call list.

The biographical from DMLC and the teacher's Lutheran elementary teaching experience may offer some valuable assistance in completing a Lutheran high school call list.

**Computer Assistance:** Much of the biographical and statistical information about each teacher is in the Synod's computer data bank. However, the computer can only help the BPE staff select names of possible candidates by specific qualifications and skills (i.e. teaches grades 7-8, organist, athletics). The staff still must search the files of each possible candidate to determine the final selection of names for a particular call list.

**Steps:** The congregation, after deciding to call a teacher, will determine the scope of the call and the qualifications needed in a teacher. The request for a call list is forwarded to the district president. He in turn will ask the BPE to develop the list.

The completed call list is forwarded by the BPE staff to the district presidents who requested it. The district president will either approve the names on the list or will make changes himself or will contact the BPE for changes. An approved list is then forwarded to the calling body with as much information as the district president chooses to forward.

The congregation with the guidance of the Holy Spirit will call a teacher from the list. They then inform the district president and the BPE about whom they have called. It might be well at this point to touch on some of the informational resources that are available to the district presidents.

Our Synod has a computer database for pastors. It has the statistics of the pastor and his

family; the calls he has had and what was done with them and some strengths. It could be noted that this latter area is incomplete because many of the pastors didn't want to fill out what they perceived to be their strengths since that would have been very subjective and thus suggested such information be received from others.

The district presidents also have a Seminary Biography that gives the graduate's characteristics, quality of work during his school years, strengths and weaknesses. It also includes a report on his year as a vicar or tutor.

The BPE receives its information from a "Teacher Information" form that is filled out by each teacher; from a "Visitor's Teacher Report"; and a "Secondary Teacher Profile Sheet," each of which is filled out by three people other than the teacher. (These forms are attached.) This information is available to the district presidents. With these sources of information in hand, the district presidents make out call lists of those persons who could fill the needs of the congregation.

Another question that was asked of the district presidents was, "How could this process of making call lists be improved?" The following is a list and, in some instances, a composite of their replies.

Circuit pastors could keep better records and have more information on the wife and family. This is true for both pastors and teachers.

Have very up-to-date information in the computer, perhaps through the circuit pastors.

Through the circuit pastors, the profiles could be updated and perhaps we could learn from the pastors themselves concerning their personal likes and dislikes, abilities and inabilities. The same applies to teachers.

There have been times when more accurate information would have changed a call list.

Computerization of data on prospective candidates would save time now needed to search for needed information.

What we need most of all is men who have mission capabilities, men who are willing and able to get out and meet people; we need men who will follow up on prospects and do the work of an evangelist.

More information on wives. Some don't fit into a mission congregation. Some want to pursue a career of their own, or some don't like the climate or culture or inability to live some distance from her family. I urge congregations to determine their needs as best they can in the cover letter. Then the man called with the Holy Spirit's help should decide if he is the man for the position or not.

Though I have received some flak on this, I at times encourage pastors to make a few phone calls to flesh out the description they have received from me in regard to teachers.

It would be helpful that more objective evaluations by district presidents and circuit pastors of the men under their sphere of responsibility could be made available. This could be included with what we already have on the computer.

In regard to teachers, I feel it would help if all district presidents had the same information about teachers that Milwaukee has, perhaps on computer. We have a knowledge of the calling body and could offer better suggestions for teachers if we had such information. Milwaukee could still formulate the final list.

I feel comfortable with the present procedure when it comes to teachers. Once the

computer system is in full place, the selection of possible names would become easier.

These, then, are the suggestions from the district presidents who are responsible for the compilation of the call lists. It would seem that in the majority of the suggestions, the matter of more up-to-date and objective information would be of help to them.

Even though the general feeling of the district presidents seems to be that they would appreciate more easily accessible and objective information, they do have access to much information. From this body of information, what do they send along with the call list?

### **III. Accompanying Information**

In the above mentioned poll the question was asked, "What information do you give the congregation concerning pastors?...teachers?" The following is a composite of their answers.

Age, family size, age of children, and any special circumstances (health).

Where they went to school.

Where they have served and when, size of congregation presently being served, whether a school or not, enrollment, projects in previous congregations.

Particular strengths, brief description of personality and gifts.

District and synodical offices he has held or is holding.

Length of time served at present congregation.

Number of adult confirmations.

Circumstances when out of the ministry for a time.

Place and type of vicarship.

A characterization of his abilities for preaching, teaching, his ability to relate to people.

Special interests and aptitudes.

It was stressed a number of times that objective information was given. It was suggested that some of the following could be added:

Growth patterns (numerical and financial) of congregation for the last 5-6 years).

