

The Clergy Appointment Process

The Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church 2010

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A Word About Our Process

Our United Methodist process of matching pastors and congregations is a "send" process, which means that pastors are sent (appointed) to a congregation by the Bishop and Cabinet (the District Superintendents). Some other denominations have a "call" system, whereby a local congregation "calls" or hires their pastor. All systems of matching pastors and congregations have their strengths and weaknesses. Our appointment process usually includes the following strengths:

- the appointment of pastors and churches is based upon the missional needs of the church, not a process of hiring pastors who suit the preferences of the local church leadership
- every church is appointed a pastor and every pastor is appointed to a church
- the Bishop/Cabinet have the responsibility of finding the right pastor/congregation match based on consultation through the supervisory process by which the District Superintendent gains knowledge of congregations, the communities in which they are located and pastoral gifts and graces.
- although they are held accountable through an extensive evaluation process, pastors have freedom for preaching the gospel without fear of being "fired"
- congregations can ask for a pastoral change at the end of each calendar year without having to go through a painful "fight" to remove a pastor
- pastors have the same privilege of asking for a change of appointment each year
- pastors are appointed on the basis of their gifts and grace for ministry, without regard to their gender, ethnic background, or age
- local congregations are served by a pastor whose fitness for ministry is monitored by the Board of Ordained Ministry and whose faithfulness, effectiveness and fruitfulness are annually evaluated through the supervisory process.
- both the appointed pastors and the congregations to which they are appointed belong to a connection which can provide support, training, mediation, and prayerful supervision

The People Involved in the Appointment Process

All Clergy (ordained Elders, ordained Deacons, commissioned Provisional Members, and Local Pastors) are appointed to their places of ministry by the Bishop assigned to the Western Pennsylvania United Methodist Annual Conference. The Bishop works through the District Superintendents, who help the Bishop by supervising a portion of the Annual Conference, called a District. In addition, the Board of

Ordained Ministry of the Conference (composed of laity and clergy) approves clergy for ministry, deems them appointable, monitors their fitness, and provides for their continuing education, removal from ministry, retirement, and other changes of their status. The local congregation is represented in the Appointment Process by the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee (or in larger churches it may be called the Staff-Parish Relations Committee) that is elected by the annual Charge Conference of the congregation.

The Meaning of "Consultation"

Consultation is the on-going process of the Bishop and Cabinet being in relationship with the pastors and the congregations of the Annual Conference. It includes those times when the District Superintendent visits the congregation, conducts various meetings (Charge Conference, Workshops, etc.), meets regularly with the pastor, and various other informal opportunities to know and to understand the situation of ministry in that appointment. Consultation also includes the specific opportunity each year for the pastor and for the PPRC to carefully and accurately complete the "Cabinet Worksheet for Charge" on which they will request either a continuation of the appointment, a change of appointment, or an openness to the possibility of a change. And of course, consultation includes the steps of the Appointment Process when the District Superintendent works with the PPRC during the time of a pastoral change.

How the Appointment Process Works

The process begins with an "opening" -- when a pastor is leaving a pastoral appointment because of retirement, death, a change of appointment, or a change of status (such as going on Leave). Once an opening occurs, then the Appointment Process proceeds through the following steps:

1. The Cabinet (The Bishop and all the District Superintendents) use the information from the Conference Database "Cabinet Worksheet for Charge" and the "Cabinet Worksheet for Clergy" to thoroughly discuss the needs of the congregation. Together, the Cabinet considers all of the available clergy of the Conference and selects the person who best matches this profile. This selection is based upon the needs of the congregation, and the community in which the church is located. The Cabinet selects the best available pastor to match those needs, without regard to that pastor's gender, age, or ethnic background.
2. The selected pastor is contacted by the Cabinet to discuss this potential appointment. The pastor along with their spouse and family (if applicable) are given a negotiated timeframe in which to pray and consider the appointment. The pastor is provided with relevant information about the congregation(s) and community. Following this discernment, the pastor shares her/his response to this opportunity.
3. If the pastor declines the appointment, the Cabinet must consider two options: a) move forward with the appointment, or b) to identify another pastor for the appointment. If the pastor, for sufficient reason, does not want to accept the appointment, then he/she puts into writing to the Bishop and District Superintendent a request for the appointment to be reconsidered, clearly

stating the reason for not accepting the appointment. The Bishop and Cabinet will determine if the appointment is to be reconsidered, in which case the Cabinet repeats step #1 above and selects another pastor for this appointment.

