



# **LCMS Placement Handbook for Commissioned Ministry Programs:**

Director of Christian Education  
Director of Christian Outreach  
Director of Parish Music  
Lutheran Classroom Teacher

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## PREFACE

Dear Candidates,

The Rev. James Sharp was called in the summer of 2014 to serve as a career missionary in Uruguay, South America. He and his wife, and their four children, had served in Baltimore for several years prior to this call. In his September 2014 newsletter, Rev. Sharp wrote the following article, entitled, “Why would anybody ever want to leave Baltimore?”

My very first presentation [about our new ministry in Uruguay]. I'm about to start the slideshow, and the pastor raises his hand. Before you start, I have a question. Anybody who knows you or follows your twitter knows how much you truly love Baltimore. Why did you choose to leave?” A great question. One that I had asked myself many times during the frantic weeks of packing and moving that followed our acceptance of our calls to Uruguay. I started to tell the story of how I had wanted to serve as a foreign missionary since pre--seminary days in college. How I took a Spanish class the summer after I graduated, even though I didn't need to. How I chose not to get a car but go to Argentina -- and Uruguay -- after graduation. How I signed up for every missions class I could in seminary, how I went to Guatemala to study more Spanish and Brazil as an exchange student in the same seminary the three Brazilian pastors now serving in Uruguay attended. How I wanted to be a missionary but fell into teaching and loved it, and got into the city and loved it, and how all of these experiences and countless others had led to that day when I received the call to go to Uruguay. How I didn't want to leave Baltimore, didn't want to leave my neighborhood, my block. How happy I was doing what I was doing and how I thought good things were happening in my churches. *But I had received a call... not a job offer, not a promotion, a call. The Lord of the Church, through His Church, had called us to this mission for which I have been truly well--prepared.* As we considered these calls, our background in Lutheran education, our lives in a large city, and our heart for Jesus' mission made it clear that this call was divine and we just could not say no. As many tears as we shed leaving friends and family and home, we have great peace knowing that the Lord is making a path for us. [emphasis added, used by permission]

Candidates, you have indeed been well-prepared for the ministry to which you aspire, and now it is time to begin the placement process leading to your first call into public ministry.

This handbook lays out a lot of rules and regulations. It is part of my role as LCMS placement director to ensure that the procedures set forth by the LCMS are followed, and I understand that this might be overwhelming for you at times. The reality, though, is that this is an exciting time in your lives. I am excited to help and guide you through this process, to see God's hand at work, and to find out where and when you are called to serve His Church and people.

It is my prayer for each of you that you take Rev. Sharp's words to heart and understand the significance of receiving a call to serve in the Church. It is also my prayer that you are confident in your readiness to enter the public ministry. Many joys and many challenges await you, but you will find that you are in the good company of friends, colleagues, and mentors who have shared similar experiences. You are well-prepared for service in the Church, and we, the faculty and staff in the Department of Theology and Ministry, are here to help, guide, and support you during this process and in your future ministry in any way that we can.

In Christ,

Rhoda Schuler, ThD  
Dept. of Theology and Ministry

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## **I. UNDERSTANDING THE CALL**

Students who have completed an approved church work certification program and have the approval of the Concordia University faculty are eligible for placement in the commissioned public ministry of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS). Concordia University, St. Paul (CSP) offers programs which lead to certification and placement in the following four roster categories:

Director of Christian Education (DCE)  
Director of Christian Outreach (DCO)  
Director of Parish Music (DPM)  
Lutheran Classroom Teacher (LCT)

According to LCMS policy, students graduating from these programs and entering professional service in the LCMS must receive their initial placement through the Synod's Council of Presidents acting as the Board of Assignments. The Board of Assignments places candidates in professional positions throughout the year. This process is facilitated by the director of LCMS placement at the respective university or college.

The student may be placed before graduation but will not receive approval for installation into office until completion of the certification interview, LCMS Professional Standards Committee (LCMS-PSC) approval, and completion of all graduation and certification requirements.

The placement process is also referred to as the call process. It is important for candidates in the process to have a clear understanding of what a call is (and what it is not), and of their own calling to ministry. For the purpose of focus and good order, the LCMS has articulated how this is formalized within the Church:

A person is “called” when they are summoned by the church to the office of Word and Sacrament or an office auxiliary to it on a full-time permanent basis, and by education, by certification, and by solemn and public act (e.g., ordination or commissioning) is brought into a unique relationship with the church from which they have unique authority and through which they are authorized to perform functions of that office of the church into which they have been ordained or commissioned, at a specific post for the length of time which is ordinarily continuing and indefinite, but which in certain cases...may be a specified period of time...evidenced by the individual’s name being placed on...one of the official rosters of the Synod. (CTCR, “The ministry: offices, procedures and nomenclature,” St. Louis, MO, 1981.)

The procedures and guidelines which follow in this handbook are based on the official procedures for designated calls as laid forth by the LCMS Council of Presidents. While we ascribe to the divine call into ministry, and the Council of Presidents has established the procedures with great care toward the Scriptural and Confessional understanding of the call, the process is indeed administered by human hands. The call is recognized as a manifestation of the working of the Holy Spirit, yet human judgments, prayerfully made, are the vehicle by which the process is carried out.

### **A. THE ROLE OF THE LCMS PLACEMENT OFFICE**

Placement is best described as a process of transition—transition from “college student” to “professional church worker.” On the one hand, candidates for placement are still students, finishing their final year at CSP. On the other hand, they must simultaneously begin to develop what we call, “the professional self.” Interviewing for the first call is really the first time candidates are no longer regarded as students, as they were even in student teaching and on internship, but now they are seen as professionals in their own right.