Information about the worker's spouse.

Perhaps we don't want too much additional information, such as hobbies (wood working, painting) or outdoor activities (hunting, fishing, golf), but it might not be a bad idea to have the kind of information that gives flesh and blood to a name.

On the other hand, all were concerned that the list did not become a subjective characterization, as the following indicated:

Preaching and teaching abilities are quite subjective.

Personality is often in the eye of the beholder.

If weaknesses of men would be tabulated, would this be viewed as blackballing a person?

To expand from the objective may be giving undue influence. Even now, a simple remark like, "I've heard he's a fine preacher," or "He's supposed to be good with the young people," is almost a certain push toward selection.

Personal characteristics, individual's resumes, periodic performance evaluations become highly subjective on the part of providers.

I think the key here is not so much what information is given but that the same type of information be given about all and that it come from an objective source. I must be careful lest I give some striking information about one and can't say anything about

another. Doing so could swing a call in a certain direction.

Each of our district presidents are very concerned with their responsibility for the drawing up of call lists and the accompanying information. They firmly believe that it is God who calls through men. They want to supply names of individuals who can meet the needs of the congregation. They want to give objective information. They are concerned that God do the calling with as little human intervention as possible.

#### **IV. The Call Meeting**

The voters of the congregation meet. The meeting is opened with a prayer, asking God's guidance. The district president or his representative presents the list of names that he has chosen. Each has the qualifications to fill the needs of the congregation. Each is different as the various statistics and information indicate. The congregation has the opportunity to add names. The slate of candidates is approved. Opportunity for questions and comment is given. The ballots are cast. The one receiving the majority of total ballots cast is the man called. A unanimous ballot is cast. The call, together with an accompanying letter from the congregation, is then mailed to the man chosen who already has been notified by telephone that he will receive the call and cover letter. The meeting is closed with prayer.

This is the basic procedure for the call meeting. It sounds simple. It is. But, at this very point we observe that some congregations feel they do not have enough input into the selection of names nor do they have enough information about the men named. The implication seems to be that they would like to have a greater "hands on" role of calling pastors and teachers.

#### **V. Some Caveats**

It has been stated a number of times that we have placed the responsibility of forming call lists into the hands of the district presidents. Therefore, in some instances a calling body will make known their suggestions to the district president for his consideration before he makes up the list or at the time of the call meeting. Sometimes a name is proposed at a call meeting where the district president is not present. An orderly way to handle that situation is to declare a recess of the meeting, make a phone call to the district president and seek his advice concerning the name proposed. Then, knowing his thoughts, the meeting is reconvened and the name may be added to the list. Other situations could be thought of but the responsibility always rests with the district president. When this is the case, regardless of how the person called may or may not, according to human judgment, work out, the responsibility rests with the district president. Does the congregation want to shoulder this responsibility? Does an individual within the congregation want that responsibility when suggesting a name and giving other information he might have?

In addition to the above responsibility, is also that of assigning new graduates and incorporating those who have come to us by colloquy. These men are God's gift to our church. It is the responsibility of the district presidents to use them effectively to meet the needs within the Synod. This area could hardly be met efficiently by individual congregations who would not have an over view of the total picture of needs within our fellowship. Indeed, would any congregation or individual within even want that responsibility?

It is the district president's responsibility to determine if a pastor or teacher, having difficulties at his present place, should be placed on a call list. It is his responsibility to determine what is to be done when occasionally a called worker desires a change, as to what should be done. Who better to make such determination—the congregation that most likely would not know the whole situation or the district president who is abreast of the matter and, together with

the other district presidents, sees the whole picture?

These and other situations indicate that the procedure of placing the responsibility into the hands of the district presidents was done most wisely by our church fathers. I believe it would be wisdom on our part to continue this procedure.

When it comes to the matter of information that is given to the calling body, we run into the matter of what is objective and what is subjective information. Usually, objective information is readily given, i.e. his age, experience, schooling, family, where he comes from, etc. However, there is also objective information that may have to be handled in a concerned manner, i.e. physical impairment, one arm, blind in one eye, bald, false teeth, slight stutter, hair lip or a large "pot belly." A district president more likely will know if this objective information will hinder filling the calling body's needs or not, much more than a congregation or individual within the congregation who may know of the impairment, but not what effect it may or may not have on the total work of the person.

Subjective information would include such things as quality and effectiveness of preaching, teaching, discipline, faithfulness, outgoing personality and a host of other things. But, again, who is able to make the better judgment and the more objective evaluation of these subjective things than the district president and his circuit pastors through personal observation, or a congregation or individual within who may have but a brief observation or leans on information that is gathered from untrained sources? This is not to imply that more information should not be given. It would seem the best way is for the district president to have and to give the information in a consistent manner that will best serve the calling body and the needs of the whole district/Synod.

