

The Clergy Appointment Process – Western Pennsylvania Conference UMC (2024 – 2028) Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball

A Word About Our Process

Our United Methodist process of matching pastors and congregations is a "sending" process, whereby pastors are sent (appointed) to a congregation by the Bishop and Cabinet (the Conference/District Superintendents). It is also referred to as an Itinerant system – meaning ordained persons have taken vows and agree to be appointed by the Bishop and to itinerate/go where they are sent. Additionally, Licensed Local pastors also agree to go where sent, but they can define the local geographical location in which they are willing to itinerate – hence their identification as being a Licensed Local Pastor. Licensed pastors have agreed to serve in a localized area.

This appointment process follows a strong biblical history of God's servants being sent to places where God needed them to be in mission and ministry. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement as well as Francis Asbury continued this tradition of sending leaders to preaching circuits in order to facilitate sharing the Gospel in all places and strengthening the laity in all places to be in ministry. Our itinerant system continues the biblical practice and Wesleyan tradition. This process is different than what is practiced in some other Christian denominations. There are denominations have a "call" system, whereby a local congregation "calls" or hires their pastor – but this is not The United Methodist way of matching pastors to congregations. 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 or assigned a spiritual leader who cares for the pastoral responsibilities of a Charge of one or more congregations. Appointed leaders are either ordained, Commissioned, or Licensed. Laity may be assigned by the Bishop to fulfill pastoral leadership responsibilities and are Certified Lay Ministers or Certified Lay Speakers or in process of certification.
- the Bishop/Cabinet serve as the "search committee" who pray and discern together to find the right pastor/congregation match

- Congregations can ask for a pastoral change at Annual Conference time without having to go through a painful "fight" to remove a pastor. This process of asking for a change works through the Pastor or Staff Parish Relations Committee. The P/SRC has an opportunity each Fall to communicate their desires around the appointment of a pastor. (Note: A desire expressed by the P/SPRC does not always result in a change in pastor in the case of a request for a change, and a desire expressed to keep a pastor does not always result in the retention of a pastor. The prayerful discernment of the bishop and cabinet takes into consideration the expressed desires of the P/SRC – this is part of consultation.)
- pastors can ask for a change of appointment without losing their job
- pastors are appointed on the basis of their gifts and grace for ministry, without regard to their gender, ethnic background, race, or age
- local congregations are served by a pastor whose fitness and effectiveness for ministry are monitored by the Board of Ordained Ministry and Supervised by a Conference/District Superintendent
- 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 Ministers, Associate Members, and Local Pastors) are appointed to their places of ministry by the Bishop assigned to the Western Pennsylvania Area. The Bishop works through the Conference/District Superintendents, who help the Bishop by supervising a portion of the Area, called a Supervisory area or District. Although, Superintendents are assigned to a Supervisory area/District, they are appointed as Conference Superintendents and so participate in the discussion, spiritual discernment, and appointment of all clergy across the Conference area. In addition, the Board of Ordained Ministry of the Conference (composed of laity and clergy) approves clergy for ministry, deems them ready to be appointed, 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 Superintendent and/or Bishop visits the congregation, conducts the annual Charge Conference, meets regularly with the pastor, and various other informal opportunities to know and to understand the situation of ministry in that pastor/congregation appointment. Consultation happens all the time. In every contact with a pastor or congregation, the Superintendent or Bishop is taking in information about the congregation and pastor. Consultation also includes the specific opportunity each year for the pastor and for the PPRC to advise the Superintendent about the pastoral appointment for the upcoming year -- either requesting a continuation of appointment or a change of appointment. And of course, consultation includes the steps of the Appointment Process when the Superintendent works with the P/SPRC during the time of a pastoral change.

