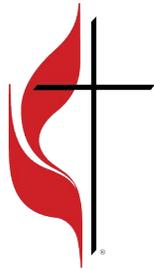


# PASTORAL TRANSITIONS

A Resource for Pastors and Local Churches in The United Methodist Church



## Northern Illinois Conference OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### INTRODUCTION

About that polity thing.....a word from Bishop Sally Dyck

As every January rolls around, the cabinet begins the process of appointment making. You may know that there are two ways in which churches receive clergy. One is the congregational system where the church has a search committee that sorts through resumes and interviews candidates, usually assisted by a judicatory office. It's all up to the local church to interview, make a decision and call a pastor. The other is the appointive system which is what The United Methodist Church has used since its beginning. It used to be that the bishop simply appointed clergy, announcing them at the annual gathering of all clergy. District superintendents assisted but with little to no consultation with the congregation. Then the Staff-Parish Relations Committee entered the equation. It's a relatively recent addition to the polity of our church. Its responsibility is to support and give feedback to the clergy but also to the district superintendent about the needs of the congregation. Consultation occurs in addition to a yearly meeting with the SPRC as a district superintendent talks with the clergy and the SPRC. The SPRC is the official entity with which the DS interacts in regards to the continuation of the appointment of a clergy person or when for the good of the church, the clergy or the annual conference's needs, there is a move. This resource is meant to provide helpful information to make this "move" or change as healthy as possible.



## Why Itinerancy

The United Methodist system of itinerant ministry is rooted in John Wesley's vision of spreading scriptural holiness across the land and utilizing both clergy and laity in the fulfillment of this mission. Itinerant ministry in the earliest days required pastors to travel continually on horseback around defined circuits, and then after a year or two be assigned to a different circuit. The itinerant system has undergone many changes in the last 200 years, but several things remain the same.

- The resident Bishop decides when and where preachers are appointed.
- The "circuit rider's" task is to spread the Word of God, administer the Sacraments, and give oversight to the life and mission of the local church.
- Strong lay leadership plays a vital role in maintaining continuity and the health of the church.
- Elder pastors are members of the annual conference, not a local church.
- Pastors, while paid by the local church, are accountable to the Discipline of The United Methodist Church and to those who have been elected or appointed to oversee their ministry.

Early in the process of candidacy for pastoral ministry, United Methodist pastors are asked to reflect on the implications of itinerant ministry for their lives and families. No pastor is licensed for ministry without an agreement to serve where the resident Bishop appoints. Those who choose ordination agree to keep the General Rules of The United Methodist Church and support and maintain the government and polity of the church. By having equipped and licensed and itinerant ministers, the United Methodist Church is able to provide pastoral leadership in each of its churches.

## **HOW ITINERANCY WORKS**

### The Consultation Process

While the Bishop is ultimately responsible for appointing pastors to churches, his or her decision relies heavily on a process of conversation and prayer involving the Bishop and all superintendents. The Book of Discipline says that consultation is the process whereby the Bishop and/or district superintendent confer with the pastor and the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, taking into consideration:

- a. the unique needs of a charge and its community context
- b. the gifts and evidence of God's grace of a particular pastor
- c. the yearly congregation assessment and pastoral evaluation
- d. the mission of the whole Church.

Ongoing consultation enables the superintendent to have current profiles on both pastors and churches, which are shared with the Bishop and other superintendents. Church profiles include data about location, demographics, local history, membership, convictional stances, ministries, strengths, growing edges, and needs in future pastoral leadership. Clergy profiles include data about the pastor's service history, family, spiritual gifts and passions, growing edges, and special needs or interests. These profiles enable superintendents to prepare for the discernment process which ultimately determines who will be appointed to each congregation. All appointments are made with defined missional reasons for the appointment.

## The Appointment Process

The pastor is the first one to hear about the new appointment from the superintendent of the future or receiving church. In that conversation the superintendent explains the missional reasons for the appointment and shares other details. The pastor is urged to ask questions and to give feedback. If the pastor has concerns about match, he/she may ask for reconsideration of the appointment. The Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) of the receiving church is the next to learn about the appointment. At an SPRC meeting scheduled by the superintendent, the new pastor is introduced. Discussion focuses on the missional needs articulated by the church and the ways the incoming pastor meets those needs. While the meeting is not an interview, there is time for sharing, for questions, and for working out the “nuts and bolts” of the move. If the SPRC or pastor at that point has reservations about the missional appropriateness of the move, either party or the superintendent may request reconsideration of the appointment.

