

“Our Pastor is Leaving, Now What?”

(updated on January 14, 2026)

Overall process: The Greater Milwaukee Synod has a “best practices” process to help congregations move through a Pastoral leadership transition. A summary of the process follows below:

1. Ending Well with the outgoing pastor

- a. Connecting with a staff person from the synod office & review the transition process.
- b. Making time for the pastor to say goodbye to individuals and groups.
- c. Handing over and/or sharing information.
- d. Scheduling an exit Interview with the outgoing pastor and lay leaders, facilitated by synod staff
- e. Signing the Membership and Financial completion forms before the call ends.
- f. Planning a party/reception/thank you for the outgoing pastor.
- g. Including a liturgy of Farewell and Godspeed at the last weekend services.
- h. Communicating clearly with the congregation along the way.

2. Preparing for the transition time

- a. Planning for supply preachers as needed.
- b. Identifying the specific pastoral needs during the transition time.
- c. Determining the finances available to pay a transition pastor.
- d. Setting up a time to meet with a potential transition pastor.
- e. Creating a transition pastor covenant (called a “PACT Covenant” – *Pastors Accompanying Congregations in Transition*).

3. Gathering Basic Ministry Information (work can begin on this before or after the interim pastor starts in the congregation.)

- a. Most recent Vision, Mission, and Values statements (if you have them)
 - i. RIC status? (More information at <https://www.reconcilingworks.org/ric/>)
- b. Current active ministries, both internal and external focused
- c. Current lay leadership positions (form available at <https://milwaukee-synod.org/the-call-process-for-congregations/>)
 - i. Name, position, contact information, how long in the position
- d. Current staffing and job descriptions
- e. Current congregation statistics
 - i. Membership Demographics (numbers of members, ages, gender, ethnicity, etc)
 - ii. Average worship attendance for past three years
- f. Current financial picture
 - i. Most recent budget
 - ii. Income sources (offerings, rental, grants, etc)
 - iii. Account balances
 - iv. Endowment balance and uses (if applicable)
 - v. Stewardship history and practices

4. Once a Transition Pastor begins in a congregation: Discovery

- a. Take time to let the transition pastor get oriented to the congregation.
- b. Each transition pastor will have a different way of getting to know the congregation and be sure to give the pastor time to do initial gatherings or visits with members and/or groups, along with the normal ministry flow that takes place.
- c. After an initial “discovery phase”, the Transition pastor and council discuss what they have been learning and begin to articulate what needs to be addressed during the transition time. (The time it takes to get to this point is variable, depending on the situation in each congregation.)
- d. Determine what you need to work on during this transition time and identify the leadership and process to do the work.

5. **Options: Vitality and Organizational Structure Assessment** (*Determine with a transition pastor which of these suggested assessments to conduct.*)
 - a. Explore the viability of the current ministry model, including mission clarity and resources to live into that mission.
 - b. Assess congregational energy.
 - c. Assess the physical plant (maintenance costs, needed repairs, space matches needs, etc)
 - d. Review Constitution and Bylaws
 - i. When was the congregation's constitution and bylaws last updated? Create a review committee if it has been more than three years.
 - e. Review Financial Records Practices.

6. **Transition Team and Preparing a Ministry Site Profile** (*this is done when the basic ministry structure is clarified and stable, and the congregation is ready to prepare to call another pastor*)
 - a. Facilitated by the transition pastor or transition consultant.
 - b. Participate in a Transition Process orientation with the transition pastor and/or a synod staff member.
 - c. There are four basic questions congregations want to be able to answer:
 - i. Who are we?
 - ii. Who is our neighbor?
 - iii. What is God up to internally and externally and how are we called to participate? (What is our specific mission moving forward?)
 - iv. Given the answers to the first three question, how do we articulate the kind of pastoral leadership we need for the open position?
 - d. Transition Team members oversee this work utilizing surveys, small group discussions, large group gatherings, visiting key people in the community, doing a congregational history event, focus groups, and other kinds of information gathering processes.
 - e. Involve the congregation along the way.
 - f. Complete a Ministry Site Profile (MSP) using the data collected by the Transition Team.
 - g. Present the final draft of an MSP to the congregation at a Town Hall Meeting where the bishop and another synod staff member attends.

7. **Call Committee**
 - a. Check your congregation's constitution regarding how a call committee gets formed. Be sure you are clear on what your constitution states.
 - b. Be clear in communicating with the congregation, what the nomination process for the call committee will be.
 - c. A synod representative will lead a call committee orientation.
 - d. Create questions for the interviews based on your congregation's MSP.
 - e. Conduct a "practice interview" with a pastor from outside the congregation (synod staff can help to identify potential mock interviewees).
 - f. Receive names of potential candidates and prepare for interviews.
 - g. Identify a "Candidate of Choice" for the open position.
 - h. Meets with the council to share the name of the "Candidate of Choice".

8. **Council**
 - a. Votes to "receive the recommendation of call committee's candidate of choice".
 - b. Call a congregational meeting as per your congregation's current constitution.
 - c. Set a date and time for a Meet and Greet of the candidate of choice with the congregation.
 - d. Work with synod staff on the compensation package prior to the congregational vote.
 - e. Hold the vote and sign appropriate call paperwork.
 - f. Welcome the new pastor!

The Greater Milwaukee Synod website has resources for congregations at <https://milwaukeeesyndod.org/resources/for-congregations/>
 Please stay in contact with synod staff about any questions or concerns along the way. Trust that the Holy Spirit will be part of the process and God will lead and guide the council, call committee, and congregation in this time of pastoral leadership transition. Thank you for your ministry!