There is a common misconception that candidates are going to choose their call or that they can request where they want to be placed or that the placement director is going to offer them a choice of positions. This is not the case. Rather than the candidate expecting to select from a list of calls, the placement director is going to put forth the candidate as a potential worker for a reasonable number of appropriate vacancies. The congregations and schools will have opportunities to conduct interviews and check references prior to extending a call. In this sense, the call process is similar to the regular process before one is offered a job.

There is another common misconception that candidates only need to sit back and wait for the LCMS Placement Office to announce a call to them. Several years ago, the process dealt with assignments, wherein the LCMS Placement Office would match candidates with congregations and assign them, sight unseen. Now, however, with conversations, interviews, and sometimes visits in the mix, candidates share a bigger portion of the work. It is expected that you will prepare thoroughly for interviews, respond to all correspondence in a timely fashion, and act professionally at all times.

It is essential for candidates to understand that the LCMS Placement Office does not, as a rule, generate or otherwise solicit contacts or positions with calling bodies. This means that we do not know about every vacancy that occurs, nor will we cold-call congregations to ask about their staffing needs. If a calling body is interested in information on CSP graduates, someone will contact us. The role of the LCMS placement director is to be reactive to the needs of the Church, not to act as an employment agency or head-hunter.

In the LCMS, the call process dictates that the calling body initiates the action through the placement office. For this reason also, candidates are not to actively solicit or otherwise facilitate their own call or the call of another candidate, or a contract of any kind. This dictum should be extended to members of their family as well. Candidates for placement are not allowed to apply for jobs outside of the placement process until given permission by the director of placement. Candidates who engage in these behaviors are putting their eligibility in jeopardy and may be removed from the active placement list. The reason for this is that, as placement director, it is my responsibility to ensure equity in the distribution of a limited number of candidates among a large number of requests from calling bodies. Every time a placement candidate gets into the act and drops names of their friends to a principal or pastor, and contacts are made without conferring with me, I have to mend fences with the other congregations which may have been considering that candidate. While I appreciate the spirit of assistance, this gets to be too complex to be a group effort.

## **B. THE BIG QUESTION: WILL I RECEIVE A CALL?**

The reality is that our Lord does not let a willing, competent worker sit idle. Receiving a call is usually not a question of “if,” but “when.” The majority of candidates receive a call during their last semester at CSP or during the summer after graduation. Of those candidates who remain at the end of the placement year in August, most are geographically restricted due to personal circumstances and may still receive a call, although they likely will need to find other employment for the short term.

If an individual does not receive a call immediately following graduation due to personal circumstances, marriage plans, relocation, etc., we do attempt to keep in contact. It is the candidate's responsibility to maintain current address and phone information with the Placement Office. Further, it is the candidate's responsibility to inform the Placement Office on a regular basis as to whether they are still available for a call.

In order to secure placement for immobile candidates, we may file the candidate's placement credentials with the District Office in the area in which the person is residing and may make use of key LCMS people or email list servers to circulate the person's availability. This does not guarantee that we will be aware of every vacancy that occurs, as this is simply impossible, but it gives the candidate more visibility.

Back to the question: will you receive a call? Unfortunately, the Placement Office cannot give a 100% guarantee to any candidate, regardless of how open, willing, and able s/he is. However, I firmly believe the statement which opens this section: that God will not let a willing and able worker sit idle. The record of this office over the last five years is 97-100% placement for graduates who are geographically mobile to a reasonable extent. What is more, in the last five years, the number of calling entities has exceeded the number of graduates by a large amount, and in 2016, there were overall two job openings for every graduate in the Concordia University System. There is a great need for professionally trained workers in the Church today, and you have been well-equipped for this work.

### **C. CONSIDERATIONS FOR MAKING DECISIONS**

It must be understood that there is no such thing as a “perfect” call. I am convinced that is the influence of our fallen nature which compels some candidates to consider a call and see only the imperfections of people, position description, facility, neighborhood, etc. and then decline the call based on these. If the old Adam can trip us up by thinking only of ourselves and whether we will be happy or not, it has succeeded in direct disruption of the ministry of the Church. We are called to a ministry of the cross, not a ministry of convenience. Accepting a call is a willingness to become a part of something bigger than all of us with a sense of duty to allow God to use us through the power of the Gospel to change lives and to be instrumental in leading people to salvation. That task is far beyond whether our personal plans will work out. Personal plans put in God's hands will work out, but for his purposes.

Along the same lines of a perfect call, there is neither only one place in the world where it is God’s will for you to serve. Some candidates feel an enormous pressure deliberating whether a congregation is “the right one,” but the reality is that there are, in most cases, a number of possibilities that would be a great fit for your first call. When you have been designated, I will use the phrase, “make a prayerful and informed decision.”

I will also use the terms “God reasons” and “me reasons,” and I encourage you to approach every decision in this process with these in mind, from initial decisions about geographic mobility, to your ultimate deliberation on the acceptance of a call. A “God reason” for doing (or not doing) something means that there is a factor outside of your control which would significantly impact your decision. An example of a “God reason” for restricting your mobility would be if you have a child who has a medical condition requiring you to live within a certain distance from a specific type of hospital. The medical condition and need for proximity are outside of your control. Because of this, it would be irresponsible to accept a call outside of that geographical range. Examples of “me reasons,” on the other hand, would be declining a call because it is for a first grade teacher but you prefer to teach third grade, or declining a call to a town in Iowa when you prefer to move back home to St. Louis to be closer to your family. Every decision in this process should be approached with this in mind. I will not force you into a situation or decision you are truly uncomfortable with, but one also has to consider the nature of the call, as Rev. Sharp stated in his article in the preface, is that it is the Lord calling us to service in His Church.

