

**When a Calling Body is Considering the Elimination of a Called Position for Financial Reasons**  
**~ Guiding Principles ~**  
*Conference of Presidents*

Those who are called into public ministry are servants of a calling body, given by God for the benefit of his people. "We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5). Public ministers of the gospel, whether called directly by the Lord (like the Apostle Paul) or indirectly by the Lord through his Church (like the elders in Ephesus), are also Christ's servants. "So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God" (1 Corinthians 4:1). They are to be loved and honored as Christ's representatives, through whom the Savior cares for the souls of his people.

It is a clear scriptural principle that a calling body is to demonstrate honor for its called worker by providing and caring for the individual who serves in the public ministry of the gospel in its midst. "Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:6,7). "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages" (1 Timothy 5:18; 1 Corinthians 9:9-12). No calling body has the right to expect someone to serve in a divine call without such support. A worker may choose to serve in a divine call without compensation, as the Apostle Paul did in Corinth, but a calling body cannot expect or demand it.

There are times when a calling body recognizes that, though its ministerial needs generally remain the same, it likely will not be able to support a worker in keeping with its scriptural obligations. The following general principles are offered as a guide to calling bodies facing such challenges and considering the elimination of a called position as the way to address a financial shortfall or changing ministerial needs.

1. Any contemplated change should not be done quickly or precipitously. Sufficient planning time needs to be given to the affected called worker(s). A calling body, through an elected representative, would be wise to make contact with the circuit pastor and the president of its district as soon as serious discussions regarding the elimination of a called position have begun. The district president will be able to offer counsel and assistance about the process the calling body ought to follow. He will also be able to encourage the other district presidents to consider using an individual's name on call lists with the prayer that the Lord might provide an opportunity to serve that fits the individual's gifts. If the worker is serving in a school setting, the calling body would want to bear in mind that the window in which calls are typically extended is between November 1 and the first Sunday in June.
2. A calling body would want to refer to "The Doctrine of the Divine Call, with special consideration of the elimination of called positions in our synod due to finances or changing ministerial needs," a document prepared for, and accepted by, the 2011 Synod Convention. It is available from the district president or on Connect.
3. Sincere and honest heart-searching must be done to avoid any hint of false motives in any elimination of a called position. A financial reason should never be used as an artificial or manufactured excuse to end a divine call because of dissatisfaction with a particular called worker. An older called worker should not be set aside in favor of a younger, "less expensive" called worker to carry out the same duties. Materialism and improper priorities need to be admonished and corrected.

4. The urge to end a divine call quickly for the sake of immediate implementation of a new ministry program (served by a different called worker) should be resisted. The calling body will want to bear in mind that the called worker is the Lord's servant, provided as a gift of his grace and to be treasured as such. Every effort should be made to help a worker address areas of weakness and grow in ministerial skill.
5. All involved in the process will want to make every effort to encourage God's people toward more faithful stewardship of the financial resources with which the Lord has entrusted them; such efforts could serve to alleviate or remove the financial shortfall.
6. The calling body should carefully consider all options to provide for the continuing support of the called position, including the possibility of reducing salaries for all of its called workers, provided that such a reduction would still allow the workers to meet their financial responsibilities. Decisions regarding compensation reductions should be made in careful consultation with the workers to determine if those cuts might put a particular worker at significant risk.
7. If, after careful examination of all options and discussions with the called worker, the calling body concludes that it is unable to fulfill its obligation to support the worker, it should not unilaterally terminate the divine call. Instead, the calling body ought to present to the called worker what could be provided by way of support. If the called worker is in a position financially to continue to serve at the level of compensation provided, the worker would be free to do so. If the worker prayerfully determines that the compensation is insufficient to support his household, the calling body ought to grant the worker a peaceful release from the divine call, rather than forcing the worker to resign or unilaterally terminating the divine call.
8. If the financial situation cannot be changed and other options are deemed unworkable or inappropriate, the calling body is expected to demonstrate love and concern for the ministry of the Word in general and the called worker and his family in particular. Specifically, the calling body ought to plan to provide three additional months of support to the worker, including salary, housing, and benefits. (This is not in any way intended to be a severance package. It is meant only as transitional assistance until the individual accepts a divine call or finds other gainful employment.) After those three months of support from the calling body, the worker may apply for need-based assistance for an additional three months (on a month-by-month basis) through the president of the district in which the calling body is located.
9. While this document means to provide an orderly process to follow, the process may not always be carried out in as orderly a manner as it ought to be. The challenging nature of these situations, however, ought not be used as an excuse for a selective following of the outlined process. Shortcuts aimed at moving things along more quickly could result in a process that does not honor the public ministry or the called worker. In such a situation, the called worker may request an external review of the process followed. The request should be made in writing to the District President within twenty-one days of the decision. The district president will appoint a review committee, consisting of a member of the district praesidium, the circuit pastor, a layman from the district appeals committee, and, in the case of a teacher, the district's Lutheran Schools coordinator or his designee. The member of the district praesidium will serve as the chairman of the review committee. The review committee will interview the appropriate parties and will be allowed to examine any pertinent material. The committee will provide an evaluative report to the worker and the district praesidium. On the basis of that report, the district praesidium will work with all involved as it takes the action it deems appropriate.

*(April 4, 2013 ~ Revised October 3, 2013)*