

# The Call Process

by  
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August 2006

[Note: this was a letter written in answer to a question about the call process. I chose to develop the historical basis for the call process, as that illumined both the manner in which our call process worked, but also highlighted areas in which modern church practice differs from historical church practice.]

In all the books I've read on the Divine Call, it is the doctrine that is discussed, and not the practice. Robert David Preus' booklet entitled *The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy* (Luther Academy, 1991), is different. Beginning on page 33 he begins to lay out The Call Process. He cribs from John Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, Tuebingen, 1763. I find this quite fascinating.

Gerhard states that three estates of the church are involved: the civil magistracy, the church body, and the people. The right of the local congregation to call its ministers apart from the church as a whole is denied. (Which by extension means congregational governance is problematic at best. The local congregation is a term not often found in the Confessions. Preus states this is the aberration of the Anabaptists.)

In Europe the regent was the protector of the church, and thus had a role. In America we say the state best protects religion by remaining separated from it. But even in America the state has a role. Churches and church bodies are incorporated, which means they are granted certain rights by the state. In return they agree to a corporate structure, which has certain legal responsibilities to the state. In this way the role Gerhard ascribed to the state becomes the role of the church body. Thus Gerhard's three players in the call---the state, the church, and the people---still have a role. I present to you Gerhard's steps in the call process here, as laid out by Robert Preus. (I have shortened some of the steps.

1. When a pastor dies, the superintendent of the diocese reports to the consistory. [Consistory: A court appointed to regulate ecclesiastical affairs in Lutheran state churches. I suppose the parallel in function would be the clergy commission.]
2. No candidate for the office is nominated, if he is postponing or delaying his own work in the church, and under those conditions one should not nominate oneself for a certain place.
3. The magistrates who are protectors (*patroni*) of the church and have a right to be consulted are given the power to nominate certain candidates who are suitable to the consistory and they present them for examination.

4. The consistory examines the candidates to determine whether they have an unfeigned faith, exhibit a highly esteemed life and are “instructed in the necessary gifts for teaching.”
5. The consistory sends the candidates who have been examined, often rigorously and with trial sermons, to the “synod” for confirmation. . . . In Gerhard’s day the magistrate would call a “synod” after visitations had taken place. The synod had power and authority over those in attendance. This was the authority of the state . . . . In our day . . . the “synod” is no longer a mere meeting sponsored by the civil government, but has become a permanent entity, a kind of super-church. . . . For all practical purposes, the synod today has taken over the office of the political estate; and in our society it governs with the Gospel.
6. If those who come together in the synod are either unwilling or unable to nominate suitable persons, then the consistory may act in the place and provide for the minister of the church.
7. Those who are to be placed in a church ought first to be heard and approved by it. No one, if he is found suitable, should be imposed upon a church against its will, unless there are unique and serious reasons.
8. Finally, the man who has been examined, approved and called should be ordained through the laying on of hands and prayer, confirmed by synodical and regental letters of call which was a legal contract, and invested by a solemn rite.