Every church worker, including new candidates, has the right to prayerfully consider and accept or decline a call. If you and I are doing our jobs well, though, the call that is offered should be something that is within your capabilities, yet is challenging and makes the best use of your talents: as in many things in life, there are always “might-have-beens.” My advice: Make a proper, ethical, and respectful decision and do not look back. Because of all of the up-front work that happens in the process, it is rare that candidates decline their first call.

### **D. SEEKING GUIDANCE FROM OTHERS**

The story goes that there was a man whose town had flooded. Rather than evacuate with his fellow townspeople, he remained in his home and said, “God will keep me safe.” As the water filled his house, he

moved up to the second floor, and finally, to the roof. There he prayed, “God, rescue me.” As he prayed, rescue personnel floated by in a rowboat. The man declined their assistance, insisting that God would save him. Later on, a helicopter flew overhead, again offering a way to dry ground. Again, the man declined. That evening, the house gave way and the man, unable to swim to safety, was swept away and perished. When he arrived in heaven, he angrily confronted the Lord, saying, “I was in danger and prayed for deliverance, yet you left me to drown.” The Lord replied, “I sent a boat and a helicopter to rescue you. What were you waiting for?”

Properly speaking, we are dependent on God for all facets of life, including his guidance in times of uncertainty and transition. God’s will and guidance is often found in those around us. When the time is at hand to make a decision on a call, I will encourage you to pray. But I will also tell you not to wait for a grand sign pointing you in the right direction. Too often we are tempted to decline opportunities because we do not feel at peace about them, but we must remember that God’s Word never tells us to look inward to discern matters of faith because we are utterly sinful. Instead, God works externally, objectively and through means. As Lutherans, that means that we look to God’s Word and Sacraments, the places where Christ has promised to be and to give us his divine gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

But what about your first call? Such things are less clear. The Bible does not tell us specifically where, when, or how God will call us as individuals to serve. This is where “God reasons” and “me reasons” come into play. Reasons ought to be weighed against what Scripture says about such matters. Keeping that in mind, God also works through people. While you deliberate a call, seek counsel from Concordia faculty and staff, your family and close friends. Keep in mind that their preferences will influence their advice (e.g., parents who want you close to home), but consult with them. They are one step removed from the process and may provide valuable insights regarding your capacity to serve in a particular circumstance if you have doubts or anxiety.

#### **E. RESTRICTING YOUR AVAILABILITY**

During the placement interview, the question will be asked as to call limitations and restrictions. Call limitations can refer to any aspect of a call that would hinder you from serving in a particular congregation, from its location, to its worship style, to the grade level for which they seek a teacher. When I ask the question of limitations, I am interested in knowing whether there are any specific and significant reasons which would prevent a candidate from serving anywhere in the United States, if not the world. The question is generally interpreted by candidates as asking what their preferences would be, but the reality is that if we only serve congregations and schools which are within driving distance of candidates’ homes, or which are in appealing areas, we leave the majority of entities with no possibility of obtaining a Synodically prepared worker. Preferences will be discussed as well, but the more important factor is the extent of your willingness to go wherever and into whatever situation God might call you to serve.

We are not here to send candidates only to the communities that are the nicest, the most convenient and which have the biggest and best Lutheran schools and most active churches: ours is not a ministry of convenience. We are called to become involved in spreading the Gospel to those people and places, which most need to hear it. I challenge each candidate to be open to that without becoming unduly influenced by those who may have good intentions but do not understand the urgency of ministry the way that we do.

Please be assured that I am aware that the entry into ministry is a watershed event for candidates and that I will do everything in my power to place candidates into positions in which they will be successful. There are many people who are ready and willing to assist candidates in making the transition from university student to brand new professional, but there is also an expectation that candidates will step out of their comfort zone to make that transition.

## **F. A WORD ON SALARIES**

It is common knowledge that salaries in Lutheran congregations and schools are somewhat below those in public schools, but keep in mind that many professional church workers in the LCMS are provided with medical insurance at no additional cost to the worker. This expense alone adds a significant expense for public school teachers and partially accounts for the lower base salaries in Lutheran schools. Additionally, many congregations will allow the called worker to set aside a portion of pre-tax salary as a housing expense.

In the professional world, people do not discuss salaries openly with anyone other than a spouse or perhaps a parent. While I encourage you to seek counsel from others in deliberating a call, the offered salary package should be kept private between you and the congregation, and your spouse if you are married. As a new professional, a parent could provide helpful insights into budgeting if you seek such guidance, but beyond that, the salary is no one's business but your own. That said, it is a part of my job as LCMS placement director to keep records of and report salaries. I will not share your salary with anyone, but if you would like more guidance or have concerns about the salary you are offered, you may discuss it with me in confidence.

While I do not have the authority to require a minimum salary from a congregation, I do screen requests before sending candidate credentials. In extreme cases, I will not send candidate credentials to a congregation whose offered salary is too low to live on reasonably. While your initial salary may be lower than you or your parents anticipate, I can assure you, it will be livable. Placement Directors around the Concordia University System do our best to ensure that calling congregations are willing to support their newly called workers. This may mean changing your lifestyle to accommodate a budget, for example, buying a used car instead of new, not eating out often, not having cable TV, etc., but we do our best to ensure that every candidate will have a livable salary.