4. Once the selected pastor has agreed to the appointment, the Cabinet contacts the PPRC Chairperson to arrange a meeting with the new pastor. This meeting is called a "take-in". Normally the District Superintendent will not divulge the name of the new pastor prior to this meeting.
5. With the District Superintendent present and presiding, the new pastor and the PPRC meet in an introductory meeting. This is not an interview resulting in a vote. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the ministry needs of the congregation, the ministry gifts and experience of the pastor, and the basis of this "match". Unless serious concerns are raised, or new data or insights emerge, then it is understood that this is the new appointment. Concerns cannot be based on gender, race, age or disability. However, if legitimate concerns emerge, then the PPRC or the pastor, may put into writing to the Bishop and District Superintendent a request for the appointment to be reconsidered. The Bishop and Cabinet will determine if the appointment is to be reconsidered, in which case the Cabinet repeats step #1 above and selects another pastor for this appointment. While a church and/or charge can request a change in pastoral leadership, it is only advisory although it will be given due consideration.
6. The new pastoral appointment is announced by the PPRC Chairperson in a Sunday service or by letter to the congregation after the pastor has had an opportunity to share this announcement with the PPRC at his/her current appointment (which means that church is "open" and the Process begins at step #1 for that congregation).

Other Notes About Appointments

1. Appointments and appointment changes are normally made at Annual Conference time. Obvious exceptions include unexpected deaths or other events that remove a pastor from his/her appointment between sessions of the Annual Conference. The process of appointment making begins in earnest in January prior to Annual Conference.
2. Salary for an appointment is set by the church (charge) conference. It is expected that the salary set at the fall church (charge) conference for the following year will be maintained throughout the year. Salaries are set for the charge, not for a particular pastor. In rare and extenuating circumstances permission may be granted to lower the salary after consultation with the Cabinet.
3. In the appointment of clergy to serve as Associate Pastors on the staff of a church, the appointment process normally includes the Senior Pastor, in consultation with the P/SPRC, meeting with the Cabinet in a joint process of discernment. Following conversation/discernment, a list of 2-3 potential Associate Pastors are identified. The District Superintendent contacts these potential pastors and determines their interest. The Senior Pastor is then afforded the opportunity of interviewing the identified pastors to discuss working relationships. The Senior Pastor will then recommend to the Cabinet her/his choice. If the Bishop and Cabinet are in agreement, the process follows from point #6 above.

4. All appointments are made for one year at a time. However, it is the philosophy of this Bishop and Cabinet that longevity is desirable in pastoral appointments and if both the pastor and PPRC recommend the continuation of an appointment we will attempt to honor that request. However, due to a need for the Cabinet to understand the total scope of needs that exist in each local church throughout the Annual Conference, there are times when such requests cannot be honored.
5. The Bishop and Cabinet are responsible for making effective pastoral appointments to all of the congregations every year, so sometimes it is necessary to move a pastor from an appointment where both the pastor and PPRC have requested continuation. Such changes are never made without careful consideration of the impact upon everyone involved.
6. Part-time appointments and certified lay minister assignments are negotiated directly by the District Superintendent involved, and then those are brought to the Cabinet for consideration and approval by the Bishop and Cabinet. Some pastors are in situations where their willingness to move to new appointments is limited by special concerns (such as geography, family needs, etc.). In such cases, the Bishop and Cabinet are also limited in their ability to provide appointment opportunities which fully meet the experience and salary expectations of the pastor. This "limited itinerancy" may even mean that the pastor be offered an appointment to a smaller church at a reduced salary. It may also mean that the pastor will have to choose a Leave of Absence or Honorable Location rather than to be able to accept an available appointment. The Bishop and Cabinet pledge themselves to be sensitive to the needs of pastors whose willingness to move is limited by special concerns. However, the ordination vows of United Methodist clergy include the promise to go where we are needed in ministry.