

EXPECTATIONS OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

**A Reference
for Pastors
and
Staff/Pastor
Parish Relations
Committees**

Virginia Conference
The United Methodist Church

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Virginia Annual Conference
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It can also be found on the Web at www.vaumc.org.
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This booklet refers frequently to paragraphs in *The Book of Discipline*.

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church may be ordered from Cokesbury (phone 1-800-672-1789 or online at www.Cokesbury.com).

In this booklet, S/PPRC refers to the Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee.

The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the good news of God's grace. Local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs.

— *The Book of Discipline*, ¶ 120 & 121

1. **A Mutual Ministry:** A pastor is one of many leaders in the church, which is the Body of Christ. All baptized Christians are expected to exercise leadership according to the spiritual gifts they have been given. A pastor's gifts include the abilities of preaching and teaching the word of God, nurturing Christians in their faith, leading congregations in visioning and goal-setting, and equipping members of the local congregation to fulfill the vision and mission. Beyond those particular gifts, pastors will have other specific gifts which are unique to their own faith and journey.
2. **A Model:** Congregations need to recognize that changing times have called forth a "new" model of pastoral leadership which focuses on equipping laity to do the work of ministry as opposed to a pastor-centered, pastor-dependent church life. Based on practices of the New Testament church, this model of pastoral leadership involves:
 - Teaching disciples how to reach out in the name of Jesus Christ
 - Nurturing disciples in their journey of discipleship
 - Sending disciples into the world to be the church.
3. **Some Essential Leadership Functions:** The new model of spiritual leadership includes four essential leadership functions. Fulfilling these functions must be the pastor's highest priority.
 - A. Helping people discover and name the current reality in which they live. With the pastor's leadership we answer the question, "What are we in the here and now?"
 - B. Discerning, naming, and casting the shared vision. Together we reflect on the question, "What is the positive future to which God is calling this church, this community, and God's world?"
 - C. Developing bridges. Pastoral leadership is called to help the congregation plan actions and develop systems that enable the church to cross the bridge between the current reality and shared vision.
 - D. Monitoring the journey. Pastoral leadership keeps an eye on the whole of the faith journey of the congregation, stepping back from the "busy-ness" of constant doing to pay attention to the big picture.

Fulfilling these four tasks, in addition to leading worship, will be a full-time job for a pastor. Expecting a pastor to do all the relational and administrative work of the church (shut-in calling, hospital visits, evangelism, etc.) limits the ministry of the entire congregation, for God has called the laity, not just the clergy, to perform these ministries every day as representatives of Christ and the church. It is reasonable to expect, however, that pastors will give personal leadership in the development of congregational systems which provide a full range of ministries employing the gifts of each disciple/member.

4. **Job Descriptions:** The "*Responsibilities and Duties of a Pastor*" are set forth in ¶340 of *The Discipline*, so it is inappropriate for local churches to present their pastor with a job description or any form of contract. Paragraph 340 states, "The responsibilities of elders and licensed pastors are derived from the authority given in ordination. Elders have a four-fold ministry of Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service within the connection and thus serve in the church and the world. Local pastors share with the elders the responsibilities and duties of a pastor for this four-fold ministry." It is appropriate for local churches to name, in consultation with the pastor, priorities for the pastor's use of time.

In the case of associate pastors, the S/PPRC is given the responsibility in ¶259.2g(7) to develop and approve written job descriptions and titles in cooperation with the senior pastor.

5. **Division of Hours on Multiple Point Charges:** Usually a covenant is made at the time of a pastor's appointment about the division of ministry hours between congregations. The covenant usually uses the ratio of salary support as a guide, but this cannot be absolute since many ministry tasks are dependent upon needs which arise or are tasks which "straddle" congregational lines (such as preparation of worship, some Bible studies, hospital calling, etc.). Conflicts over hours often have more to do with relational issues between the pastor and congregations or the congregations themselves, and probably should be dealt with as relational issues. Focusing on numbers seldom yields a satisfactory or reasonable result.

6. **Working Hours:** It is reasonable to expect full-time pastors to be engaged in ministry tasks related to the local church, ecumenical community, district, or conference for what is considered “full-time” by the labor laws and norms of our culture (40-45 hours per week on the average.) Church work is highly seasonal, however, often requiring more hours some weeks. Pastors should exercise initiative in quieter seasons to compensate for additional hours worked, listening continually to their bodies and spirits to monitor burn-out and spiritual dryness, and allow time for refreshment as needed.

