

First Call Process

For Candidates in the ELCA

INTRODUCTION

At the March 2020 Conference of Bishops, the decision was made to change the assignment process in the hopes of creating a process that was more flexible and responded better to the changing dynamics of the church.

Following the endorsement of the Conference of Bishops, a sub-group consisting of one Bishop from each of the nine Regions crafted a First Call Process in order to enact the new way in which candidates will be made available to serve the Church. This new First Call Process was approved by the Conference of Bishops in October 2020 and implemented on January 31, 2021. It called for a shift in responsibilities from past patterns, and a cooperative spirit of engagement by synods, Candidacy and Leadership Managers (CALMs), Seminaries, Churchwide personnel, candidacy committees, candidates, and bishops.

A review of the First Call Process took place among the Conference of Bishops in October 2021, and some changes and clarifications were requested. This document contains those clarifications and changes. Until this document is approved by the Conference of Bishops, those changes are written in green. Significant items removed from the document will be noted by a strikethrough, also in green, and highlighted, until the document is approved.

Ultimately, the success of this First Call Process is the responsibility of the Synod Bishops, working together in their regions in concert with the persons and offices named in the second paragraph above.

For purposes of this document Home Synod refers to synod of candidacy and Home Region refers to region of the synod of candidacy.

The following is an introduction to the First Call process. Details follow later in the document.

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST CALL PROCESS

Phase 1: First Call Process Preparation

Trusting that the Holy Spirit works through candidates as well as through synods and churchwide bodies, synod Bishops and/or synod staff meet individually with each candidate before approval. The purpose of this conversation is to share with candidates the number of first call opportunities throughout the church and to listen for candidates' needs and concerns regarding their first call so that bishops can enter the regional consultation knowing what can work for each candidate.

Phase 2: First Call Regional Consultation

The purpose of the First Call Regional Consultations is to seek the workings of the Holy Spirit for the missional needs of the Church along with the intersection of the availability of calls and the hopes of candidates. Bishops, and/or designated Synod Staff persons for Candidacy and Mobility and the Candidacy and Leadership Manager (CALM) for the region will meet on a regular basis.

These Regional Consultations will help to clarify the pathway forward for each candidate. There will be three possible outcomes from these consultations:

- a) the candidate would be open to serving in the wider church
- b) the candidate would remain available for call within the synods of their home region
- c) the candidate would remain available for call in their home synod

Phase 3: First Call - Working the Plan

Upon approval by a synod candidacy committee and preferences agreed upon by the Regional Consultation, all candidates (including Mission Development & TEEM candidates) will be available to begin call processes. The candidate cannot accept a call until the seminary has verified with the synod's candidacy committee the candidate's successful completion of their studies.

All candidates will be connected to a region and a synod for their first call process. Should a candidate be connected to a region other than their home region, the receiving region's consultation should agree on a priority process for call interviews. Normally, first call candidates can only be in process within one region at a time.

Home Synod Bishops are responsible for the care of each candidate of their home synod until their candidates are called and rostered in a synod. At that time, they join the roster of the synod of their call.

DETAILED FIRST CALL PROCESS

What follows is how the process would typically work. Increasingly, "typical" is becoming less so as various seminaries develop alternative paths toward completion of a candidate's education. In those cases, it will be necessary for the candidate, the Candidacy and Leadership Manager, the seminary and the Home Synod Bishop (or staff) be in communication. Regardless of when the process unfolds, the following steps should be completed.

Phase One: First Call Process Preparation

1. Candidate completes an RMP and a First Call Process Form prior to the conversation with their Home Synod Bishop/staff. CWO will store the candidates' paperwork.
2. Seminaries send Form D to the home synod. Bishops or designated staff persons are encouraged to consult with appropriate seminary representatives to gain additional information about the candidate that may help this process.
3. Home Synod Bishops or assigned staff persons have individual discernment conversations with candidates to get further clarity on both the needs of the church and the hopes and gifts of the candidate. Additional notes may be added to the First Call

- Process Form based on this conversation to help facilitate the Regional Consultation.
4. Where possible, candidates will be encouraged to consider openness to the Holy Spirit for service in areas that are currently underserved. No assumptions or promises regarding either approval or placement/call/location are to be made to any candidate prior to approval. The role and authority of the candidacy committee regarding the approval decision are paramount.