How the Appointment Process Works

The appointment process is a prayer led and prayer filled process. Some of the deeply held values in the appointment process are:

- Deep and continuous prayer and an openness to the movement of God's Spirit.
- Listening for God's voice, listening to one another, listening to the congregation through communications between the S/PPRC, including the congregational profile, listening to our pastors as they share their passion, gifts, and graces for ministry.
- Being curious and asking questions
- Focusing on the mission of making disciples and multiplying Christian witness and practice in every place in the Conference. The appointment process seeks to send leaders based on what is good for the health of the whole Conference. We seek to be the wisest stewards of the people/leader resources that God has given to the WPA Conference.
- Matching gifts and graces with opportunities for ministry
- Sensitivity to the circumstances and needs of our congregations as well as those of our pastoral families.

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), then the appointment process begins and proceeds through the following steps:

1. The Superintendent of that Charge/church meets with the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee (S/PPRC) to discuss the needs of the congregation for pastoral leadership. Together they update or develop a "profile" of the congregation, the community, and the pastor leadership needs of the congregation to be in ministry to that community.
2. The Superintendent takes that Profile to the Cabinet (The Bishop and all the Conference/District Superintendents) and they thoroughly discuss the needs of that congregation. The Cabinet prays about the congregation and seeks to hear God's voice. Together the Cabinet considers all of the available clergy of the Conference, considering the gifts and graces of the clergy, and prayerfully selects the person who best matches this Profile. This selection is based upon the needs of the congregation, and the Cabinet discerns the best available pastor to match those needs, without regard to that pastor's gender, age, race, or ethnic background.
3. The selected pastor is contacted by the Cabinet and informed that he/she is to be appointed to the church. The pastor is provided with the Profile developed by the P/SPRC and with any other relevant information that the Cabinet has available. The pastor is asked to pray over the Bishop's intention around the appointment and the pastor has the opportunity to clarify any questions.
4. The next step in the appointment process is that the Cabinet contacts the P/SPRC Chairperson to arrange a meeting with the new pastor, called an Introduction or a "take In." Normally the Superintendent will not divulge the name of the new pastor prior to this meeting. This meeting is an introduction to the new pastor and not an interview. The United Methodist Church's system of pastoral appointment and assignment is an appointing/assigning or "sending" process and not a search, interview, and call process.
5. The new pastor and the P/SPRC meet with the Superintendent present and presiding, in order to discuss the ministry opportunities and needs of the congregation, the ministry gifts and experience of the pastor, and the basis of this "match". This meeting introduces the S/PPRC to the newly appointed

pastor and the pastor to the new Charge. Appointments usually begin July 1 in any given year unless otherwise stated in the introduction.

6. The new pastoral appointment is announced in a Sunday service after the pastor has had an opportunity to share this announcement with the PPRC at his/her previous appointment (which means that church the newly appointed pastor is serving is now "open" and the Process begins at step #1 for that congregation). On the Sunday immediately following the introductory meeting with the S/PPRC the new appointment is announced, and the pastor to be newly appointed pastor is sharing with his/her current congregation that they have accepted a new appointment.

Other Notes About Appointments

1. Appointments and appointment changes are normally made at Annual Conference time with new appointments beginning on July 1 of any given year. Obvious exceptions include unexpected deaths or other events that remove a pastor from his/her appointment in between Annual Conference Sessions.
2. All appointments are made for one year at a time.
3. Part-time appointments and supply pastor assignments are negotiated directly by the Superintendent involved and in consultation with the Bishop. These assignments are brought to the Cabinet for consideration and approval by the Bishop and Cabinet. Laity who serve as assigned supply are assignments and not appointments. Lay Supply and CLMs are not able to celebrate the sacraments.
4. The Bishop and Cabinet are responsible for making appointments and assignments 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 has requested continuation. Such changes are never made without careful consideration of the impact upon everyone involved.
5. 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 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 sent and needed in ministry.

6. The Bishop and Cabinet are given the responsibility of caring for the good of the whole Conference. Sometimes pastors or churches are asked to sacrifice their own preferences for the good of the ministry of the whole body.
7. As bishop's change, the process and the priorities for how appointments are made also change. Not every bishop will process appointments in exactly the same way. However, the process and values of the process are not radically different from bishop to bishop.