In short, the responsibility to develop the call list and to give both objective and subjective information can best be done by our district presidents.

## **VI. Some Thoughts**

I am of the opinion that congregations should give more thought concerning their needs. Could this be expedited through a standardized form that would be given the congregation through the district president's office? After the congregation has filled out the form, would it be advantageous for the district president or his representative to meet with the congregation's representatives, review the needs and come to a mutual agreement as to the needs of the congregation? (I say mutual agreement, because the district president at times sees needs that the congregation may miss.) Such specific attention to needs would be of help to the district president in the selection of names for the call list. It would also reassure the congregation that the district president knows more precisely their needs and will place names on the call list that will fill their needs. The information accompanying the names would especially pertain to their needs. I would also suggest that at this pre-call meeting any names the congregation might wish to suggest be given to the district president for his consideration rather than waiting until the time of the call meeting when information would not always be readily available.

I believe we could give more information to calling bodies. One district president stated, "I think the key here is not so much what information is given but that the same type of information be given about all and that it come from an objective source." I subscribe to this. We can give more information so long as it is presented in a uniform manner. All know that each pastor and teacher has different gifts and

talents, different dispositions and attitudes, different strengths and weaknesses just as they have different ages, wives and number of children. As long as the information comes from as objective a source as possible, I don't believe we need fear to give the information to the calling body. Our district presidents jointly could determine what kind of information is to be given and how it could be given in a uniform manner at all call meetings on the basis of the congregation's needs, i.e., if there is no special need for stewardship talents, information concerning that area need not be given. Inasmuch as the pastor roster is becoming larger and larger, would there be an advantage to have the circuit pastors together with the district praesidium, make regular evaluations of the men within their district? These evaluations could then be made available to all of the district presidents within our Synod.

Is there merit in having a teacher evaluation from a pastoral and/or congregational viewpoint that looks at how he/she fits in, and what his attitude is, to the whole of congregational life? i.e., There may be teachers who are excellent in the classroom but have little leadership aptitude within congregational life. Perhaps the congregational chairman and/or local pastor could give information of this sort. Has the time come for a self-evaluation to be made by the individual pastor as to his extra education, skills and interests which would be tempered and weighed against the evaluation of the circuit pastors and district praesidium? Sure! Those of us who prefer not answering very subjective questions may refrain from doing so and let others make that judgment, even as is being done now.

When it comes to information concerning wives and families, I am a bit hesitant to urge we have a personal form for them with various evaluations as we may do with pastors and teachers. I believe the qualified pastor and/or teacher will "manage his own family well," and that would include knowing what his wife can or cannot cope with as far as distance from her parental home, culture of the area, the demands of the work, the living conditions, etc., etc. In this instance, should the district president and/or congregation feel there may be unusual circumstances to contend with, it might be well that the cover letter give in some detail what life may be like so the pastor/teacher and wife may be able to make a sound judgment as to where they can best serve the Savior.

From time to time, there is a tendency for individuals to seek certain positions within the church. Through various kinds of "campaigning" they seek to have their names placed on certain call lists. There also may be those who "campaign" at or before the call meeting to have a specific person called. This is out of order. It infringes on the truth that it is our Lord who develops the need within the church and it is He who will fill the need in an orderly way with those He wishes to use at any particular place and time. To seek and then gain a call unorderedly is to place ourselves into a position of uncertainty when problems arise and difficulties come. The certainty that the Lord has placed us there and that He sustains us will be lacking because, at least partly, we were instrumental in gaining the position, rather than to have our Lord do it through the orderly process set up to do the calling.

Many more thoughts could be expressed on this entire matter. I'm sure each of us has some thoughts that have not been touched on. There may be many that are at odds with what has been expressed. However, there are some essentials that I believe we should keep in mind when it comes to call lists and accompanying information. I would like to express them this way: Our

gracious Lord has placed us into His church. He has instituted the public ministry to fill the needs of the church, to proclaim the message of salvation. As a God of order, He wants this process to be done in an orderly manner. We have chosen an orderly manner of doing this, whereby our district presidents are held responsible to draw up call lists and to give information concerning those listed. To help them meet the needs of the church, we have to provide information. Let the responsibility as to how much and what information should be given remain with them. Those qualified to serve in the public ministry will regularly remind themselves of their high and privileged position when called to be spokes men of God. They will realize that their Lord will call them if and when He wants them to serve in any particular area. He knows their abilities, aptitudes, attitudes and address.