The Book of Discipline states (§338.1) that “Full-time service shall mean that the person’s entire vocational time, as defined by the district superintendent in consultation with the pastor and the committee on S/PPRC is devoted to the work of ministry in the field of labor to which one is appointed by the bishop.” This provision prohibits full-time pastors from 1) engaging in any employment outside the local church which a) in any way limits the pastor’s availability and b) has not been approved by the district superintendent (DS), followed by consultation with the local church S/PPRC; and 2) charging church members for church-related services (i.e., counseling, marriages, baptisms, youth, or secretarial work, music ministry, etc.) The S/PPRC is encouraged to consult regularly with the pastor about priorities, office hours, Sabbath time, family issues, and scheduling matters, and consider how the pastor’s use of time serves the vision and mission of the church. Effective preaching requires time in spiritual, theological, and biblical preparation and being in tune with the context in which the sermon is preached. This task alone may require anywhere from 10-15 hours each week, and sometimes more, depending upon the priorities of the S/PPRC. Doing secretarial or janitorial tasks is not generally considered to be the best use of a pastor’s calling, gifts, and time.

7. **Accessible 24 Hours a Day:** Except for days approved for a pastor’s absence (vacation, continuing education, etc.), a pastor is expected to be accessible for emergencies 24 hours a day. Pastors who are away from office and home phones for 24 hours or more (even on vacation or at continuing education) should leave an emergency phone number with an identified member of the congregation (i.e., secretary or S/PPRC

chair). Pastors should never be pressured to change vacation or continuing education plans for congregational emergencies, or punished when they choose to let another pastor cover for them. It is a difficult personal choice each pastor must be allowed freely to exercise.

8. **Worship and Sacramental Leadership:** While the pastor is encouraged to share worship leadership and decisions with laity, it is ultimately the pastor’s right and responsibility to direct the worship life of the congregation. Lay persons may assist with baptism and communion during worship with the pastor present and presiding, and the pastor may select and train lay members to serve the consecrated communion elements. (§340.2.a.5) Lay supply pastors may not administer communion or baptism or officiate at weddings, although they may assist on these occasions and give leadership at funerals.
9. **Weddings and Funerals:** Christian marriage is an act of worship, so the appointed pastor has the right and responsibility to make decisions about how, when, where, and by whom a marriage ceremony is performed in and by the church. Pastors are required by *The Book of Discipline* to have “due counsel” with the parties involved prior to the marriage, and the decision to perform the ceremony is the right and responsibility of the pastor (§340.1.c.1). Pastors are encouraged to work with the couple’s preferences around the type of wedding service, wording, music, photography, video, processions, and symbolic acts in the service, but the pastor is responsible for making final decisions about the event. Pastors may not charge for a member’s wedding or funeral, but may accept honorariums. The S/PPRC is encouraged to consult with and support the pastor in relation to wedding policies and charges, if any, for non-members.
10. **Supervision:** United Methodist pastors, ordained and licensed, are accountable to expectations, roles, and responsibilities defined in *The Book of Discipline*. It is the responsibility of the Bishop, Cabinet, and Board of Ordained Ministry to interpret the *Discipline* and along with the Orders, hold pastors accountable to these expectations (§307.4 and §333.1). While the pastor is expected to consult with members of the

local church S/PPRC regarding priorities and other issues, the district superintendent is to be considered the pastor's immediate supervisor. Pastors experience ongoing supervision through annual and other scheduled meetings and consultations with the superintendent. Sometimes a more focused supervision occurs when specific issues arise. If serious moral, legal, or effectiveness issues occur which cannot be justly resolved through focused supervision, a more formal process involving the filing of a complaint may be used (§362).