## **G. DEFERRING A CALL**

If an individual voluntarily chooses to remove him/herself from active candidate status, this should be communicated in writing to the LCMS placement director and discussed in person. The individual must fill out a deferment form and return it to the LCMS placement director. A deferment is valid for one year unless you decide within that timeframe to seek placement again. After one year, a candidate must renew his/her certification with the LCMS-Professional Standards Committee at CSP in order to be considered for a call (see LCMS-PSC Handbook for details on renewal of certification).

Please note that once qualified for a call, one may retain or reestablish ecclesiastical qualification, however, one's experience base in the chosen category of ministry must remain current and viable. For example, an individual who does not receive a call as a Lutheran Teacher and spends five years in retail management, no matter how successful, will be hard-pressed to demonstrate continued competency as a classroom teacher: We simply do not operate under the "once qualified, always qualified" assumption. Conversely, that same person who secures a teaching position in a public or other parochial school, given successful performance, will be much more likely to be given favorable consideration.

In all cases, it is the candidate's responsibility to keep their information and intentions up to date with the Placement Director.

## **H. MISSION OPPORTUNITIES/ALTERNATIVE MINISTRIES**

There is an ongoing need for individuals to be willing to serve in overseas mission stations, either through agencies directly connected to the LCMS or other organizations. Many of these candidates work through the LCMS Office of International Mission (OIM) to be trained and then assigned to locations throughout the world.

If a candidate is interested in camp ministry or other mission opportunities, they should mention that in the placement interview and appropriate connections can be made within the framework of the call process. If coordinated through the LCMS-OIM these positions may then be arranged as the initial call for the candidate. The call is not a guarantee for candidates accepting mission opportunities; the decision to extend a call lies with the organization. If there is no call available, but the candidate is contracted, candidates should defer placement until the end of the mission contract.

If the candidate elects to sign on with another organization that is not a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of the Synod,<sup>1</sup> they defer their call. Upon completion of their contractual agreement, candidates may contact the LCMS Placement Office if they desire to reinstate their certification for LCMS Placement.

## **II. PROCEDURE FOR FIRST CALLS – OVERVIEW**

These are the rubrics of the procedure for first Calls as approved by the Synod’s Council of Presidents in 2012. The full document may be obtained from the placement director upon request. Candidates should refer to section III below for greater detail of their responsibilities in the process.

1. Candidate prepares credential file
2. Calling body submits request
3. Institutions send candidate credentials
4. Interviews
5. Calling entity requests designation
6. Decisions regarding the proposed assignment
7. Preparation of call documents
8. Commissioning

## **III. PROCEDURE FOR FIRST CALLS – STUDENT GUIDE**

What follows here is a detailed summary of the Call process relevant to the students’ experience. It is based on the above rubrics but focuses on student responsibilities.

The first phase in the placement process occurs early in your senior year. If you are graduating in December, you must complete this phase prior to the start of classes in the fall. If you are graduating in May, you must complete these steps no later than October 1. The goals of this phase are threefold:

1. For you to complete the paperwork and create your placement credential file. This file will be shared with calling congregations during the second semester.
2. For you to begin to familiarize yourself with how the process works.

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<sup>1</sup> A Recognized Service Organization (RSO) is an organization or entity that is identified by the Synod as eligible to engage workers via the Divine Call either as an Ordained or Commissioned Minister. LCMS member congregations, Lutheran High Schools, the Concordia University System, the Seminaries, Office of International Mission, and some social service agencies and camp ministries are examples.

3. For me to get to know you, your strengths and weaknesses in ministry, what you are open (or not open) to in a call, so that I can work to the best of my ability to match you with congregations that would be a good fit. This is primarily accomplished through the placement interview.

#### 1. SETTING UP YOUR CREDENTIAL FILE

The first step in the placement process is to submit paperwork for your credential file. All paperwork is due **by September 1 for December graduates and by October 1 for Spring graduates**. The paperwork includes the following documents:

- a. Placement application for the appropriate vocation.
- b. Placement application, supplemental information for the LCMS placement office at CSP.
- c. Philosophy of ministry; LCT candidates instead submit a philosophy of Lutheran education.
- d. Three letters of recommendation.
- e. Internship or student teaching evaluations, as available.
- f. Records release authorization form.

Instructions for completing your credentials:

- a. Obtain the application forms from the website at [info.csp.edu](http://info.csp.edu). Forms may also be requested directly from the placement director. Application forms and the philosophy of ministry must be filled out and submitted electronically (as a PDF) via email. You will need Adobe Reader in order to save data into the form. Many other apps and programs do not save the forms with your changes. Adobe is available as a free download for your computer.
  - i. The 5-page vocational application will be sent to schools and congregations with your credentials. Write professionally, proofread carefully, and be thorough. **SAVE** this document on your computer. If there are errors, you may be asked to correct them and resubmit the application.
  - ii. In the Leadership Skills section, include examples and specifics whenever possible. For example, if you indicate that you have experience playing organ, briefly outline the experience in the comments box: number of years taking lessons, number of years playing for worship, which services or hymnals you are familiar with, etc. Do not leave any comment boxes blank.
  - iii. Sign the form electronically (type your name).
  - iv. The references listed on the application will normally be the same three people who write your letters of recommendation. Faculty members, pastors, and internship/student teaching supervisors are good choices. References from friends or relatives are not acceptable.
  - v. The “Information for LCMS Placement Office” form is your opportunity to tell me your preferences and what you are open to, or absolutely not willing to consider, in a call. If

you truly will not consider a call in Texas, then tell me that so that we do not lead on a congregation in Texas by sending them your file. I only know such things if you tell me. This form is NOT sent out to churches, but is kept confidential between you and me, so please, be honest with me.