Phase Two: First Call - Regional Consultation

The Candidacy and Leadership Manager, Bishops and/or assigned staff persons meet for a Regional Consultation to review all candidates whose approval is forthcoming, utilizing RMPs and forms as necessary. The Regions can determine the frequency of these meetings.

There will be three possible outcomes from these consultations:

- a) the candidate would be open to serving in the wider church
- b) the candidate would remain available for call within the synods of their home region
- c) the candidate would remain available for call in their home synod

For candidates in category “a”, the Regional Consultation will review first call openings and the needs and preferences of these candidates and will recommend a priority order of preferred region(s) in which these candidates could interview. Following the regional consultation, the Candidacy and Leadership Manager (CALM) will communicate with the CALMs in those preferred region(s). The Home Region CALM will communicate with CALM(s) in the preferred region(s) until a region and synod are identified that are willing to accept the candidate. The Home Region CALM will report to the Home Region Bishops the name of the region and synod Bishop that will work with the candidate to find a first call. Prior to accepting a candidate from another region, and only with the permission of the Home Synod Bishop, Bishops from the preferred region may contact the candidate for a discernment conversation to see if there is a “fit” for a call but cannot discuss specific congregations with the candidate. Once a region and a synod have agreed to accept a candidate, the CALM will report back to the Home Synod Bishop, but the candidate shall not be informed of this until after approval. If the preferred region(s) cannot accept a candidate, the CALM and the Home Synod Bishop may, outside of a Regional Consultation, prioritize a new region in which the candidate could interview until a region, and a synod within the region have agreed to accept the candidate. The accepting region and synod will be reported back to the Home Region Bishops by the CALM.

For candidates in category “b”, the Home Region Bishops will determine in which synod within the region the candidates will first interview.

For candidates in category “c”, the Home Synod Bishop takes responsibility for the interview processes of those candidates.

Candidates remain under the care of their Home Synod and that Bishop no matter where they are interviewing.

The Regions are now responsible for setting these dates and communicating the dates of the Regional Consultations for the upcoming year to the First Call Team at CWO. A calendar of these dates will be published by the First Call team and communicated to seminaries and candidates. The Candidacy and Leadership Managers will gather these dates from the region and communicate them to the First Call Team on a calendar year basis.

Ultimately, the success of this Regional Consultation is the responsibility of the Bishop of each Synod in that region.

Phase 3: First Call - Working the Plan

1. Candidacy committee meets with the candidate for approval. If approval is denied, no first call process takes place. Where approval is granted, the candidacy committee fills out and submits the Candidacy Approval Form.-A copy of this document is sent by the Home Region CALM to the CALM of the Region of first interview to pass on to the appropriate Bishop.
2. The approved candidate is informed by the Home Synod Bishop of the synod that will provide their first interviews. The candidate may begin interviewing immediately but cannot accept a call until the seminary has verified the candidate's successful completion of their studies.
3. The Home Synod Bishop/staff monitors the candidate's progress in receiving interviews, updating the CALM as needed. The candidate shall keep the Home Synod Bishop/staff updated regularly.
4. If a candidate in this process fails to receive an interview or a call within 3-9 months, the Home Synod Bishop should consult with the candidate and applicable CALM to determine which of the following actions should be taken next:
 - a. Continue the current process
 - b. Bring the candidate paperwork back to a regional consultation with their Home Region

Candidate paperwork can return to Regional Consultations as many times as needed.

TIMELINE REALITIES

We acknowledge that there will be different timing considerations based on:

- Roster (Word and Sacrament, Word and Service)
- Timing and duration of internship
- Initial placement (synod, region, beyond the region)
- Faculty approval schedules
- Regional consultation schedules
- Candidacy committee schedules
- Other issues related to the candidate

Order of the steps in the first call process may vary somewhat by region.

