

2026

Recommendations to ORLC Council



Forward in Faith Team

6/2/2026

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Introduction

The purpose of the Our Redeemer’s Lutheran Church’s (ORLC) Forward in Faith Team is to review and make strategic recommendations for church processes by ensuring their alignment with our mission and operational best practices.

This team was created to ensure called pastors/deacons, lay ministry associates, employees, and volunteers have clear guidelines and the tools necessary to perform their roles successfully, while ensuring a healthy ministry environment.

The Forward in Faith Team is composed of two members of the most recent Call Committee (who transitioned into the Mutual Ministry role for Pastor Adam Barnhart), Shauna Helfert and Craig Linke, and two members of the Executive Committee of the Council, Trudy Burke and Attila Fohnagy.

The Forward in Faith Team had conversations with numerous congregational members, received 10 documents with comments from the congregational members, and a team member interviewed ORLC staff. At the beginning of 2026, ORLC had 490 confirmed (voting adult) members.

The following recommendations propose changes to the personnel policy, constitution, and expectations of pastor and staff for council consideration. The policy recommendations are intended to provide guidance for the governance, administration, and overall ministry practices of the church as an organization. These recommendations are not directed toward, nor are they intended to regulate, the personal authority, spiritual leadership, or pastoral responsibilities of the Pastor. Rather, the recommendations serve as general principles and procedural guidelines for church operations, committees, boards, and ministry teams, while respecting the Pastor's distinct role in leading the congregation and carrying out ministerial duties in accordance with the church's constitution and mission.

Recommendations

1) Include Lead Pastor in the Call Committee's Interview Process

Issue: Pastors involvement and ownership in the Call Process.

Recommended Action(s):

The Lead Pastor should be involved in the interview process. This would allow the Lead Pastor and pastoral candidate to interact in the presence of the Call Committee.

The Call Committee retains authority and responsibility for recommending a candidate to the Congregation.

Background:

ORLC Constitution, CR 13.01.7 (pg. 29) says that the lead and associate Pastors and Council President shall be 'ex-officio' members of any committee unless identified otherwise.

The ELCA, Montana Synod, Call Committee Handbook does not mention Pastors having a role in the Call Committee.

This process is intentional, as it helps the congregation to maintain control of the call process.

Possible Action Items:

ORLC has typically had two pastors, a Lead Pastor and Associate Pastor. In situations where there is a Call for an Associate Pastor, it may be beneficial to have the Lead Pastor be actively involved in the work of the Call Committee. *The Lead Pastor should have a discernment voice, but not decision authority and is not a voting member of the Call Committee.*

The Lead Pastor should have early and active collaboration with the Call Committee. The Lead Pastor will likely have more experience in interviewing and working with other pastors than members of the Call Committee. Because it is intended that pastoral staff have a collegial and collaborative relationship, the existing pastor should have meaningful involvement in the call process, without controlling the process.

2) Establish Onboarding procedures for new pastors and staff

Issue: Unclear if there is guidance on onboarding a new Pastor and staff.

Recommended Action(s):

- Establish an onboarding meeting between Pastors and members of the Mutual Ministry Committee and Executive Committee.
- Review and understand onboarding process, expectation, and personnel policy.
- Provide the new employee with a detailed job description, with the expectation that changes in duties may occur as skill sets and needs determine. Include information on how an employee is expected to communicate with other staff (i.e., weekly meetings, check in times, etc.)

- Provide clear expectations on work hours vs. personal time knowing that emergency situations may arise as a church leader. Clear discussions on being on call, off the clock, unavailable, etc.
- Arrange times for the new employee to meet with other staff members (and Council Leadership) one on one to make introductions and share expectations of working relationships as well as get acquainted with one another.
- Provide new employees with a list of expectations/culture at Our Redeemer's. Examples: Events where attendance is expected, traditions/events unique to ORLC, and how faith and community life is handled (i.e., baptism rituals, confirmation process, new member process, funeral procedures).
- Evaluate performance more formally and frequently for new rostered ministers (performed by Executive Committee and Lead Pastor) and staff (Lead Pastor and Personnel Committee).

3) Address work-life balance

Issue: Interaction between Pastors and/or staff and their work life balance.

Recommended Action(s):

We encourage pastors and staff to have this conversation and recognize that each situation is different. We encourage healthy interaction and team building between the Pastors and staff.

For work life balance, we recommend that Pastors and staff work together to establish workplace boundaries.

4) Second Pastor access to Executive Committee

Issue: Second Pastors lack of access to the Executive Committee.