- vi. If you have questions when filling out the forms, ask!
- b. Philosophy of ministry, or philosophy of Lutheran education (for LCTs). See the guidelines in the appendix to this handbook.
- c. Three letters of recommendation. These will normally be the same three people you list on your application.
  - i. You should ask your references to write a letter commenting on your professional qualifications, readiness to enter the ministry, and/or Christian character, depending on their relationship with you.
  - ii. The letter should be written on stationary and scanned to pdf. Then you are to place the letter in your digital portfolio.
- d. Internship or student teaching evaluations.
  - i. DCEs and DCOs typically return to CSP for their final year before graduation, so final evaluations should be readily available.
  - ii. DPMs and LCTs should submit **midterm and final** evaluations as soon as they are complete. Many schools request evaluations and will not wait until the end of the year to receive final ones. If you have an evaluation at midterm or even earlier, submit it; principals and pastors understand that you are in the middle of your practicum and will continue to grow through the rest of the semester. Whenever possible, these should be submitted electronically.
- e. Records release authorization. You will sign this form at your placement interview, authorizing CSP to send your credentials to calling congregations and to report information about your call to the LCMS.

## 2. THE PLACEMENT INTERVIEW

Once you have submitted your application forms, philosophy of ministry, and evaluations (for those whose internship/student teaching is already finished), and have contacted your references to request a letter, you will schedule a placement interview with the placement director. The interview can be scheduled before I have received all of your letters of recommendation, but you should be able to give evidence that you have contacted your references prior to the interview. **Placement interviews for December graduates must be completed September 15, and Spring graduates complete their interviews by October 15.**

This interview is for me to get to know you, both as a person, and as a soon-to-be professional church worker. The interview is meant to be informal, but it is a great opportunity to dress and act as though you are going to a job interview.

During the interview, we will discuss your placement application, your education and experience, strengths, weaknesses, and your preferences for ministry. Again, the process works best for all involved (you, me, and

congregations) if you are honest with me up front. Anything that you tell me in confidence stays with me, but being open and honest is necessary in order that I might best serve the Church and help to match you with congregations that may be a good fit, ultimately leading to a good first call experience for both you and for the congregation.

Likewise, if you have any call limitations, the interview is the best time to tell me. If you would like any information pertaining to this kept confidential, please tell me and I will do so, unless it is a situation where I am legally bound to report the information.

While the interview is the only required time for us to meet one-on-one, I encourage you to schedule additional meetings if your situation changes after the initial interview, if you have any questions or concerns about the process, or if you just want to talk (this is a great way for me to get to know you better!). Yet again, the key is honest communication.

#### **A. THE SECOND PHASE AND TIME AFTER GRADUATION**

The second phase of placement covers the time until graduation, is quite a bit more involved. Your file will be shared with calling congregations beginning on October 1 for spring graduates (September 1 for fall graduates). Please familiarize yourself with the process outlined below and ask if you have any questions or concerns.

##### **1. Calling bodies contact the placement director to indicate their personnel needs. Placement directors share credential files with the calling bodies.**

The placement office fields requests year round. The placement director, at her discretion, sends credential files for the candidate(s) who may meet the needs of the calling body, generally beginning February 1. A concerted effort is made to be equitable to all candidates; however, the reality is that certain areas of expertise are more in demand than others, and that those who restrict themselves geographically will have potentially fewer contacts. It is not uncommon for a single candidate's file to be under consideration at several places at once, but a candidate's file will be limited to at most 4-5 places at one time.

When the placement director sends out credentials, she will notify the candidate of the calling body, position, and name of the contact person so that the candidate can be prepared in case of a subsequent phone call or email from the calling body. Candidates should begin looking at the calling body's website, Facebook or Twitter page, etc. to learn about it and its community, but candidates may NOT contact the calling body directly (whether by phone, email, etc.). If the calling body is interested in pursuing a candidate, they will make the initial contact with the candidate(s), usually by phone.

##### **2. Calling bodies make initial contact with candidate(s) who appear to meet their needs to share preliminary information about their position, to give candidates an opportunity to ask preliminary questions, and to determine if the candidate is interested in further consideration.**

Because this is a very early point in the actual call process, candidates are encouraged to remain as open-minded as possible about the prospect of being placed in any given congregation or school. The initial contact with a pastor or principal (or other representative of the Calling body) is usually not an extensive interview, but it will leave them with a first impression. Candidates should not ask questions about salary at this stage, or in any interviews that follow, unless the subject is initiated by the congregation. It is important that both parties are clear about next steps in the process, for example, whether the congregation will follow up with a phone or on-site interview.

*Candidates must keep the placement director informed of all contact* made with calling entities. Doing so helps me to discern where calling entities are in their search process, and whether our candidates are being considered for a call. It is also helpful if you keep me informed of your thoughts, excitements, and potential concerns about a given congregation so that I can continue to help you navigate the process.

### 3. Interviews

*Candidates must also inform the placement director of any formal interviews*, whether they take place on-site or via phone, Skype, etc. for the same reason as listed above.

If a calling body wants to interview a candidate(s) on CSP's campus, these arrangements must be made through the placement director. All interviews are at the expense of the calling body, but these expenses are generally paid only for the candidate, not for a spouse, fiancé, parent, or friend. If a calling body offers to provide airfare for a candidate to interview on-site, the candidate should accept only if there is a very serious interest in the position and the on-site visit is necessary. Money is tight in many congregations and it is plainly unethical for a candidate to accept travel arrangements if there is little interest. On-site interviews are not required of calling bodies, and many may decide not to conduct them. If there is no on-site interview, yet the candidate feels that a visit is necessary, the candidate is expected to fund his own travel.