11. **Sabbath Time:** All Christians are called to a time of Sabbath, to follow the example of Christ, who sought time away for his spiritual health and renewal, taking seriously the ancient command to "Remember the Sabbath, and keep it holy." Pastors are expected to set an example for their congregations by taking Sabbath time. This Sabbath time is negotiated with the S/PPRC and respected by all. If an emergency arises on the pastor's Sabbath time, another pastor is called or another Sabbath time is arranged in its place. It is a time of spiritual and physical rest and renewal.
12. **Clergy Self-care:** Pastors are required by scripture, tradition, and covenant with The United Methodist Church to love and care for themselves by practicing habits which are conducive to physical, emotional, spiritual, and social health. Pastors are expected to practice on a regular basis spiritual disciplines which are a means of grace in their lives. These disciplines include scripture reading, prayer and devotional time, communion, fasting, accountability groups, and acts of mercy. Exercise and healthy patterns of eating and resting are expected. Local congregations should encourage pastors to exercise self-care in these ways when it appears that such care is not given priority. The Virginia Conference "Self-care Covenant for Clergy" (available on the Web at www.vaumc.org) is a helpful guide.
13. **Clergy Family Care:** Pastors are required by scripture and tradition to care for their families. 1 Timothy 3:4 is unequivocal about this, in fact, stating that attentiveness to and orderliness in family life is a precondition to effective leadership in the church. Many pastors struggle balancing the dual covenants

of family and vocation and need the support of their local church at the point they make difficult decisions about priorities.

14. **The Pastor's Family:** Congregations contribute to a pastor's health and effectiveness by treating the pastor's family members as individuals rather than extensions of the pastor or employees of the church. Decision-making about their church membership, attendance, and involvement belong exclusively to them, as do all other choices and decisions ordinary citizens are permitted to make in the course of their lives. The Virginia Conference Thrival Kit is a resource for clergy families.
15. **The Parsonage:** Every church or charge is required to provide for housing their full-time pastor in accordance with §252.4e. The Virginia Conference "Minimum Standards for the Parsonage" (available on the Web at www.vaumc.org) describe standards for such parsonages, along with maintenance and safety information. A pastor's home ownership will not be a determining factor in appointment-making.

A parsonage is owned by the local church, but is held in trust for The United Methodist Church (see §2503.2). This means that the denomination can count on 1) being able to use that building as a parsonage for UM pastors, and 2) certain agreements between the local church and conference which allow for smooth transitions of pastors between appointments.

While it is owned by the local church, the parsonage is the home of the pastoral family, and is a private residence. The church is required to provide for the long-term maintenance of the house, walk through it at least annually to inspect for maintenance and repair issues (see the Annual Review Form), and ensure that it is clean and in good repair for the arrival of a new pastor at the time of a change (see Policy at the Time of Change of Pastors).

Pastoral families are required to be good stewards of the property which has been entrusted to them, which includes proper and timely attention to household tasks and routines and the repair of any damage caused by children, pets, or hobbies that goes beyond normal wear and tear.

Pastors strengthen the clergy covenant and their own relationship with the local church when they personally invest in the home and leave it in better condition than they found it. Working in cooperation with the church's parsonage committee, the family leaves the parsonage clean and in good repair when the house is vacated.

The morale of the pastoral family can be raised or diminished by the care given to the parsonage by the church. Neglect of the parsonage is normally viewed by the pastor as neglect of the pastor and his/her family. Timely attention to the parsonage, on the other hand, has a very positive impact on the pastor and family.

The morale of the pastoral family is raised when they are invited to assist in decisions about refurbishing and repair. Having walls and carpet that match furniture, for instance, helps the family feel proud of their home.

The morale of the pastoral family is raised when their pets are welcomed. The pastoral family is responsible, however, to replace any church-owned furnishings which are damaged by the pets, with consideration given to the age and condition of the furnishings when the pastor arrived.

16. **Financial Matters:** Pastors are asked at the time of ordination if they have indebtedness which might prove embarrassing. The assumption behind the question is that pastors must be content with the compensation they receive and will not be tempted to take additional work, leave unpaid bills behind, ask their churches or church members for advances and loans, or resort to other desperate measures to stay afloat financially.
 - A. **Paychecks:** Pastors should never be put in the position of having to ask for their paychecks or accept less than the amount agreed to in charge conference action. For conference staff, paychecks are issued twice a month, on the 10th and 25th. Local churches might want to use this plan. At the time of a pastoral change, the final paycheck in June is given to the outgoing pastor regardless of the moving date.
 - B. **Loans:** According to the Church and Clergy Tax guide, churches that make low-interest or no-interest loans to

ministers or lay employees may be violating state nonprofit corporation law and generating taxable income. It is recommended, therefore, that a pastor needing money borrow only from public lending institutions.

