

# **Grand Rapids District**

## **Appointment Transition Materials**

### **Clergy**

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**GR District Superintendent**



## **Grand Rapids District**

### **Vision Statement**

#### **Growing together, Reaching out**

The churches of the Grand Rapids District of the United Methodist Church are healthy, vital, outer-directed and are united in actively making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As clergy and laity, we live out our connection through cooperative initiatives, local and worldwide mission, mentoring, sharing of resources, and mutual love and support.

### **Mission Statement**

**Our mission is to connect and support vital ministries of Jesus Christ.**

Our mission calls us to:

- Train, equip, encourage, and coach clergy and lay leaders for transformational ministry
- Provide effective multi-layered communication
- Promote networking and clustering among clergy and churches
- Engage together in acts of mercy, and justice and spiritual growth
- Be proactive risk-takers and change agents

(Adopted by the Grand Rapids District Conference, February 15, 2009)

## PASTORAL TRANSITIONS

*Leading From the Heart* by Laurie Haller (Grand Rapids District Superintendent)

June 1, 2009

Like many parents around the country, Gary and I spent last Friday packing a 14 foot U-Haul with the substance of Talitha's life. After 10 straight years of moving kids, furniture, clothing and "stuff" back and forth, we seem to be done with college and graduate school – at least for the moment!

As Gary drove the U-Haul back from Ann Arbor, and I followed in the car, I couldn't help but notice the slogan splashed across the back of the truck, "Where will U go next?" How well that sentence summarizes the itinerant life of United Methodist pastors.

When elders in full connection are ordained in the United Methodist Church, they "offer themselves without reserve to be appointed and to serve, after consultation, as the appointive authority may determine." (§333, *The Book of Discipline 2008*) We sometimes forget that clergy are appointed year to year, even though cabinets are charged to "work toward longer tenure local church appointments to facilitate a more effective ministry." (§434)

**United Methodist elders and local pastors are sojourners, just as the Bible is full of stories about wanderers and strangers without homes.** We are itinerant, which means "working for a short time in various places." So the question "Where will U go next?" is very real in the lives of pastoral families in the West Michigan Conference year after year. Many United Methodist pastors around the connection are on the move right now, some just finding out where they are going next.

**As with so many other transitions in life, moving always seems to take longer and is much messier than we think.** Gary and I had hoped that Talitha would have everything packed and ready for us to simply throw into the U-Haul. Ha! We ended up in Ann Arbor for 4 hours rather than the 1 hour we had anticipated.

Last year I offered advice to pastors as they build ministry in a new setting. This year I want to share some tips which I hope will help churches and lay persons support their pastoral family and alleviate some of the inevitable stress and anxiety of moving.

- **Help your congregation understand how pastors are appointed by Bishop Keaton in consultation with the cabinet.** Church members from non-United Methodist backgrounds may not know why their beloved pastor is moving unless U regularly explain the nature of the appointive system, preferably *before* your pastor is reappointed. Most times either the pastor or the church requests a move. Occasionally, however, a move is initiated by the cabinet.
- **If your church has a parsonage, make sure that it is clean and that appropriate repairs and updating has been done or is in process.** The condition of your parsonage reflects the value U place on pastoral ministry. At the same time, remember that the parsonage is the pastor's home as well. Please respect their privacy and honor their family time.
- **Plan to have volunteers ready to help your new pastor and family unload the moving van when it arrives.** How about stocking the refrigerator? U can do that even if your pastor has a housing allowance instead of a parsonage. Offer child

care for young children. Provide a picnic lunch on moving day and dinners for the first week. Have U ever heard of an old-fashioned pounding? Why not encourage people to bring a pound of something to the house as a gift?