## The Announcement of an Appointment is Made to the Churches

Protocol for announcing the change simultaneously involves:

1. Announcement of the change to the pastor's present congregation. This is done in the weekly worship service(s) and then announced through the church's typical channels of communication. The superintendent also calls the pastor's present SPRC chair before the appointment change is announced to the whole church.)
2. Announcement of the change to the pastor's future congregation. This is usually done by the SPRC chair with appropriate introductory information about the new pastor. The appointment may be announced to those outside the involved congregations any time thereafter.

## **THE TRANSITION**

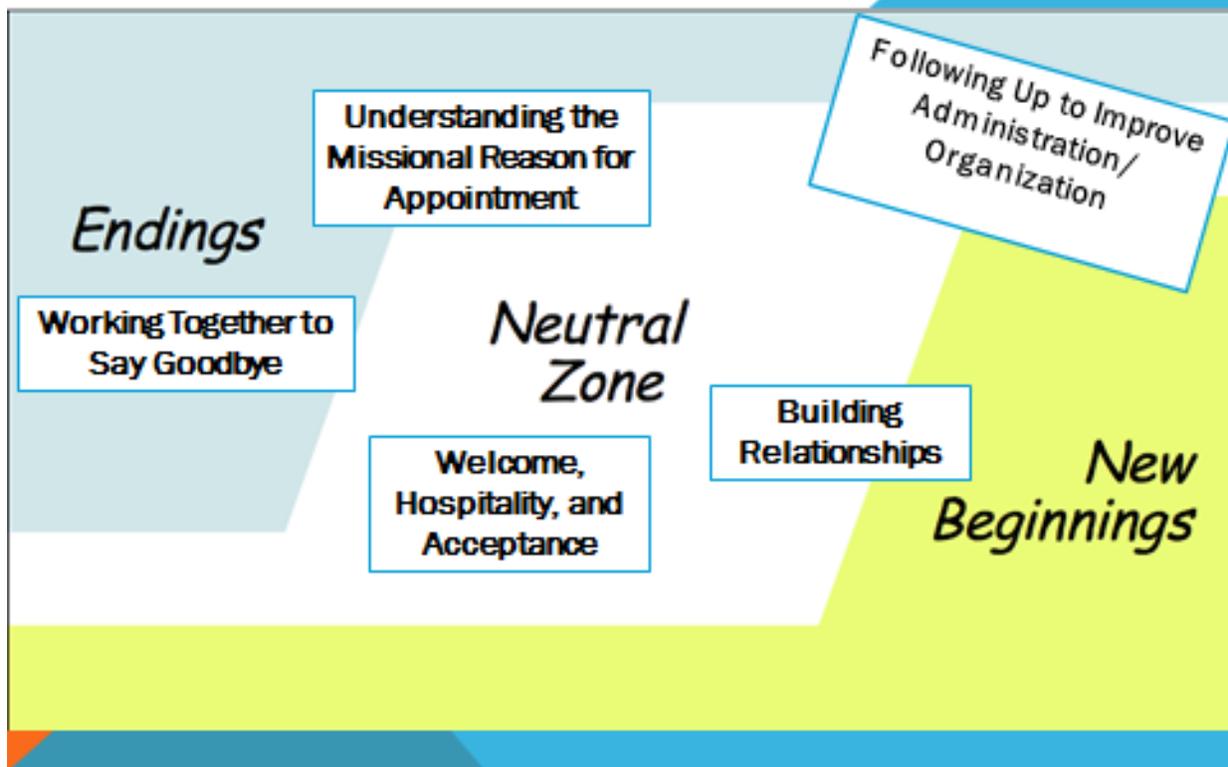
So a change is going to happen in the church and in a pastor's life. We must remember though, that “change does not equal transition”! Making a healthy transition for both a church and a pastor (and perhaps family) takes intentional work by all involved. Change is immediate. Transitions take a process.