Once in awhile, pastors are given property without charge, such as automobiles, homes, and equipment. These "in-kind" transfers must be valued and reported on Form W-2s or 1099-MISC as taxable income.

- C. **Salary-Setting:** The S/PPRC carefully uses the information provided by the conference treasurer and district superintendent to recommend annually the pastor's salary, considering the needs of the appointment and cost of living increases. The church council receives the recommendation from the S/PPRC (§252.4.d) and includes it in the church budget. If, when the church council receives the recommendation they believe a change is necessary, they are urged to review thoroughly the recommendation. The charge conference sets the salary of the pastor (§247.13). Salary-setting should be done apart from the annual evaluation of the church and pastor.

17. **Mileage and Accountable Reimbursement:** The UM standards for reimbursement are in agreement with IRS standards. A pastor is reimbursed by the local church at the IRS rate for miles driven in relation to church or connectional work (calls, visits, meetings, and travel between churches on a charge). For purposes of accountability to the IRS, the pastor is required to keep a mileage log, which includes date, destination, beginning and ending mileage. The total miles are turned in regularly to the church/charge treasurer, but the log itself is considered confidential.

For more information on business miles, check the IRS Web site at <http://www.irs.gov>. The standard business mileage rate is published annually by the conference treasurer's office, which also sends timely updates when the rate is changed mid-year. The Virginia Conference Accountable Reimbursement policy is different than that published by the General Council on Finance and Administration. The full text of the Virginia Conference policy can be found on the Web at www.vaumc.org.

18. **Consulting on Vacation Dates:** Good vacation time benefits ministry. Since pastors are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, time away (when the parish is “vacated”) can bring renewal and refreshment for the tasks at hand.

The Virginia Conference Cabinet Guideline for Clergy Vacations:

Four weeks vacation shall be available beginning the first year of appointment and every year thereafter for all full-time clergy in the Virginia Conference.

This policy is applicable to licensed local pastors, probationary members, associate members, and members in full connection.

At least one day per week should be considered personal time, apart from vacation.

It is further accepted that pastors who are in the first year of an appointment need to show sensitivity concerning the scheduling of their vacations. It is recommended that pastors in their first year refrain from taking vacation during the first month of their new assignment. It is also recommended that first-year vacation be distributed across the year, not taken all at once. On the other hand, it is recognized that pastors and their families having just moved, with all the stress moving can bring, certainly are entitled to, and should take, some vacation time during the first summer.

It should be emphasized that pastors who move from one church to another within the United Methodist connection should not be expected to “earn” vacation in each new place as new employees. The situation is analogous to a branch-manager of a company being sent to another branch, but within the same employer-employee relationship.

Finally, continuing education for pastors is a requirement of the denomination (§351), and time should be allowed for fulfilling this requirement. Continuing education is not to be considered vacation time.

These policies should be applied with utmost cooperation and sensitivity between pastors and congregations, considering both the needs of the local churches and of pastors’ families. If there appears to be a problem in this regard, it is im-

perative that the pastor, the Pastor/Parish Relations Committee, and the district superintendent meet to seek a solution.

The number of paid vacation days for less-than full-time pastors is usually negotiated at the time a pastor is appointed, but generally does not exceed that of a full-time pastor.

The church pays the cost of providing pulpit supply during vacation period. Vacation days not used in any single appointment year are lost and do not accrue, nor shall the charge be obligated to pay additional compensation for any such unused days.

19. **Holidays:** Holidays for pastors typically include secular celebrations: Labor Day, Thanksgiving, New Year’s Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, and Independence Day. Christian holidays are work days for pastors, although compensatory days off are in order. If a secular holiday falls on Sunday, pastors should be supported when they arrange for compensatory time off.
20. **Educational Requirements:** All pastors are required to fulfill certain educational requirements for the practice of licensed or ordained ministry and to engage in ongoing continuing education. All new pastors are initially required to complete Licensing School, and after that, either seminary (year-round) or a five-year “Course of Study” (usually held in July for full-time local pastors or over a series of weekends for some part-time local pastors). The congregation needs to support and encourage pastors in their educational requirements and should pay for pulpit supply on the Sundays the pastor must be gone (3-4 Sundays for four weeks of Course of Study). A full-time licensed pastor has 8 years to finish the 5-year Course of Study; a part-time local pastor is given 12 years to finish. Extensive reading and writing is required of pastors prior to the Course of Study, and the congregation should avoid making additional demands on the pastor during those preparation times.
21. **Continuing Education:** Pastors who have completed the Course of Study or seminary are still required to undertake continuing education which benefits the disciple-making min-