- **Give your new pastor the opportunity to unpack and adjust before U ask him/her to jump right into ministry.** Pastors need time to get settled so that they don't begin tired, off-balance and cranky. In recent years, the cabinet has set the last 2 weeks of June as moving time. Pastors are not expected to preach either of those 2 weeks and can focus on saying good-bye and hello.
- **Acknowledge the reality of grief.** Just as U may be experiencing feelings of loss, separation, fear and even anger during this transition, remember that your new pastor probably has the same feelings. When U love someone deeply, U also grieve their departure deeply. Grieving well includes honesty, courage, prayer and hope. In one recent introductory meeting, SPRC members were open with the incoming pastor about their grief, but then said this, "*Our grief is natural and good. We love our present pastor, but we will learn to love you as well.*"
- **Don't create an awkward situation by asking the previous pastor to come back to perform pastoral functions like weddings, baptisms and funerals.** U honor him/her when you welcome the new pastor warmly. Your former pastor can still be your friend but will no longer be your pastor. Remember Paul's words regarding Timothy in 1 Corinthians 16:10, "*If Timothy comes, see that he has nothing to fear among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord just as I am.*"
- **Be intentional about caring for your new pastor and family during the first 6 months.** U can be part of hosting a nice all church welcome event in the summer. Plan small groups meetings where the pastor can get to know a large number of people in a short amount of time. Encourage your pastor to engage in spiritual disciplines and take regular time off every week.
- **Allow the new pastor to find his/her voice in your congregation.** The strengths of your previous pastor will not be the strengths of your new pastor. Empower your pastor to discover his/her greatest assts in your church, then find lay people to complement your pastor's abilities. Remember that even though your new pastor has been called by God and the church to be in professional ministry, he/she is human, just like U. Your new pastor is a servant leader but won't be your savior. Jesus is your Savior and desires for U to work alongside your pastor to make disciples for the transformation of the world.

There was one more slogan on the U-Haul we rented last week, "*Your helping hands along the way.*" Fortunately, Gary and I had the helping hands of Talitha's friend, Ashwin, on Friday. Otherwise, we'd probably still be packing! Yes, moving companies haul a pastor's stuff to the front door of the parsonage. **But it's the helping hands of church members like U that greet the pastoral family with graciousness and hospitality and enable both pastor and congregation get off to a good start.**

*Where will U go next?*" As sojourners, I and my colleagues never know when "the call" will come, so we continue to wonder as we wander, amazed at the privilege of our call to itinerant ministry. As July 1 approaches, if U are receiving a new pastor, may God bless your congregation and your departing and incoming pastor. If U don't anticipate receiving a new pastor on July 1, please pray for all those in transition. **And for all: offer to be helping hands along the way.**

## BUILDING A NEW MINISTRY

*Leading From the Heart* by Laurie Haller (Grand Rapids District Superintendent)  
June 30, 2008

**How many pastors does it take to hang two pieces of F-channel (a vinyl siding accessory trim) over the back porch of the conference Habitat house?** It took Robert Eckert, Mark Johnson and me 90 minutes to figure out what to do, including several "re-dos."

I am very grateful to the 12 pastors who gave up their day spent last Thursday to help build a house for Natasha Blakely and her 4 young children. I learned many things that day, not the least of which is the fact that I know next to nothing about building a house. I've done painting and dry walling before, but this time we were working with soffits, fascia and F- channels. **Don't ask! I can't understand it, let alone explain it.**

We had a very patient site supervisor, Dave Zimmerman, who gave us lots of responsibility but was always there to help when we got stuck. After we contemplated giving up on the F-channel, Dave fixed it within minutes. When we asked why it took 90 minutes for us to attempt the same thing, his reply was simple, **"I eyeballed it."** In other words, **experience is everything.**

I'm not sure how much we actually contributed to the building of the house at 510 Fuller S.E. in Grand Rapids. However, I sensed satisfaction in being able to see some tangible results of our efforts. At the same time, we thanked God that we were called to build the kingdom of God, not houses.

**We have a number of pastors right now in the West Michigan Conference who are beginning to build the kingdom of God in new locations.** I have been holding these pastors and families and their churches in prayer for months, asking God to bless this time of transition.

I can't resist offering a bit of wisdom to all those who are building new ministries, knowing that these principles also apply to pastors in continuing their current ministries.

- **Ministry is not haphazard, so create a plan for how you spend your time in the first three months.** The first 90 days in your new congregation are critical to the overall success of your ministry.
- **It is human nature to want to follow people we trust and want to be like.** The most important way you can foster trust in a new church is to build relationships with staff members, meet with key lay leaders in the church, and visit the shut-ins.
- **Listen more than speak.** When you learn the collective stories of the congregation and the individual stories of parishioners, you are much better equipped to come alongside existing ministries and build on them.
- Working hard and smart as you build a new ministry will reap enormous benefits in the future. **At the same time, set aside a specific day off at the beginning and stick to it.** If you honor your own day off, your parishioners will honor it too. Build longer times of retreat and renewal into the year as well.
- **Eyeball your ministry by building on your own pastoral experience.** There is a reason United Methodist bishops don't appoint 25 year olds as senior pastors in large churches. Deep and sustained pastoral experience as well as growth in

emotional, spiritual and leadership intelligence is critical if we are to pastor churches with larger and more complex ministries. Eyeballing ministry does not mean thinking that what you did in your last church will automatically work in your new church. It means looking at your new ministry setting with fresh eyes and seeing potential for transforming ministry.