It is assumed, if a candidate has declared a willingness to serve as a professional church worker, that all opportunities for an interview will be taken seriously regardless of the location, size and other attributes of the school, congregation and community. **Candidates should NOT ask about salary during interviews.** A congregation may choose to share this information, but candidates should not ask. If you are extended a call, you will be given the information before you make a decision.

### 4. The calling body contacts the placement director to request that their final candidate of choice be designated for a call to their congregation/school.

When the calling body has decided to whom they want to extend a call, they notify the placement director that they are requesting the candidate for designation. *Designation must take place through the Placement Office. If a congregation notifies you directly that they want to designate or call you, inform the placement director immediately.* The placement director counsels the candidate to determine that there is nothing apparent at that point to prevent due consideration and ultimate acceptance of the call. Candidates are also encouraged to speak with faculty, close family members, and anyone else they see necessary to make a decision, keeping in mind that the salary information should be kept private.

At the point of designation, the placement director will insure that the candidate receives all information necessary to make an informed decision: a thorough description of responsibilities, salary information, benefits, cost of living, etc. If there are significant questions or missing information, the candidate may ask for this information from the calling entity, and may seek guidance from the placement director.

Designation is essentially a verbal call (no official paperwork is filed). It is helpful to think of designation as an engagement, whereas the official call document is the marriage. When a candidate accepts designation, she is saying in good faith that she intends to accept the call when the official call documents arrive several weeks later, barring substantially changed circumstances. Of course, this analogy breaks down in that the call to a particular entity is not necessarily permanent, but the point is that when a candidate accepts designation, she is expected to accept the call when the call documents arrive.

There may be instances in which a candidate interviews with more than one congregation before actually being requested and they may be under serious consideration for two or more positions. It is a great temptation to engage in behavior best described as “holding out for the best offer.” These situations are best dealt with from a mindset which considers each setting as a distinct opportunity to use one's talents in service to God’s people in that place. When the request for designation comes, *one must properly give honest consideration to that location only*, excluding other possibilities. This is almost humanly impossible, but every effort should be made. After all, what if the designation is declined and the other congregation decides to call someone else?

If the candidate accepts the designation, the placement director (not the calling body) designates that candidate to the calling body as the person to receive the call. Candidates may hold only one call or designation at a time. Therefore, during the deliberation period and after accepting designated status with a calling body, the candidate’s credentials will not be sent elsewhere and any other locations where they are under consideration will be informed that the candidate is no longer available. The candidate is obligated to see the call process through with the calling body with which they have been designated. Further, if continued contact comes from other calling bodies, candidates are obligated to state that they “have a call pending and are not available for consideration.” Once a candidate has been designated for a call, they may NOT interview with any other calling body.

If a candidate declines the designation, it is candidate’s responsibility to inform the placement director and the calling body. It is a useful experience to have to articulate one’s reasons for declining to a principal or pastor. This must be done through a phone call or in-person meeting. Leaving a voicemail or sending an email to decline a designation is unprofessional and inexcusable.

If a declination of a designation is handled properly with open and honest communication and in keeping with the integrity of the process, the candidate may be eligible for an alternate opportunity, following conversations with the placement director. If, on the other hand, the candidate acts unprofessionally in declining, or if the candidate declines the call after having accepted a designation, the placement director may remove the candidate from the active call list at her discretion.

##### **5. The calling entity extends a call to the designated candidate through prepared call documents.**

After a candidate accepts designation for a call, the calling body draws up the official call documents. The documents must be processed through the District Office and the placement office **before** being given to the candidate by the placement director. If a candidate receives call documents directly from a District or a calling body, such documents are not official; in such cases, the candidate should inform the placement director so that the official documents can be located and processed.

Since at this point in the process there has been adequate groundwork laid in terms of the “fit” of the candidate to the position, declining the call should be only for a **very good reason**, i.e., a radical or serious change in one’s personal situation or some life-changing event, or a change in the nature of the call. If the call documents contain unexpected or unacceptable conditions, e.g., different responsibilities or a significantly lower salary than originally stated, the candidate should contact the placement director immediately to discuss it. Having “cold feet” or “butterflies” is typical, but should not count as a reason for declining a call at this point in the process. If there is any possibility of declining the call at any point after designation, the candidate is obligated to discuss this with the placement director prior to informing the calling body.

While all of this may sound regimented, one has to remember that, from the Calling body’s viewpoint, this is serious business. If the call is declined after a candidate has been designated, the congregation or school must begin again from square one and other viable candidates may have received calls elsewhere

in the meantime. While most of the congregational representatives will accept the decision of a candidate to decline as God's will at work, we must always recognize the seriousness of purpose on their part in this. It is expected that candidates will approach the final decision with this in mind. Because of this, I encourage candidates to think of designation as the final decision.

If the candidate accepts a call, s/he notifies the placement office and the calling entity via a formal acceptance letter along with the necessary forms in the call documents.

## **6. Commissioning and Installation.**

The call process is complete when the candidate is commissioned into public ministry and installed at the congregation, upon the approval from the District President. The candidate should complete all forms within the call documents in a timely manner to ensure that all is in order from his/her end.

If a candidate accepts a call prior to graduation, the call is valid pending successful completion of all graduation and certification requirements. If a candidate fails to complete their program in the projected term, the calling body has the right to rescind the call and seek a different candidate rather than issuing a non-called contract. Likewise, CSP will not sign off on a call for any candidate who fails to complete all graduation and certification requirements successfully. It is the candidate's responsibility to see his/her education and certification through to the end.