istry of the local congregation. They must be allowed a minimum of one week (including one Sunday) each year and over the course of a quadrennium, an additional four weeks (*Discipline*, ¶351.2). The Virginia Conference Board of Ordained Ministry requires each full-time clergy who has completed the Course of Study or Seminary to receive at least one CEU per year and eight per quadrennium. The pastor always consults with the S/PPRC in advance about the type and timing of any educational plans.

22. **Connectional Responsibilities:** Pastors are not members of local churches, but of the annual conference, and so have responsibilities to United Methodism beyond the local church. Pastors are often called upon to serve on one or more conference or district board, commission, committee, or task force, or are occasionally elected to quadrennial General and/or Jurisdictional Conferences. It is expected that the church will be supportive of this connectional work. Pastors are expected to monitor their own involvement.
23. **Pulpit Supply:** Pastors and S/PPRCs often help their congregations save money by procuring pulpit supply which does not require payment. These might include district or conference staff, or a representative from a UM agency, camp, or Wesley Foundation. Lay speakers from the local church can also be used.
24. **Sick Days:** When pastors become ill, they need to be given time and space to recover. The superintendent should always be notified when a pastor is not able to fulfill full-time duties because of chronic or acute illness/es. If financial help is needed, congregations may consult with the district superintendent.
25. **Leaves:** *The Book of Discipline* contains information and guidelines for the following kinds of leaves: for maternity/paternity leaves, see ¶356; for Leave of Absence, see ¶354; for Family Leave, see ¶355; for Sabbatical Leave, see ¶352; and for Incapacity Leave, see ¶358.
26. **Family and Personal Days:** Congregations need to allow pastors occasional absences due to family crises, such as

illness or death. Celebrations such as reunions and weddings are generally coordinated with vacation Sundays. When a family crisis interferes with full-time ministry for more than one week, the superintendent should be notified.

27. **Annual Conference:** Each clergy is required to attend the entire session of the annual conference, so local congregations need to provide for pulpit supply whenever annual conference is held on a Sunday. There is also at least one lay member from each charge with an additional lay member for each appointed clergy on a charge. The charge is responsible for paying the expenses of their clergy and lay members to attend the annual conference.
28. **Former Pastors:** When pastors move, the covenant of ordination and licensing instructs that they sever pastoral ties with the church or charge they are leaving. This is for the benefit of the church the pastor is leaving, as well as for the church the pastor is going to serve. When a former pastor returns to do pastoral care, weddings, funerals, or other pastoral acts, the current pastor is denied key opportunities to be involved in the important events in his/her parishioners' lives and in ongoing ministry to them.

In addition, the church or charge to which a former pastor is appointed needs and deserves his/her full-time attention, so it is detrimental to the pastor's effectiveness in his/her new setting to continue being a pastor in the old.

Pastors are often willing to invite former pastors back to assist with rituals and sacraments, but the invitation needs to be initiated by the appointed pastor, not by the parishioner or another pastor. If a pastor is approached by a former member to do a pastoral service, the pastor must simply answer "no." To say, "I am willing to officiate if your present pastor gives permission" compromises the appointed pastor's ability to freely exercise choice in relation to the invitation.

In The United Methodist Church, it is a serious breach of ordination covenant and *Discipline* for one pastor to interfere in the ministry of another (¶341.4 and ¶2702.1.g).

Understanding Pastoral Changes

An Itinerant System

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 faith community.
- Strong resident (lay) leadership plays a vital role in maintaining continuity and the health of the church.
- Pastors are members of the connectional body (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.

Some denominations acquire their pastors through a "call system." In this system, the congregation conducts a search for a pastor, calls the pastor, and decides when the pastor's tenure ends.

No system of placing pastors is perfect. We eagerly await God's perfect reign on earth, but in the meantime, United Methodists choose itinerant ministry.