- **Grow the church where you are.** Don't covet your neighbor's church or complain that you are appointed to a dead end church. *Every church can grow!* If you desire a bigger appointment, bloom where you are planted.
- **Think strategically.** Work in partnership with lay leaders and staff to develop a long range plan for the church's ministry. At the same time, set goals for your own ministry, goals that include professional growth as well as cultivating your own spirituality. Be a life-long learner.
- **Move outside the church!** How deeply is your congregation involved in your community? Would anyone miss the ministries of your church if it closed? Don't let anyone guilt trip you into ministering only to members of the congregation.
- **Communication is at the heart of effective ministry.** When issues come up, face them directly, graciously and hopefully. Avoidance never works. Discern who needs to be at the table, then pray, listen, talk and compromise together. Accept responsibility for your own mistakes, learn from them and move on.
- **Find a coach, mentor, spiritual friend, covenant discipleship group or spiritual director.** Every pastor needs support and accountability, and you are no exception!
- **Ministry is not a safe profession.** It demands boldness, moving out of our comfort zone and enlarging our borders. We throw open the doors of the church to all, not only so that others are welcome to enter but so that we can move *out* in ministry. Remember, you are much more than a chaplain or a caregiver. You are also a prophet, a leader, a risk-taker, and a visionary.

**What a joy it has been to be a superintendent for the past two years and have the privilege of sharing in the ministry of 70 congregations.** You have inspired, touched, prodded, challenged and eyeballed me to deepen my faith, learn new skills and grow in grace and spiritual maturity.

For those who are not moving, please take the time to welcome your new colleagues. **And for all those pastors who will be preaching in a different pulpit this Sunday, I pray that God will bless you richly. Create your new ministry by building on the solid foundation of your own experience and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who calls and sends.** And if you discover a need to know about F-channels, just give me a call.

# THE RIGHT START

## BEGINNING MINISTRY IN A NEW SETTING

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### **Results of a Survey of United Methodist District Superintendents in the United States**

- *Best Practices for Concluding Ministry in One Setting*
- *Best Practices for Beginning Ministry in a New Setting*
- *Key Challenges in Pastoral Transitions*



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## ***Best Practices for Concluding Ministry in One Setting***

### **1. Maintain good successor relations (20% of responses)**

- Prepare the way for the successor with the congregation
- Prepare the way for the congregation with the successor
- Spend quality time with your successor with an agreed upon agenda
- Talk about your successor only in positive terms
- Do not make comparison between yourself and your successor

### **2. Share ownership and responsibility for the move (18%)**

- Affirm (or at least acknowledge itinerancy) and your ownership of the process
- Do not blame others for the move
- Do not use closure to get back at others
- Be gracious to everyone

### **3. Provide good records and administrative wrap-up (18%)**

- Prepare essential lists for your successor and make sure important files are up to date
- Make sure church bills are paid through the month you leave
- Make sure apportionments are paid through the month you leave
- Never leave any unpaid personal bills
- Do not take church records with you

### **4. Adequate goodbyes, grief, and closure rituals (15%)**

- Provide adequate rituals for the going and coming
- Find appropriate ways to say goodbye and grieve with congregation and family
- Grant and ask for forgiveness
- Tell the people you love them
- Have personal visits and write personal notes where appropriate

### **5. Clarify your new relationship with the church (13%)**

- Clarify in spoken and written communication your new relationship with the people
- Do not promise to come back
- Take time to teach the congregation about closure and boundaries
- Affirm love and friendship while releasing persons from pastoral relationships

### **6. Leave the parsonage and office clean and in order. (9%)**

### **7. Keep working. (7%)**

- Continue vital ministry and avoid emotional withdrawal
  - Settle as many hanging difficulties as possible
  - Do not initiate major new programs in the closing months
  - Handle hanging staffing difficulties rather than pass them on
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## ***Best Practices for Beginning Ministry in a New Ministry Setting***