Recommended Action(s):

We recommend that the Executive Committee invites the second pastor to attend meetings as desired by the second pastor. Language about attending the Executive Committee meetings may be added to the second pastor's job description as an optional job task.

5) Early meetings between Mutual Ministry Committee(s) and Executive Committee

Issue: Perception that church leadership acted too late to intervene on a pastor's concerns and issues.

Recommended Action(s):

Initiate a Mutual Ministry Committee (s) and Executive Committee meeting with the Pastors sooner when issues are brought to either committee's attention. Early intervention and healthy interaction should happen as soon as possible.

6) Constitution Language Change – Personnel Committee

Issue: Language in the Constitution doesn't reflect what the Personnel Committee does. Also, some congregation members would like the committee to have a more active role in personnel issues.

Recommended Action(s):

The Personnel Committee meets and recommends language changes to the council.

7) Constitution Language Change – Rostered Staff

Issue: It is unclear which personnel policies the council shall apply to rostered staff.

Recommended Action(s):

The Personnel Committee meets to develop language changes to clarify policies that apply to rostered staff. The Personnel Committee will make recommendations to the council.

8) Constitution Language Change – Mutual Ministry Committee

Issue: The Lead Pastor's Mutual Ministry Team is composed of members of the Executive Committee.

Recommended Action(s):

Strike (black strikethrough) and add language (blue text) to the Constitution.

C13.03. Mutual Ministry Committee(s) ~~(in the absence of a mutual ministry committee, the duties shall not be fulfilled by the executive committee or its members)~~ shall be appointed jointly by the president and the rostered minister. Term of office shall be two years, with three members to be appointed each successive year.

We recommend that this change be put into action before the constitution is officially changed.

9) Constitution Language Change – Executive Committee

Issue: Perception of the Lead Pastor's control of church organization.

Recommended Action(s):

Add proposed language #4 to the Constitution (blue text).

CR13.02.A2015

The Executive Committee shall:

1. Set the Congregation Council meeting agendas.
2. Conduct emergency Council business between council meetings pending subsequent approval by the Congregational Council at the next council meeting.
3. Function as the Executive board in all matters involving church business.
4. [Conduct an annual evaluation with rostered staff.](#)

Background: Under C12.04 e, the council shall help the pastor and staff annually to evaluate and fulfill their call or employment. Adding the language in blue above to the constitution makes it clear on who is responsible for these annual evaluations.

No Action Recommended

Issue 1: Remove Pastor(s) as voting member on Council and remove them from the Executive Committee.

Recommendation:

The Forward in Faith Team finds merit in the comment; however, we do not recommend changing the constitution in regard to Pastor(s) voting at council meetings or their attendance at executive committee meetings.

Issue 2: Perceived secrecy by the church council.

Recommendation:

The Forward in Faith Team hears the concerns of the appearance of secrecy and the want for more transparency from church council. The council has open meetings with meeting times and meeting summaries published in the Voice (monthly newsletter). Concurrently, the council practices confidentiality, through executive sessions regarding pastoral candidates, legal matters, personnel management, and private pastoral care. We found that the council and executive committee are working within the appropriate balance of openness and confidentiality.

Conclusions

- **Feedback Addressed:** The Forward in Faith Team addressed and acted upon as many congregational concerns as possible.
- **Separation Status:** Staff interviews and work by the Forward in Faith Team confirmed Pastor Adam and the church separated mutually. The Bishop of the Montana Synod was involved throughout the separation process. No disciplinary action was taken, and mediation was offered. Based on our review, the pastoral call did not appear to be a good fit, consistent with the observations shared in Pastor Adam's letter to the congregation dated January 29, 2026.
- **Church Council:** The Forward in Faith Team found that the ORLC council protects community trust through a model of Appropriate Transparency, rejecting any practice of secrecy.
- **Constitution Review Committee:** The Forward in Faith Team advises the council to establish a constitutional review committee.
- **Call Committee and Church Leadership:** The call committee and church leadership acted in good faith during Pastor Adam's tenure. The Forward in Faith Team affirms the importance that church leadership continue moving forward with transparency and accountability. It also affirms the congregation's support of Pastor Trina Johnsten as we faithfully pursue God's direction for our congregation.
- **Next Steps:** The Forward in Faith Team urges the council, committees, pastors, and staff to execute the recommended actions in this document. We recommend that:
 - the Call Committee or relevant committee work on recommendation 1,

- the pastor(s) and staff work to implement recommendations 2 and 3,
- the Executive Committee work on recommendations 4 and 5,
- the Personnel Committee meet and discuss recommendations 6 and 7, and,
- the ORLC constitution be changed to address recommendations 8 and 9.