Capstone Internship candidates will have a different timeline than those without such an internship. For the purposes of this document, a Capstone Internship is a six month (Word and

Service) to one year (Word and Sacrament) full-time internship that takes place as the final step of a candidate's seminary preparation. Due to their somewhat altered timing of conclusion of internship responsibilities, it is recommended that by three months prior to their completion of internship, the RMP and First Call Process Form are completed and submitted. As with all approval decisions Form D is completed and posted by the seminary.

As a general guide, it is most helpful if approval decisions for non-Capstone Internship candidates are made 3-6 months prior to the candidate's completion of their seminary preparation. For those candidates who have a full-time Capstone Internship it is most helpful if approval decisions are made 1-3 months prior to the candidates' completion of their seminary preparation.

PERTINENT INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

Bishops are encouraged to be in communication with one another regarding candidates and call openings and to keep their Regional Candidacy and Leadership Manager apprised of these conversations.

Home Synod Bishops are expected to work with candidates to assist in placements for calls.

Candidates are not to reach out to any bishop other than their Home Synod Bishop or the Bishop in the synod in which they are interviewing.

Candidates must have their approval decision renewed annually by their candidacy committee. Those who do not receive a call within three (3) years of their approval must be re-approved by their home synod candidacy committee as per the Candidacy Manual.

Clergy couples or persons anticipating becoming part of a clergy couple shall engage in conversation about First Call process with their respective Home Synod Bishops in order to facilitate a "best case scenario" for placement at the respective regional consultations.

EXAMPLES

a) Candidates open to serving beyond the region of their home synod.

Examples

Rebecca is a seminary graduate candidate in Region 11 in the Eastern Coastal Dakota Synod. She completes her RMP and her First Call Process Form, prioritizing synods and regions of the ELCA. During the process leading up to approval, Rebecca and her Bishop have used the First Call Form to discuss her desire and sense of call to serve the wider church. At the Regional Consultation leading up to her approval, these are reviewed. She has a first priority for Region 10, particularly the Western Rocky Appalachian Synod. The Region 11 Bishops and their CALM agree that Region 10, and particularly the Western Rocky Appalachian Synod, be contacted to see if they might have a position for her. The candidacy manager connects with the CALM in that region, who brings Rebecca's RMP and First Call Process Form to the Region 10 consultation. Region 10 and the Western Rocky Appalachian Synod agree to work with Rebecca. Following

her approval, the Home Synod Bishop tells Rebecca that the Bishop of the Western Rocky Appalachian Synod will contact her. The Home Synod Bishop also notifies the Western Rocky Appalachian Bishop that Rebecca has been approved and can begin interviewing for call. Rebecca remains under the care of her home synod until a call is issued.

Juanita is a seminary graduate candidate with Spanish language skills and cultural awareness that make her ideal for a call in a Latinx context. However, her home synod does not have a call opportunity for her and neither does her home synod's region. Her gifts are in high demand across the ELCA. As she completes her RMP and First Call Process Form she has indicated a few Regions where she is open to serving. At the regional consultation, the Candidacy and Leadership Manager is asked on behalf of the region to communicate with counterparts in the Regions in which Juanita has indicated preferences. Juanita's RMP is then given to Regions based on a prioritization of her openness as well as the needs of the mission of the church. In the case where more than one region/synod needs someone with Juanita's skills, the Regional Candidacy manager convenes a Zoom meeting with the two bishops and Juanita for a discernment conversation about possible fit. Once again, it is paramount that the gifts and needs match.

b) Candidates remaining available for call within the region of their home synod

Example

Theodore is a seminary graduate candidate. During the process leading up to the approval, Theodore's gifts along with desires seem best utilized in another synod within the region of his home synod. During the regional consultation, an appropriate match for a possible call is determined. Following Theodore's approval, he begins interviewing in that synod. Theodore continues the call process in another synod in the region. Should the initial call not come to fruition, the bishops would bring RMP to the next regional consultation. Once he is called, he is then rostered in that synod. Throughout the process, the Bishop of Theodore's home synod of candidacy remains his Bishop until a call is completed.