- 1. Learn about the new church and community. (18% of responses)**
    - Take 6-18 months to get to know the people and community
    - Demonstrate a willingness to learn the history of the congregation
    - Develop your skill in "reading" the congregation.
    - Learn the mission and vision of the congregation.
    - Consider using data gathering methods to understand the church and community.
    - Do careful assessment of strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities
  - 2. Spend time with people and build relationships (18%)**
    - Visit
    - Meet with the Staff Parish Relations Committee early and regularly
    - Pay particular attention to pastoral care and preaching
    - Make building relationships your highest priority
    - Meet community leaders, be visible in the community, and meet clergy colleagues
    - Visit members with key leadership roles
    - Visit people who have pastoral needs
    - Develop a strategy to get to know the people, communicate that plan, and stay with it.
    - Ask everyone you visit to suggest others with whom you should be talking.
  - 3. Don't change things at first, especially worship. (16%)**
  - 4. Listen and observe with an open mind to discover strengths and needs. (11%)**
  - 5. Build trust. (10%)**
    - Express joy in being there
    - Be authentic, honest, and genuine
    - Let people get to know you and allow the congregation time to learn to trust you
    - Focus on the congregation and their future, not your agenda
    - Earn the right to change things before initiating changes
    - If you write a letter of introduction to the church, have several others read it to make sure you are not communicating unintended signals
  - 6. Honor your predecessor's ministry. (10%)**
    - Do not criticize the former pastor, even if criticism is warranted.
    - Honor the progress and achievements accomplished before you arrived.
    - Let people know it is OK to grieve the loss of their former pastor.
    - Honor traditions long enough to understand the positive motivation behind them.
  - 7. Don't talk about your previous parish. (7%)**
  - 8. Don't complain, criticize, or make excessive demands. (6%)**
  - 9. Be patient. (4%)**
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## ***Key Challenges in Pastoral Transitions***

### **The Personal Challenge**

#### **Dealing with Emotional and Family Issues (32% of responses)**

Family adjustment, spouse employment, and issues related to children are paramount. There is a need to find appropriate ways for the pastor, family, and congregation to express their feelings, including the grief that inevitably is present. This includes a letting go of important relationships. For some, it also includes letting go of past hurts. Just as these emotional strains are so real, there are the pressures of adjusting to a new community, congregation, schools, doctors, and people. Adequate rest, spiritual renewal, and support can prove essential.

### **The Professional Challenge**

#### **Enabling a Smooth and Positive Transition (31%)**

The pastor leaving will set the tone for how the new pastor is received. Differences of personality or theology by the new pastor should not interfere with the manner in which the departing pastor helps prepare the way for the new pastor. The same is true for dealing with one's predecessor at the new congregation. Congregations, specifically the Staff Parish Relations Committee, can be helped to prepare for a new pastor. A pastor's feeling of grief in leaving or loneliness in the new setting should not cloud dealings with successor and predecessor. Everything possible should be done to pave the way for a successful transition in the church being left and for the continuation of ongoing ministries in the new congregation.

### **The Leadership Challenge**

#### **Understanding a New Church and Community (19%)**

Things taken for granted after years of interaction in one church and community must now be relearned in a new setting. Learning to "read" the history, traditions, and culture of a new context is the primary challenge in the first year or so in a new church. This also gives the new congregation a chance to learn the new pastor. In both cases, imperfections will be spotted quickly; discovering each other's strengths will take much longer. Your "job" as pastor may be similar from church to church, but the leadership assignment in a new congregation, in all likelihood, will be very different given the new circumstances. Merely doing what one has always done is normally inadequate when any leader changes from one context to another.

### **The Local Church Challenge**

#### **Closure and Saying Goodbye (15%)**

Saying goodbye to the pastor leaving and hello to the new pastor should not be left to chance. This is a time of major transition in the lives of many people. As such, it needs to be handled with care, sensitivity, and sufficient spiritual depth and ritual. Lack of proper closure can hamper ministry for a long time. A pastor's ability to express genuine love for a congregation and, at the same time, make clear the new relationship of former pastor will do a great service to self and congregation. A congregation's ability to express profound appreciation for the years of service by a pastor and, at the same time, release that pastor for new ministry and welcome their new pastor with open arms will make effective ministry more likely for all involved.