Jon Montgomery (Consultant and Certified Coach with a Master's degree in Organizational Development & Leadership, Researcher, Trainer and Speaker, Chair, SPRC at Our Redeemer's UMC in Schaumburg, IL) conducted a research study in 2014-2015 using some NIC churches that had just moved through a new pastoral appointment. He shares with the NIC that healthy transitions occur when five critical criteria have been met:

1. Working Together to Say Goodbye
2. Understanding the Missional Reason for the Appointment
3. Welcome, Hospitality and Acceptance
4. Building Relationships
5. Following Up to Improve Administration/organization

In working with William Bridges' Transition Model in which Bridges identifies three stages of a transition – endings, neutral, and beginnings – Jon identified that these five criteria are crucial parts to the process of transition.

## WILLIAM BRIDGES' TRANSITION MODEL & THE CRITERIA FOR A SUCCESSFUL PASTOR TRANSITION



### MAKING THE FIVE CRITICAL CRITERIA HAPPEN

#### "Working Together to Say Goodbye"

- Begin praying daily for your pastor and family, thanking God for the ways his/her ministry has been important in your life. In the same way, begin praying daily for your new incoming pastor, for the changes he/she will be going through.
- Show love, regard, and even grief, for your departing pastor. This is one of the best things you can do for the new pastor.
- Consider giving the pastor the last two weeks off. This helps the pastor enter the new situation rested and gives an emotional buffer between one pastor's last Sunday and another pastor's first Sunday.

- Plan goodbye celebrations prior to the beginning of the two weeks off. On the last Sunday that your congregation will be with your present pastor plan "An Order of Farewell" worship service recognizing the gifts, opportunities and work that have been accomplished in his or her ministry. A suggested order of worship for that service, to be held at the regular Sunday morning worship, is found in the *United Methodist Book of Worship*, (pgs 598-599). Of course, you may modify it, but we strongly recommend its use.
- Please refrain from inviting the former pastor to return for weddings, funerals, or baptism. This allows your former pastor to engage fully with his or her new church and it helps your new pastor build pastoral relationships right away.
- Give attention to the parsonage during the time the outgoing pastor is packing up. Check to see if repairs or other changes need to be made during this time. This allows for only the general cleaning to be done in the short amount of time between the former pastor moving out and the new pastor moving in.
- Help the pastor and family on moving out day by providing a simple meal, as well as having a cleaning team from the Trustees, help clean the parsonage as it is emptied.
- Our NIC Parsonage Guidelines from our Standing Rules gives clear expectations about the parsonage responsibilities for both church and pastor. (See "NIC Parsonage Guidelines" in the Additional Resources section at the end.)

#### "Understanding the Missional Reasons for the Appointment"

- When a new appointment is made and announced to a congregation, the missional reasons for why a pastor is being appointed to that church should be shared in the announcement. The congregation can then begin to accept the incoming ministry of the new pastor.
- Missional reasons, along with other introductory material, should be printed and shared through the bulletin, newsletter and other forms of church communication.

#### "Welcome, Hospitality, Acceptance"

- Before the actual moves take place, the incoming pastor may take part in some visits/meetings with the outgoing pastor at the outgoing pastor's invitation. Information about the ministry, current goals and needs of the congregation, information about the community, schools, and parsonage are appropriate pieces of information to share between the pastors. If pastors are able to provide a team approach to the ministry of the congregation, working together for the health of the congregation and thus avoiding the appearance of competition, the transition is much easier on the congregation. (As always, pastors should honor their predecessors and never speak ill of the previous pastors' ministry.)
- Signs of welcome can be extended to an incoming pastor prior to their arrival. Congregations that show they care about their incoming pastor through cards and calls and prayers to help make the transition healthy for all. The new pastor also begins the process of welcome, hospitality and acceptance of the new congregation by praying for new members by name.