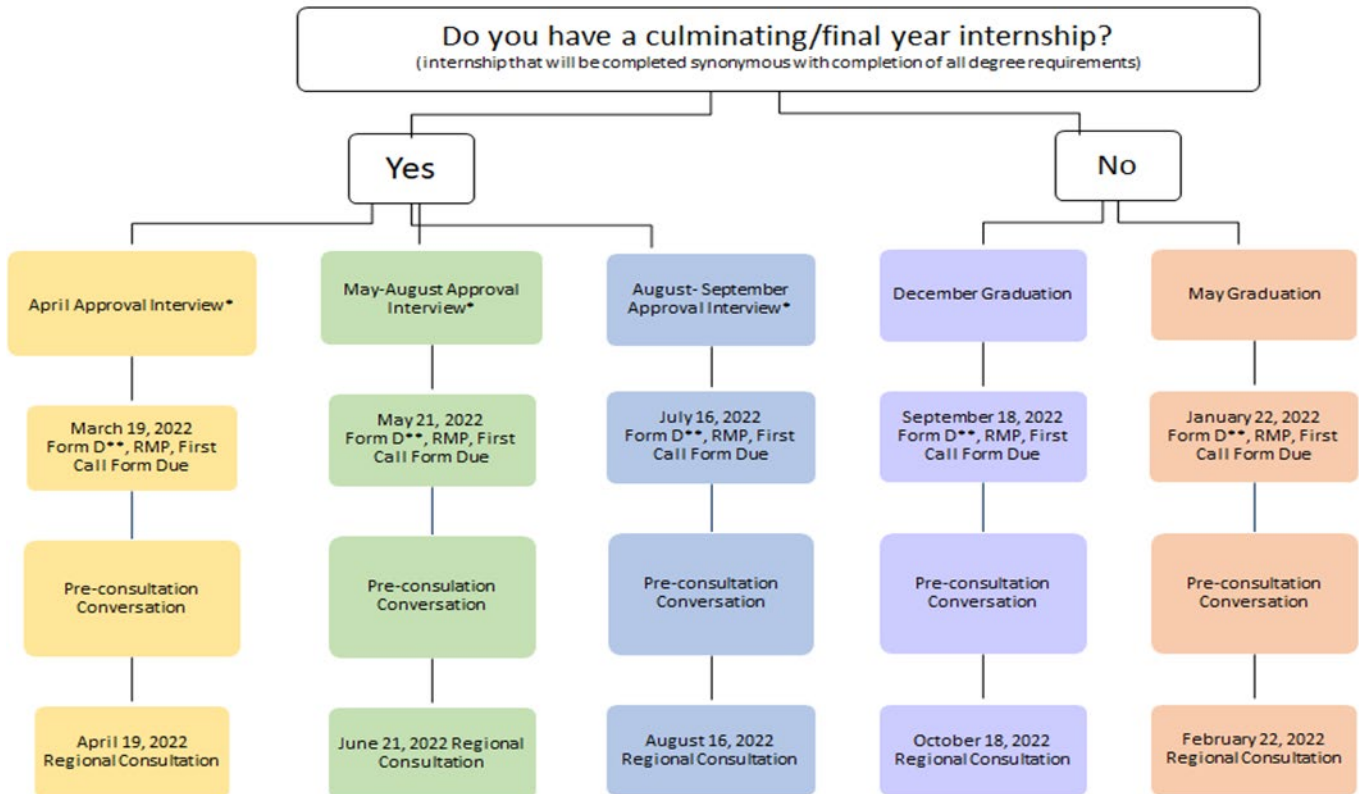
c) Candidates remaining available for call in their home synod

Examples

Juan is a TEEM candidate in his home synod. He remains under the care of his home synod which works with him and the congregation to complete the call process.

Julia is a seminary graduate candidate. She and her Bishop have discussed call options within the synod and there is one available. At the regional consultation, Julia's Bishop has reviewed this with colleagues. Following approval, Julia remains under the care of her home synod and her bishop initiates the call process with the congregation.

EXAMPLE PROCESS TIMELINE (FROM REGION 3)



Note: This chart is only an example. Individual candidates should talk to their Candidacy Committee to determine the timeline in their synod.