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# Leading Ideas

May 21, 2008

## **Pastoral Transitions - Leaving Well** by Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

If you will be moving to a new congregation this summer, keep in mind the importance of ending your ministry well at your current location. It is easy to shift one's thinking and emotional energy to the anticipated new congregation and neglect some key elements of leaving well and preparing the way for your successor. Most mistakes clergy make in their last months before moving are not intentional but the result of oversight from not planning carefully for leaving.

Remember that the primary goal of the transition is the continuing faithful witness of the congregation in which you have invested much energy. There is an important dimension of the leaving time that is about you – in that people want to express appreciation for your ministry. But you will want to find every opportunity possible to receive their thanks graciously while reframing what is happening as God's ongoing purpose for the congregation.

Many clergy do not have an adequate plan for their leaving. This can leave a feeling of incompleteness for the pastor and congregation. One also wants to be very careful not to do things in the closing months that will undermine one's overall ministry there or make the entry of a new pastor difficult.

### **Communicate**

There can never be too much communication during times of change. Give people information and then do it again and again. The pastor does not need to do all the communicating, but the pastor needs to ensure that such generous information sharing is taking place.

Adhere to all denominational protocols and timelines, but do not be content to think that just because "the change was announced" or "a letter went out," the task of communication has ended. Find multiple ways to give people information they will need to understand and to interpret to others the upcoming change.

You will want to give special attention to some persons with whom you will plan to have personal conversations to express thanks and discuss the transition. For some you may want to prepare personal letters of appreciation. Who are the persons that need particular consideration because of close personal relationships, extraordinary service, or key current or past roles within the congregations? Who are the people with whom your relationship has often been difficult and troubled – and you would not want to leave without some kind of personal communication?

For the congregation as a whole, find multiple ways to say in speech and writing your thanks for how much they have meant to you. Always lift up positive things from your tenure, even if there have been unhappy or rocky periods. Share ownership for the move and for your church's polity. Do not blame others for the move or use closure to get back at others; be gracious to all. Clarify in spoken and written communication your new relationship with the congregation. Define what is over and what is not.



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# Leading Ideas

May 24, 2008

Also think of communicating with public and community leaders. They often do not have access to the information shared within the congregation. Make sure that ecumenical and community partners know what is happening. Tell them about your successor. You might also serve as a linking person in connecting the new pastor and key community leaders.

## Mark the Endings

It is particularly important to find ways to mark the endings that are taking place. Rituals, ceremonies, and litanies that mark occasions of celebration and goodbye are essential for all. It is important to capture the significance of what is happening by acknowledging what has been accomplished, what is changing, and what lies ahead. Such services create common experiences that make it easier for everyone to move forward.

One component can be your final message as pastor. George B. Thompson, Jr., provides some suggested themes for consideration (*How to Get Along with Your Church: Creating Cultural Capital for Doing Ministry*, Pilgrim, 129).

Accomplishment - "See what God has done in our midst!"

Affirmation - "You continue to be God's people."

Anticipation - "Behold, God is making all things new."

William Bridges, in his work on transitions, has noted how important it is to give careful attention to such markings. "Most *unsuccessful* transitions start with failing to handle the ending well," he says, in that such endings rarely get the thought and planning they need. (*The Way of Transition*, Da Capo, 144-145)



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# Leading Ideas

February 3, 2010

## **Retirement Best Practices for Pastor and Congregation**

**By David Rich**

The retirement of a pastor from his or her ministry is a unique and critical transition involving the pastor, his or her family, the staff, and the congregation. Planning together for this transition offers the pastor and congregational leadership the opportunity to manage the transition. It also serves as the first step toward working together to do their best in ministry in their last months or years together.

Too often the retirement of the pastor is approached with secrecy, a lack of openness, and an attitude of "biding our time." Parking lot conversations among church leaders become times of gossip and questions: "Has he or she talked with you about retirement? How old is she? How long do you think he will stay?" And the pastor talks about retirement with his/her family, trusted colleagues, and friends, but not with key church leaders for fear of being a lame duck: "Don't tell anyone that I am thinking about retirement."