- The SPRC should plan for welcoming of the new pastor. The first Sunday your new pastor is scheduled to preach in your church, someone from the SPRC should introduce the pastor (and family) at the beginning of the service and welcome them to the church.
- An “*Order for the Celebrate of an Appointment*” that recognizes new beginnings in ministry is encouraged and can be found in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, (pgs 595-598). Worship leaders, SPRC members and incoming pastors will want to work closely to coordinate the service. (Both this service and *An Order of Farewell to a Pastor* recognize that the changing of the pastor is a significant event which needs to be celebrated and affirmed in the sending forth of one who has served in the midst of a congregation, and celebrating and renewing the covenant of the one who comes to serve. Both services place emphasis on not just the pastor, but the total ministry of the church.)
- The SPRC should begin plans to create opportunities for more in-depth conversations between the members and pastor. These gatherings should take place in the first few months of the appointment (refer to “cottage meetings” in the “building relationships” section below.)
- The SPRC should put together key pieces of information for the new pastor. Ideally this should be shared at the introductory meeting or shortly thereafter. This information should include, but not be limited to:
  - current directory (if a new directory is being planned it would be most appropriate to invite the new pastor (& family) to have their pictures be included if it is being published before the appointment change),
  - yearly goals of the congregation,
  - list of shut-ins and expectations for visitation,
  - key leadership and committees,
  - area hospitals,
  - accustomed dates and times of scheduled meetings,
  - church calendar with upcoming events
  - traditions including communion practices and seasonal events
  - expected role of the pastor with church school, VBS, youth group, etc.
- Welcome your pastor (and family) on moving day. Have a small group of people on hand to greet the new pastor when they arrive. Stock the parsonage refrigerator and pantry with some staples and provide some meals for the first few days in the parsonage. A picnic lunch that can be eaten while unpacking will be very much appreciated. If there are young children in the new family, see that children from the congregation open opportunities for friendships.
- Pastors and SPRC members should take advantage of transition and cross-cultural ministry training events that the conference provides.
- Invite the new pastor to any social events held by church groups/classes in the early months. Make sure that the pastor's spouse and children, if applicable, are invited to groups and made to feel welcome by the congregation.
- Wear nametags. Even if name tags are not a tradition, the congregation can wear them for a few weeks to help the pastor learn names - remember the congregation only has to learn a few new names, while the pastor has to learn many!

## “Building Relationships”

- Cottage meetings or coffee talks are opportunities for a pastor to have more in-depth conversations with a small group of church members. Many times these gatherings are held in church members homes with a dozen other church members invited. This gives the pastor the opportunity to learn more about the members and listen closely to their hopes and dreams for the ministry. Depending on the size of the church, these gatherings can take place throughout the first 6 months of an appointment.
- Have a church member who has lived in the area for a long time and is well-informed about the community offer to give the new pastor a guided driving tour of the community.
- Use this new appointment as an opportunity to bring your church to the attention of the community. Offer a press release to the area newspaper. As well, introduce your new pastor to public officials, community leaders, and area pastors.
- It is important for churches to maintain healthy boundaries with the former pastor. Inviting former pastors back for important events hinders the relationship with the current pastor as well as not taking into account the pastor's responsibilities to his/her new congregation.
- Likewise, it is important for pastors to maintain healthy boundaries with members of their former church so as not to hinder the ministry and development of relationships between the new pastor and congregation and to not hinder ministry in the new setting. Pastors, if a former parishioner invites you to conduct a service or attend, do not say “if the new pastor invites me”. This puts the new pastor in a difficult situation. Please be mindful of healthy boundaries and respond with messages that indicate appreciation for the relationship and history with the individual but that you want to respect the new pastor's ministry and your presence may hinder that. These principles should also be taken into consideration with forms of social media. (See “Rules for Social Media” and “Our Life Together” in the Additional Resources section at the end of this document.)

## “Follow Up”

- It is crucial for monthly SPRC meetings during the first 6 months of an appointment. This gives an opportunity for clarifications to be made and questions to be answered regarding the ministry of the church. SPRC members should regularly ask the pastor what additional information the pastor needs about the congregation. Reflections on how the transition is going and what might need to take place in order to make the transition healthy are key conversations points.
- Pastors are encouraged to move through the priorities that are set out in the resource “The First 90 Days”. (See Additional Resources at the end of this document.) The pastor's findings and additional inquiries will provide topics for discussion at monthly SPRC meetings.

## Additional Resources

The following additional resources (and others) can be found at the Northern Illinois Conference website at [umcnic.org/ordainedministry](http://umcnic.org/ordainedministry).

**[Our Life Together](#)**

**[Social Media Guidelines](#)**

**[The First 90 Days](#)**

**[Suggestions for Churches with a Single Pastor](#)**

**[Suggestions for Churches with a Young Pastor](#)**

**[Suggestions for Churches with a Clergywoman](#)**

**[Why Women are Clergy](#)**

**[Parsonage Guidelines](#)**