How Itineracy Works

COVENANT

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 (§336). In the ordination service they are asked if they will be loyal to The United Methodist Church, accept its order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline, and accept the authority of those who are appointed to supervise their ministry. Each ordinand answers, "I will, with the help of God."

The United Methodist Church has chosen to care for these itinerating pastors and their families through a system of parsonages (held to certain standards), health insurance coverage, and retirement benefits, all of which release the clergy to give full attention to their spiritual leadership responsibilities. Superintendents, who counsel the Bishop in relation to appointment-making, attempt to stay current with the needs and concerns of parsonage families and share relevant information with the Bishop as a new appointment is discerned.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND GRACES

Licensed and ordained pastors has been examined in relation to their fitness for ministry and their call, and may be expected to have:

- a vital relationship with Christ
- an ability to relate to people
- an ability to communicate their faith in preaching and teaching
- an ability to lead and give oversight to the local church and its connectional relationships
- a willingness to model a Christian lifestyle, and
- a dedication to lifelong learning and growth.

God has given to each pastor differing measures of these gifts,

and other gifts, as well. Some pastors are gifted to bring healing to hurting congregations; some are specialists in “spiritual CPR”; some have gifts in youth or older adult ministries; some are top-notch administrators. Some pastors like to start new churches and others to transform existing ones. There are as many different gifts as there are pastors! We are blessed to be diverse!

The needs of churches and the gifts of the pastors lie at the very heart of appointment-making in the Virginia Conference.

CONSULTATION

While the Bishop is ultimately responsible for appointing pastors to churches, the episcopal decision relies heavily on 1) counsel from district superintendents who are in regular communication with both churches and pastors about the missional fit of the church and pastor, and 2) 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 Pastor-Parish Relations Committee, taking into consideration 1) the unique needs of a charge, the community context, and also the gifts and evidence of God’s grace of a particular pastor, 2) an annual pastor and church assessment, and 3) the mission of the whole Church. (See ¶431-433)

PROFILES

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. Community profiles include data about demographics, economics, projected community changes, and other sociological, political, historical, and ecumenical aspects of the community surrounding the church.

These profiles enable the Bishop and the superintendents to prepare in an informed way for the discernment process which ultimately determines who will be appointed.

WHY PASTORS MOVE

The most common reasons pastors move include:

- Church, pastor, and/or superintendent articulate missional need for new leadership
- Retirement
- Disability or death
- Church closing or change in alignment of churches in a charge

DISCERNMENT

Discernment begins as the Bishop and superintendents prayerfully explore possible missional matches between open churches and pastors. This exploration includes:

- Nominations for open churches
- Detailed discussion about the missional appropriateness of those nominated
- Prayer and consensus-building among all 18 district superintendents
- Recommendation of the name to the Bishop and Bishop’s discernment
- Appointment by the Bishop.

The Change

INTRODUCTIONS

The pastor is the first one to hear about the new appointment, usually in a conversation with his/her present (“sending”) and future (“receiving”) superintendent. In that conversation the superintendents explain the missional match and share other details. The pastor is urged to ask questions and to give feedback. If the pastor has serious concerns about the match, he/she may ask for reconsideration of the appointment.

The Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee (S/PPRC) of the receiving church is the next to learn about the appointment. At a “Meet Your Pastor Meeting” with the S/PPRC scheduled by the superintendent, the new pastor is introduced. Discussion focuses on the missional needs articulated by the church and the spiritual

gifts and experience of the incoming pastor. This is a time for sharing of faith stories. If the S/PPRC or pastor at that point has serious reservations about the missional appropriateness of the move, either party or the superintendent may request reconsideration of the appointment.

The Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee, which is accountable to the charge conference, reports to the church council the recommendation they made to the Cabinet and Bishop. The final appointment decision will be made by the Bishop (see next section on the formal announcement).

ANNOUNCING THE CHANGE

On the date established by the Cabinet for the conference-wide announcement of projected changes in appointments, the following protocol for announcing the change simultaneously involves:

1. Announcement of the projected change to the pastor's present congregation. This may be done through a letter or through an announcement from the pulpit.
2. Announcement of the projected change to the pastor's future congregation. This is usually done by the S/PPRC chair or through a letter.

The appointment may be announced to those outside the involved congregations any time thereafter.

GRIEF AND HOSPITALITY

Pastoral changes are difficult even in the best of circumstances, requiring churches and pastors to name and address the difficult mix of sadness, joy, and fear that accompany a change of pastoral leadership.

