



# A GUIDE TO THE MDS

## for Bishops, Call Process Administrators, Churchwide Personnel

*Not for general distribution*

Call Process Online: <http://www.elca.org/call-process/>  
CPA Login: <https://community.elca.org/login>

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You are encouraged to read  
**A GUIDE TO THE MSP** and **A GUIDE TO THE RMP**  
as companion pieces to the information found here

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## A TEACHABLE MOMENT

**Many, if not most, of the tasks** that bishops and members of the synod staff perform on a daily basis offer the opportunity to teach and grow people in their discipleship and understanding. Call process is among these. Call process is a partnership of common purpose as ministry sites, rostered a [b]ghYfg, synod bishops and churchwide offices find ways to mutually engage in, cooperate and coordinate their efforts in the call process for the sake of Christ's work in the church and for the world.

To that end, much of the design and intention of the Mobility Database System, especially in the design of the forms and the governing protocols of the system, aspires to encourage reflection, reward initiative, stimulate creativity, promote cooperation and achieve results that reflect this church's core convictions about mission, calling and faith. Anything less than this aspiration would be to allow call process to drift into the secular realm of jobs and job descriptions, hiring and firing, duties and expectations.

Congregations come to the work of call process expecting that their efforts will not be unduly hampered by requirements and rules, that their position will get the best possible exposure to the available pool of candidates, and that the process will end in a good match. Rostered ministers expect that their availability for call will be handled with confidentiality, that the process will be fair and level, and that it will be treated as a Call and not an employment process. Bishops and CPAs expect that their shepherding role in defining and directing call process will be honored, that they will be able to appropriately regulate the flow of the process and information, and that the three expressions of this church – congregations, synods and churchwide – will be mutually respected for the roles they serve in the ELCA.



## Potential Benefits of the MDS

- Forms are flexible and adaptable to most settings and needs
- Forms reveal each individual's and site's creativity, initiative and energy
- MDS gives a greater transparency to the call process
- Users are urged to be thoughtful, discerning and specific
- Forms are grounded in a structured process of discernment
- Users are able to take active responsibility for their mobility and search
- Call Process Online embodies the "partnership of common purpose" by being the place where all the partners to call process come together: sites, ministers and bishops
- The MDS offers the prospect of speed, accuracy and efficiency
- The MDS is a tool in the total process of reaching the desired outcome – identifying leadership for mission.

## INTENDED USERS

The Mobility Database System is intended to be used solely within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to support congregations and church-related organizations (schools, healthcare institutions, agencies, social ministry organizations, and global mission sites) that seek to call an ELCA rostered minister (ordained and lay rostered minister) to their ministry. As such, the MDS is not designed to support searches conducted by organizations that are not organically linked to a synodical bishop or for searches for non-rostered persons within congregations or church-related organizations (e.g. non-rostered musicians, educators, youth and family ministers, administrators and the like).

### Special Considerations

#### Rostered Minister Profile

- Candidates for rostered ministry who are completing their training and preparing for Assignment are asked to complete the Rostered Minister Profile.
- Rostered Ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada seeking a call within the ELCA may utilize the MDS if they are in conversation with an ELCA bishop and have obtained a valid Leader Key from the ELCA Office of Secretary.
- Synodically Authorized lay ministers do not have access to the MDS.

#### Ministry Site Profile

- The MSP is designed for use by congregations and those congregations under development that will call a rostered minister upon organizing. Congregations complete the entire MSP.







should be placed in the file and forwarded to each ministry site that is considering the rostered minister. The rostered minister is to send a copy to the reference completing the *Reference Recommendation* form.

### Reference Recommendation

The MSP and RMP both require an outside recommendation in order to add another perspective on the rostered minister's leadership or the ministry site's mission. The form should not be treated as perfunctory. It can be very useful, especially in that questions are asked in the recommendation form that echo what the rostered minister or ministry site have already stated within their RMP/MSP. This gives a point of validation and contrast. The MSP recommendation should be shared with the candidates for call; the RMP recommendation should be shared with the ministry site. Beyond this, the forms are considered confidential.

### Reflections on Ministry and Context

The RMP and MSP *Reflections* forms are optional, though some synodical bishops may elect to require that one or more of the questions be addressed by all rostered ministers or ministry sites.

## BISHOP'S CONFIDENTIAL FORM

The *Bishop's Confidential Recommendation* form is, strictly speaking, not a part of the Rostered Minister Portfolio. (A "portfolio" is that collection of information that the rostered minister develops in support of his/her mobility.) The bishop's form is a private bishop-to-bishop communication that is considered highly confidential. It is never to be distributed to people outside the bishop's office and may not even be shared with others within the bishop's office if the bishop so elects.