Developing and implementing a transition plan builds a solid foundation for ministry – for the congregation and the retiring pastor. A transition plan allows the pastor and congregational leadership to have control of the transition and avoids the pastor becoming a "lame duck" by providing direction for the remaining months of vital ministry until the retirement date. Without a transition plan, the pastor simply waits to see what happens after the announcement of the retirement date.

What are some best practices a pastor and congregation can use to plan and manage a healthy and meaningful ending so that the pastor and the congregation can finish together with vitality?

**Best practices for the pastor for the time prior to announcing the retirement date include:**

- **Reflect on your years of ministry.** When were you most energized and when were you most drained. What has been most fulfilling and what has been most challenging? What have you learned over the years?
- **Examine your present situation.** How are you feeling physically, spiritually, and vocationally? Where would you like to focus your energy? What would you like to see happen in the congregation before you leave?
- **Consider when is the right time to retire.** Consider financial needs, personal health and stamina, family needs, personal goals, and what the congregation needs in pastoral leadership.
- **Consult with the appropriate people.** It is important to talk with your family, your primary support group, denominational executives, or trusted leaders in the congregation. Be aware of any deadlines your denomination or pension plan requires you to meet.
- **Identify your retirement date.**

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- Go on a three or four day silent retreat to prepare for this time of transition.

**Best practices for the pastor and congregational leadership** for the time from the retirement date announcement to the conclusion of ministry include:

- **Plan a retreat for the leadership of the congregation.** Include church officers and staff using an outside facilitator. Review and reflect on the years of ministry of the retiring pastor. Identify where the pastor should focus energy during the transition. Develop a transition plan of tasks and time lines.
- **Develop a plan for saying goodbye.** Express appreciation for church members; forgive and ask forgiveness; and deal with staff issues before leaving. It is also important for the pastor and the congregation to recognize and experience their own grieving.
- **Help the congregation understand the importance of boundaries.** Avoid creating unhealthy dependencies. Upon retirement, the pastoral relationship has ended. Once you leave, you will no longer be the pastor. You will no longer officiate at their baptisms, weddings, and funerals.
- **Identify important administrative tasks to be accomplished.** Help the congregational leadership get reports and computer files in order, review and update policies and procedures, and identify ongoing facilities issues that need to be addressed.
- **Help the congregation understand the process by which a new pastor will come to the congregation.** Invite denomination officials to meet with the leadership of the congregation to outline the process. Prepare a question and answer sheet for the congregation.

The retirement of a pastor is a unique and critical transition for many people. It requires open and honest communication. Developing a sound transition plan provides an opportunity for the pastor and church leaders to work together in planning and managing a healthy and vital ending of ministry as the pastor moves toward retirement and a solid foundation for the congregation as it moves into the process of welcoming a new pastor.

David Rich (davidrich@cox.net) is a minister, educator, and consultant in helping pastors and congregations finish strong. Formerly he was Director of the Retirement Planning Program for the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

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# Leading Ideas

May 21, 2008

## **Pastoral Transitions – Preparing the Way for Your Successor** by Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

Below are some of the “best practices” suggested by several hundred pastors and denominational leaders.

### **Maintain good successor relations.**

- Prepare the way for the successor with the congregation so that the entry is as smooth as can be.
- Prepare the way for the congregation with the successor so the new pastor starts with a hopeful stance toward the new context.
- Spend quality time with your successor with an agreed upon agenda. Invite the new pastor to visit and ask what types of information would be most useful so you can prepare for the meeting.
- Talk about your successor only in positive terms.
- Do not make comparisons between yourself and your successor.

### **Provide good records and administrative wrap-up.**

- Prepare essential lists for your successor such as pending pastoral care situations, hospital lists, prospective members most likely to join in the near future, etc.
- Make sure important files are up to date and that the latest pertinent reports are easily available.
- Make sure church bills are paid through the month you leave.
- Make sure denominational apportionments are paid through the month you leave.
- Be sure to pay all personal bills in the community.
- Do not take church records with you.

### **Leave the parsonage and office clean and in order.**

### **Keep working.**

- Continue vital ministry and avoid emotional withdrawal. The church deserves a full-time and engaged pastor until the end.
- Settle as many hanging issues and staff difficulties as possible rather than passing them on. You are in a better position to deal with such matters than the new pastor will be for quite some time.
- Do not initiate major new programs in the closing months that you cannot see through before leaving.