A farewell party or recognition for the departing pastor helps bring closure, as do sermons or newsletter articles on the nature of grief. The departing pastor helps support the incoming pastor by clearly defining the boundaries of the changed relationship.

The incoming pastor feels most welcomed when:

- The parsonage is clean and in good repair when he/she arrives.
- The new parsonage family is invited to make decisions about paint, wallpaper, floor coverings, and other accoutrements.
- A member of the S/PPRC is personally on site when the pastor's family arrives.
- Meals are offered and/or provided for the first week or two.
- The congregation is able to view change as positive and as an adventure and extend a warm welcome.

OPEN ITINERACY

Open itineracy means appointments are made without regard to race, ethnic origin, gender, color, disability, marital status, or age, except for the provisions of mandatory retirement. The concept of itineracy is important, and sensitive attention should be given in appointing clergy with physical challenges to responsibilities and duties that meet their gifts and graces. (§430)

S/PPRCs are responsible for helping interpret open itineracy and to help prepare their congregations to welcome all pastors who are appointed. (§259.2G(6))

Problem-solving and Conflict Resolution

Wherever two or three (or more) are gathered, there is always the potential for misunderstanding, disappointment, and conflict.

Jesus assures us in Matthew 18, however, that “Where two or three are gathered in my name ‘I am there among them.’” Scriptural (and therefore S/PPRC) goals around problem-solving and conflict resolution include, but are not limited to:

1. Reconciliation between offended parties,
2. Building a strong mutual ministry,
3. Growth for all parties, and
4. Learning how to live together in Christian community, when the people who make up the community are diverse and imperfect.

Listen to Jesus on the matter of resolving conflicts (Matthew 18: 15-20):

¹⁵“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

Reconciliation and problem-solving are not always easy, but the following process is scriptural and very workable for those who have reconciliation and restoration as goals. By handling conflict in the following way, the church sets a Christian example for people to use in their families, work places, and community relationships.

These are intended to be guidelines, and not hard-and-fast rules. The main point is to bring about reconciliation and to involve as

few people as necessary in the problem-solving process.

The superintendent is always available to the S/PPRC to answer questions and offer guidance. It is expected, however, that an effort has already been made to follow steps 1-3 when the DS is summoned to attend a S/PPRC meeting in the midst of conflict.

S/PPRC meetings are closed for discussion around personnel issues. They may be opened long enough for an individual with a concern or a complaint to be heard by the group, however (§259.2e).

NOTE: The S/PPRC cannot meet without the pastor’s or district superintendent’s knowledge.

STEP ONE: (verse 15). If the offended person is unable to let a hurt go, he/she speaks privately, in love (see “Respectful Communication Guidelines” on page 27), with the one who has offended. Jesus knew that the potential for resolution increases when fewer, rather than more, people are involved. He wants people to avoid “building an army” at the outset, involving more than the immediate parties involved in the conversation. He also wants us to avoid “triangulation” which happens when the offended party wishes to remain anonymous and recruits someone else to do the difficult work of confrontation for them. (See page 26 for more on the dynamics of triangulation.)

Reconciliation cannot happen when the offender does not know the identity of the one who has been offended. Second- or third-hand remarks or anonymous communications on the whole should be treated as gossip and disregarded by the S/PPRC.

(An exception to the one-on-one step would occur when a person alleges to have been physically threatened or abused by the offending party. If there is substance to the allegation and the allegation involves the pastor, the DS needs to be notified immediately. Responsible follow-through inevitably requires the offended party, however, to make a formal, signed complaint.)

STEP TWO: (verse 16). If the problem is not solved by Step One, the offended person brings a witness with him/her. In United Methodist churches, S/PPRC members are elected to be reconciling

agents and interpreters. The offended person may ask for an S/PPRC member to go with him/her to assist with the conversation or ask another party. Before matters come to the S/PPRC as a whole, however, the offended party should include an S/PPRC member in a two- (or three-) on-one conversation.