- Bishops complete the form by using their personal login to *ELCA Community* and going through the "Synod Portal" to "Call Process" and then "RMP Activity Log". Simply select the rostered minister's name and then choose "PDF" to read the existing recommendation.
- If the bishop wishes to edit the existing recommendation, choose "ON FILE" / "EDIT".
- If no recommendation currently exists, the bishop will see the option to open a "NEW" form.
- The bishop will have the opportunity to enter comments into a separate text box that only other bishops can read.

## ADDITIONAL PROTOCOLS

The Mobility Database System is only a technological tool for streamlining and facilitating call process work. Procedures and protocols that bishops and CPAs have established for



their respective synods in the past should continue. Nevertheless, the following protocols will help insure that all parties to call process work share a common understanding of the MDS' purpose and use.

## Relational Agreement

Synodical bishops have agreed to work cooperatively, supportively and openly with one another, respecting each other's ministry and territory. Among other things, the bishop's document, *A Shared Vision of Episcopacy and a Relational Agreement* (2008), states:

- Each synodical bishop has pastoral and administrative responsibility for their synod. Specifically, each synodical bishop has responsibility for determining how call process will be conducted within her/his synod territory.
- The synodical bishop works interdependently, rather than hierarchically, with the other two expressions of the church – congregations and churchwide.
- Bishops work collegially together, including the sharing of ministers and information as is good for the whole church and not just the local synod. Bishops will be candid and forthright about all relevant information about rostered ministers or ministry sites.
- Bishops strive to deal fairly and evenhandedly with all candidates, rostered ministers, congregations, institutions and agencies.
- The *Bishop's Confidential Recommendation* form is privileged bishop-to-bishop communication.
- If a synodical bishop wishes to recommend a rostered minister to a ministry site and wishes to contact that rostered minister to discuss his/her mobility, the bishop (or CPA) will first contact the rostered minister's home bishop for permission to do so.
- Bishops will normally permit another bishop to contact a rostered minister regarding mobility unless there is a compelling reason not to (e.g. premature interruption of a call under three years or a pressing personal or family circumstance).
- Bishops do not support any attempt to conduct conversations or negotiations between candidates and ministry sites prior to formal Assignment or recommendation.
- Bishops give particular attention to persons who experience difficulty in the call process due to ethnicity, gender, being married to another rostered minister, age, challenging personal conditions, service in the military chaplaincy, and returning missionaries.
- Bishops attest all Letters of Call signifying that the call has been properly extended and that the stated terms are accurate.

## Use of the MDS Forms

- The Leader Key and Social Security numbers should always be treated as private and confidential information.
- Rostered ministers generally expect that their availability for call will be treated confidentially so as not to undermine their current call.
- A RMP should not normally be marked "active" on the *RMP Activity Log* unless the *Rostered Minister Profile*, *Reference Recommendation* form, *Authorization and Release*, and *Bishop's Confidential Recommendation* form have all been submitted.
- A MSP should not normally be marked "active" on the *MSP Activity Log* unless the *Ministry Site Profile* and *Reference Recommendation* form have both been submitted.







## BACKGROUND

Congregations and rostered ministers in the call process in the ELCA do not unanimously love the experience. Stories abound about bumping into unspoken rules and unwanted gatekeepers, the lack of transparency, the cloud of confidentiality, and the perplexing way practices differ from one synod to the next. Some searches seem endless; others do not seem to be set on a level playing field. In an informal survey by *The Lutheran* magazine in 2002, only 15% of the 280 respondents liked their experience of the call process.

The Churchwide Assembly of 2003 considered a memorial from the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod that cited the confusion and negativity associated with call process and called for research and recommendations. In 2006 the Task Force that took up the work made specific recommendations: that tools be developed to support all the parties in the call process, that best practices be identified and promoted, that resources be written with an eye for developing a common language and understanding of call process, and that emerging technologies be employed to undergird the work of call process.

As a part of the response to these recommendations, a team of people from the churchwide offices began work in 2007 on the Mobility Database System. From the beginning the goal was to create new forms that encouraged reflection, creativity and a missional mindset, that a database be created to house and easily process the information found on the forms, and that helpful resources be identified and made available at ELCA.org.

The MDS went live in March 2009 and underwent a significant review and updating in 2015. The hard work of creating the MDS was managed entirely by ELCA staff under the leadership of Marcia Johnson (Office of Bishop) and the Rev. Richard Bruesehoff (Leadership Support). The Rev. Dr. Stanley J. Meyer served as Project Director.

The Mobility Database System is a complex array of programming and protocols. You are encouraged to offer your comments to help improve its friendliness and functioning.

### CALL PROCESS ONLINE

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