## **IV. FINAL THOUGHTS**

Placement is an ongoing process. Some congregations move very quickly and may not even conduct a formal phone interview (hearkening back to the "old days" when the first call was executed as an assignment and the candidate had little-to-no say in the matter). Other congregations may take their time, spending months making a decision, so candidates are encouraged to exercise patience. This can be a long process and it can feel like you are in "limbo," but you can rest assured that we—placement directors and district officers—are working behind the scenes on your behalf. The good news is the reality that our Lord does not let a willing, competent worker sit idle, so I ask you to be patient and encourage you to speak with me if you have questions or anxieties at any point in the process. I also ask that you keep me informed of every contact and interview, both because I want to know how things are going for you and because I need that information in order to discern my next steps on your behalf.

It is your responsibility as a candidate to act professionally because you are being considered as a professional church worker. Your words and actions reflect not only yourself as a professional, but also the reputation of Concordia. I am here to help you, and will give a good recommendation if asked and if I know you well enough to do so in good conscience, but I cannot ask or force a calling entity to extend to you a call. You must complete your responsibilities in the process, which means responding to inquiries from churches in a timely manner (typically within 24-48 hours), keeping the placement director informed of all contact, and showing due respect to all involved. Again, there are a number of people who are ready to help you, but you also must step up and do your part.

Practically speaking, more flexible candidates are more likely to receive a call in the near term. If you are asked to consider a designation (or even an interview) somewhere outside of your preferred geographic region or congregational preferences, try to consider the question, "How can/will God use me there?" While there are some legitimate reasons for such restrictions, I challenge each candidate to step out of his comfort zone and see where God leads. There are a number of people, myself included, who want you to succeed and are willing to help you with this transition in any way that we can. As you enter the placement process, I encourage you to prayerfully consider how God might use you, with your unique talents and experience, in a particular place to accomplish his will and share the Gospel with those who need to hear it.

## APPENDIX A: PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY GUIDELINES

Your philosophy of ministry should describe the theological and professional foundation and framework in which you conduct your ministry, specifically as a DCE, DCO, DPM, or LCT. This essay tells a prospective principal, pastor, and/or board member a lot about you and your professionalism, and it forms their first impression of you as a potential colleague. I carefully read this essay and may recommend (and occasionally require) revisions if potential issues stand out. If/when I ask for revisions, please do not take my comments personally; I do not want to change your philosophy or your personality, but it is my role to help you to present yourself in the most professional way possible to prospective employers. If you would like my input before you are ready to submit the essay, I am happy to proof/edit it or assist in any way that I can short of writing it for you.<sup>2</sup>

The philosophy of ministry should be 1-2 pages in length. For LCTs, the bulk of this essay should focus on your philosophy of Lutheran education, but be sure to include the Lutheran aspect of that. The tone of your writing should be professional yet personal. When in doubt, use formal language. Always use positive language in both content and syntax, and be confident in your abilities, using “I will...” instead of, “I hope...”

Your philosophy reflects your own approach to education and/or ministry. This philosophy should be based on your personal beliefs, which in turn should show an influence of college work, readings, and thinkers, not to mention Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. Consequently, when appropriate, use direct quotations. Remember to cite your sources! Also, be sure you understand the philosophy of the person being quoted, or the context of the Biblical text, since you likely will be asked questions about it at an interview.

Prospective colleagues want to know about your ministry, what they can expect from you as a church worker in their congregation or school. A brief statement on why you feel called to ministry can be used if done well, but a lengthy paragraph on a person who inspired you to enter ministry is overdone and does not convey your approach. Concrete examples from your student teaching, internship and/or field work experience should be included to illustrate the principles of your philosophy. Likewise, providing a few (but only a few) carefully selected scholarly quotations or Scripture texts which provide the framework of your ministry demonstrate your knowledge and competence as a professional.

While proofreading is part of my revision process, I expect that what you turn in to me is already in professional form. Be certain that the essay has been proofread and is absolutely correct in grammar, spelling and punctuation. It is a great idea to have at least one other set of eyes read over your philosophy, so ask a friend, family member, or the Writing Center to read it carefully.

You may wish to approach the development of your philosophy by considering a few of the following:

### ***Why do you want to be in public ministry?***

- What is the purpose of a Christian education or ministry? And likewise, what sets Lutheran education apart from secular education?
- What is your role as a Lutheran educator/DCE/DCO/Parish Musician?

### ***Whom are you going to teach/be in ministry to?***

- How will you reach the wide diversity of children that you will have in your classroom?

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<sup>2</sup> Note regarding certification: a philosophy of ministry essay will also be required when you complete your eFolio for certification. Normally, the essay for placement is written in the fall, and the certification eFolio is completed in the spring. If your essay has undergone revisions at my request beyond simple proofreading, I reserve the right to consult with faculty on whether it is allowable for the certification eFolio or if you must submit your original essay for that purpose.

- How do you define your community of learners?
- What impact will you, in your role within the Church, have on the wider community?
- What will be your relationship with the community, parents, colleagues and administration?
- How do you balance the needs of individuals with the needs of the entire group?

***How and what are you going to teach/accomplish in your ministry?***

- What are your beliefs about Lutheran education/outreach/parish music?
- How will these beliefs impact your ministry? For example, curriculum design, instructional/outreach strategies, management techniques, parent involvement, technology, diversity, etc.

