

Immanuel's Transition Process:

I'm going on a journey; it's a Holy Ghost journey...

As goes the old gospel spiritual, so goes the journey of transition in this interim period in the life of Immanuel Lutheran Church. We are on a journey together—interim pastor and interim congregation ... and a few dozen other guests and strangers and bishops and synods and sister congregations and pastoral candidates who accompany us, seen and unseen. We pray it is the Holy Spirit who leads us, but all the usual travel questions apply.

Where Have We Been?

I've been here two months as your interim pastor, during which I have learned a lot about you, gotten to know quite a bit about who you are, where you've been, where you hope to be; we've found our way toward combined online/in-person worship opportunities (which sometimes feels a little like groping in the dark as things change every week); and moved from a winter/spring schedule toward a summer schedule of life at Immanuel.

Getting to know you and discovering how well you know yourselves, how you work and play together, your history and what has gotten you to this place in the life of your congregation is all an important part of the process.

It's been a very busy time of something new to deal with every day for me. But it might seem like we've just been standing still to you.

We're not; time is relative, and we're moving along just fine.

When I start swimming laps or hop on my bike, all I can think of is the 36 laps or 20 miles ahead of me. Those first few laps or miles go by slowly, and it seems like it will take forever. But the last few seem to fly by (even though by then I am undoubtably moving slower).

I'm not the only one pedaling for you right now. Pastoral candidates are looking for vacancies such as yours and considering if this is a potential call for them. The synod office is supporting you and gathering names of possible candidates to match with the Ministry Site Profile your Call Committee eventually will put together.

This past month, your Congregation Council went through a careful process of discerning and recruiting members of the congregation to serve on the Mission and Life Committee—one of the first steps in the call process. We hope to announce those names and get that group started on their work before the end of the month. Their task is to engage the congregation in what we sometimes call a self-study process.

Where Are We?

The Mission & Life Committee is a team of listeners and learners. They hold up the mirror so you can see who you are, and they lead you to the window to see who your neighbors are. Their basic task is to listen to the congregation, to listen to the community beyond your doors, and to provide the Call Committee (and the congregation) a fresh, accurate picture of Immanuel Lutheran Church, the community it serves, and a vision for serving that community, and the world.

The M&L Committee will focus on discovering the data, the information, the questions, the new perspective we need to understand what our *vision* of what God is doing in our world is; to understand what our *mission* or *purpose* is, a vision for accomplishing that mission, and the leader we need to accomplish it.

And miraculously, they will do all of that within the space of just a couple of months!

An impossible task to complete, because it is an ongoing task that is never completed. What the Mission & Life Committee can do is help us see ourselves as we are, spur us on to what we can be, and provide the Call Committee with a lot of useful information to formulate a compelling picture of the congregation to provide to a pastoral candidate.

Where Are We Going?

The Call Committee will be formed toward the end of the Mission & Life Committee's work, and then the Mission & Life Committee will sit down with the Call Committee and share what they've learned. Together they will begin to put together the Ministry Site Profile—sort of like the resume of your congregation to present to potential pastors for Immanuel. The Call Committee also will solicit your input as members of the congregation in that process.

Then the Call Committee's work of preparing for the interview process, considering potential pastoral candidates to interview, and interviewing those candidates begins.

It is not a simple process; it is a careful process. It is mightily important not to assume you already know how to do this; it is essential to be a learner every step of the way. It is a journey of faith; your prayers are as important as the work of either of these committees—actually, more important.

When Will We Get There?

It's the family vacation question, isn't it? It can be hard to remember that the journey is as important as the destination.

There is no hard and fast timeline, but here's a projection of the way it might happen:

June	Mission & Life Committee is appointed
July-August-September	Mission & Life Committee goes to work
August	Call Committee is appointed
August-September	Call Committee begins its work
early Fall	Call Committee submits the MSP to the bishop
early to mid-Fall	Call Committee receives names of candidates
mid-Fall	Interviews begin

As I told the council this month, 'Immanuel is all about change and adaption right now. If that challenges you, I can only tell you that when you have a God who loves to create new things out of your chaos, it is inevitable. If that excites you, I can only tell you it won't happen as quickly as you wish, and when it does, it won't look like what you wished for.'

But God is faithful, and ever-creative, and very good at what God does. And if the scriptures are any clue, there's nothing the Spirit loves more than a chance to journey, leading the people of God into some new adventure, to where we've never been before.

Pastor Paul