STEP THREE: (verse 17a). At this point the S/PPRC as a whole (representing the church) is involved. The offended party needs to be present at the meeting with the one who has offended long enough to state the concern and summarize the efforts to resolve the problem on his/her own. To do otherwise is for the S/PPRC to risk “triangulation” with committee members trying to speak for the offended party and often second-guessing what the real issues are. In the event there is more than one offended party, each may meet for a time with the S/PPRC in the presence of the one who has offended, one by one. The goals of all involved at this point still remain reconciliation, building up the church, personal growth, and learning to live with less than perfect co-workers in Christian community.

STEP FOUR: (verse 17a continued). If the pastor is involved, the next step is to once again broaden the base of those who help the offender hear the concern by involving a denominational representative — the district superintendent. The DS can arrange to visit with the S/PPRC and parties involved. Goals of the work remain the same.

NOTE: It is not the practice or polity of United Methodists to hold all-church meetings for problem-solving, or to pass petitions for support of a particular cause.

STEP FIVE: (verse 17b). Someone who does not know about the life and teachings of Christ may assume that letting someone be “as a Gentile or tax-collector” means ending the relationship. Christians know, however, that these are precisely the persons Jesus was most intentional about seeking. What this verse does suggest is that there may come a time when the offending party needs a clear statement from the church that certain behaviors cannot be tolerated and that they may need to remove themselves from the gathered community until their behavior is in greater compliance with Christian community values.

The Drama of Triangulation

Triangulation is a destructive pattern of relating to others in which a person identifies with one of three roles and invites others to play the other two. There are multiple payoffs for playing any one of the roles, but the main one for each is avoidance of one’s own issues. We have all unknowingly played each part at one time or another, although one role may feel most comfortable to us. A mature person in Christ, however, is able to identify when he/she is playing one of these roles and take ownership and control of the issues that rightly belong to him or herself and no one else.

The victim in the drama is seen by self and/or others to be weak, injured, or suffering injustice. The savior is seen by self and/or others as the “hero” who intervenes to rescue the “victim” from the real or imagined problem. The persecutor is the one seen by self and/or others to be “the heavy,” harassing or oppressing the “victim” with real or perceived ill treatment. These 3 roles work together to sustain any drama of triangulation.

S/PPRCs are often enlisted as “saviors” by church folk who see themselves as powerless (i.e., unable to confront or be honest with a staff member) or by pastors and staff who see themselves as victimized by supervisors or unreasonable people around them. The response of the S/PPRC to such situations is to encourage and expect the “persecutor” and the “victim” to deal face-to-face with each other, participating in the direct resolution of their issues, and thereby ending triangulation.

S/PPRCs sometimes play the role of “victim” by asking their superintendent (“savior”) to intervene in conflict before they have worked Steps 1-3, described in the previous section. The superintendent is willing to help counsel the S/PPRC about conflict management if called, but will ask what steps have already been taken in the local church by the parties involved.

Helpful Hints for Problem-solving

- Be yourself.
- Speak only for yourself (Use “I” statements).
- Be honest.
- Speak the truth in love.

- Address behavior, not the person.
- Let the other finish his/her thought before you speak.
- Remember that conflicts are problems to be solved, not contests to be won.
- Remember that a person is usually a part of the problem if that person is not a part of the solution.
- Remember that no one is perfect and that we're all doing the best we can with what we have been given.

¹⁴Do all things without murmuring and arguing, ¹⁵so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. ¹⁶It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. (Philippians 2:14-16)

Respectful Communication Guidelines

By Eric Law

- R** Take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming other people
- E** Use EMPATHETIC listening (put oneself in the other's shoes)
- S** Be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles
- P** PONDER on what you hear and feel before you speak
- E** EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions
- C** Keep CONFIDENTIALITY
- T** TRUST/TOLERATE ambiguity because we are NOT here to debate who is right or wrong.

Other Resources for S/PPRCs

The 2004 Book of Discipline (§259.2, page 173) describes the purpose, function, and responsibilities of the Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee in the Local Church.

Guidelines 2005-2008 Pastor Parish Relations are available from Cokesbury (phone 1-800-672-1789 or on the Web at www.Cokesbury.com).

Resources on the www.vaumc.org Web site under Resources/Pastor Staff Parish Committee Resources include:

- Overview of Responsibilities
- Personnel Issues
- Parsonage Issues
- Appointment Issues
- Annual Evaluation

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 P.O. Box 1719
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 Glen Allen, Virginia 23060
 1-800-768-6040 or (804) 521-1100
www.vaumc.org