As you write your philosophy, keep the following in your thoughts:

- Your philosophy reflects your own approach to education and/or ministry; this philosophy should be based on your personal beliefs, which in turn should show an influence of college work, readings, and thinkers, not to mention Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. Consequently, when appropriate, “drop names” in your philosophy. For example, “As Erikson, I believe that children go through a series of mini-crisis as they mature and it will be part of my task to assist young people in making these transitions.” However, be sure you understand the philosophy of the person being quoted since you likely will be asked questions about it at an interview.
- Your philosophy should be positive in content. While there may well be problems with our educational and ecclesiastical systems, a prospective employer already knows this and does not want to hear how bad things are – they are interested in what you are going to do to make it better for those in your care. You are writing a personal philosophy, not a critique of the system.
- Your philosophy should be positive in vocabulary and syntax. Every statement that can be said positively should be. Rather than saying, “No child will be left behind,” say, “Every child will be involved...” This is a subtlety in writing style, but the simplest of statements can be interpreted negatively even if not intended that way. In the same respect, positivity jumps off the page in the reader’s mind and goes a long way in expressing enthusiasm and energy.
- Avoid the use of jargon. If you do use educational jargon, explain how you are going to impact the student. For example, rather than writing “I strongly believe in inclusion,” write “I believe that inclusion is a key ingredient in the makeup of the classroom and I will support inclusion through practices such as using alternative assessments and preparing lessons which appeal to different learning styles.”
- Avoid broad generalizations – while you may want to say “I believe that all children can learn” – the statement is relatively meaningless without examples of how you will put that into action.
- Some suggestions on word usage: Choose words that are, again, personal and professional. Be confident without exaggerating your abilities. Specifically:
  - Exchange the use of “I hope...” for something more confident like, “I will...”
  - Rather than writing “In school students should experience...” use “In my classroom, students will experience...”
  - Be simultaneously personal and professional. Instead of writing “DCEs will...” use “I will...”
- Your philosophy is among the first things a prospective employer will see. The appearance of these documents is important and should look professional – this means standard font types and sizes, paragraph indents, reasonable margins, and a header indicating your name, the date, and what this is.
- Have someone review your philosophy for accuracy and eye catching appearance. Better yet, have two people review it.

## APPENDIX B: TIMELINE AND CHECKLIST FOR PLACEMENT

### First Phase

- Attend a small group meeting or schedule an individual meeting in August or September with the LCMS placement director to begin the placement process.
- Submit materials for the placement credential file electronically by placing them in a Google Drive folder and sharing that folder with [rschuler@csp.edu](mailto:rschuler@csp.edu). When you submit materials, include your last name in the document title.
  - Application
  - Application supplement
  - Philosophy of ministry
  - Three letters of recommendation
  - Internship or student teaching evaluations, as soon as available
- Schedule placement interview to be completed before September 15 or October 15.
- Make any necessary revisions to your credential file as required and/or recommended by the LCMS placement director. All finalized materials, except evaluations where unavailable, must be received by September 15/October 15.

### Second Semester

- Check your email and phone regularly for information about placement and to find out where your credentials are sent.
- Keep the LCMS placement director informed of any changes to your situation and/or any concerns that you have regarding placement.
- Keep the LCMS placement director informed of any and all contact made by calling congregations, including initial contact, interviews, and designation.

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### Reminders:

- LCMS Placement operates on a rolling, or as-needed, basis. Each year is different, and we respond to the needs of the Church in any given year.
- The peak of the placement year is mid-March through the end of June. Most calls are facilitated during this time. Occasionally, a student will be placed as early as mid-February, or as late as the following fall semester.
- If at any time, you have questions about the process, regardless of how seemingly small the question is, please contact the LCMS Placement Office. The more informed you are, and the more open our lines of communication, the smoother this process will work.

LCMS Placement Office | AD 328 | Schedule an Appointment by email:  
Dr. Rhoda Schuler, [rschuler@csp.edu](mailto:rschuler@csp.edu)

**APPENDIX C: SAMPLE LETTERS**

Your Name  
1282 Concordia Ave  
St. Paul, MN 55104

Date

Principal John Smith  
St. John Lutheran School  
123 4<sup>th</sup> Street  
Anywhere, MN 50006

Dear Mr. Smith and Members of St. John:

**RECEIPT OF CALL DOCUMENTS**

I have received the Call documents from St. John for the position of fourth grade teacher.

It has been a pleasure speaking by phone with you and members of the Board of Education regarding this position. I want to assure you that I will give serious and prayerful consideration to this Divine Call. You can expect a definitive decision by XXXXXXXXXX.

Please keep me in your prayers during the days ahead as I seek God’s guidance in this matter.

**CALL ACCEPTANCE**

After prayerful consideration, it is with excitement and great pleasure that I write to accept the Call from St. John to serve as your fourth grade teacher.

Our conversations have been both encouraging and helpful. I look forward to the teaching ministry to which God has called me as well as the opportunity to serve among his people at St. John. I can assure you that I will serve faithfully according to the gifts with which God has blessed me.

**If you have not officially graduated, include the following:**  
Although I am indicating to you my desire to accept this Call and my intent to serve as outlined in the Call documents, I am aware that my assignment is considered official when I complete my work at Concordia with satisfactory academic and personal records.

If you need to contact me prior to my arrival, please feel free to call me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx. Please continue to keep me in your prayers as I continue to pray that God would bless our ministry together.

**DECLINATION**

After prayerful consideration, I must write to inform you that I have decided to decline the Call from St. John to serve as your fourth grade teacher.

I appreciate all the time you have taken to speak with me regarding this position and the prayers that you have offered on my behalf. In my prayers for discernment and wisdom in considering this Call, I have, however, [been unable to reconcile my desire to teach at the middle school level with the fourth grade position detailed in this Call].

I pray that God continues to bless St. John’s ministry and guides someone to fill the position.

Kind regards,  
Your Name Signed  
Your Name Typed