To read more “Best Practices” for transitioning from one congregation to another,  
go to *The Right Start: Beginning Ministry in a New Setting*

English Version - <http://www.churchleadership.com/pdfs/bestpracticespastoraltransitions.pdf>  
Spanish Version - [http://www.churchleadership.com/pdfs/Right Start ds survey Spanish version.pdf](http://www.churchleadership.com/pdfs/Right%20Start%20survey%20Spanish%20version.pdf)

**Pastoral Transition Tasks**  
***Making a Healthy Pastoral Transition***  
*Compiled and written by Micheal Selleck*

Welcoming a new pastor is a challenging time for the church as well as the pastor and his or her family. While nothing can truly take away the hard work and necessary time of getting adjusted, there are things that can and should be done to minimize stress and maximize joy.

Questions that should be asked are many, but the following are some of the types of questions that should be addressed.

"What kinds of events will help acquaint the new pastor with the congregation?"

"What needs to be done to the church office and the parsonage to welcome the new pastor?"

"What kinds of orientation, (hospitals, shut-in's, shopping, restaurants, historical highlights, schools, etc.) will the new pastor need?"

"If there is a spouse and or children, what can be done to help them feel welcome?"

"How can the church best facilitate the physical moving process?"

To address these tasks, consider establishing a transition team through the SPRC. The makeup of this team should reach into the congregation and not necessarily be limited to members from the SPRC. Pray about the membership of this temporary team; seek the best person for each type of task. The team will need a visionary chairperson with gifts of administration, inspiration, and encouragement.

Below are some suggestions (not exhaustive in any sense) that ought to be given consideration by the transition team. Each suggestion addresses a need and, when done well, can go a long way to assuring a good "marriage" between church and pastor. As each task below is evaluated, consider and identify who will take responsibility for the task and put it on a master timeline for completion.

Remember, the new pastor has no basis of reference when coming into the life of a new congregation. If little or nothing is provided from the list below, the pastor is "running blind," slowing and muddling the transition time.

### **1. Order signage, cards, and plan publicity**

Order a new desk plate and/or doorplate with the new pastor's name. This includes a panel for any street signage as well. Include a welcome message on the street sign beginning on the Conference Move Day. Get pertinent cell numbers, and discuss with the new pastor how much this number ought to be distributed. Order new stationary, new business cards (let the new pastor choose his or her own design) and new personalized note cards for personal correspondence. All this should be on the pastor's desk upon arrival.

Also, depending on your situation and community, contact a local news organization and run a quick story of the new pastor with a picture.

Task: Contact new pastor and get proper spelling of name, (be sure to clarify titles, formal and informational name preference and the use of initials.), desired designs, order stationary and cards.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **2. Coordinate "Letters of Welcome"**

As soon as the new pastor is identified, perhaps a month or two before arrival, have various persons in the congregation write notes of welcome at random times until the family arrives. This is especially valuable if children of the congregation write to any children in the pastor's family, teens write teens, and so on. These initial contacts can be very meaningful and comforting. Encourage the congregation to offer personal invitations to get to know the family after they move in.

Task: Have church members write notes of welcome to new pastor prior to arriving at the parsonage.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **3. Make sure to "Warm The House"**

If there is a parsonage that needs attention, (in matters of paint, carpet, etc.) this needs to be anticipated by the Trustees. If things are not ready for occupation by the time of "move day," arrangements for quality temporary housing needs to be anticipated. **DO NOT PUT THE NEW PASTOR'S FAMILY IN SOMEONE'S HOME AS TEMPORARY LODGING - FIND A NICE MOTEL SUITE NEAR BY.**

Task: Have Trustees inspect the parsonage, plan any updates and repairs, and make sure work is done as soon as possible.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **4. Paying for the Move**

The cost of moving the new pastor into the parsonage is the responsibility of the church "receiving" the pastor, though there is a "finance cap" suggested in the Standing Rules of the Conference. (Look in the Conference Journal for this information.) Contact the pastor as soon as you are allowed to do so, and offer whatever help and support you can in this process.

If it can be determined what needs the family may have, consider a house warming of appropriate gifts or a perhaps a "Pounding" (one pound of "anything and everything" people can think of) to support them in the move.

Task: Plan a fun way to welcome the new pastor and family as they move into the new parsonage/community.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **5. Provide Time to Acclimate – Out of the Office or...**

##### **The First Week In The New Parsonage**

Some 'buffer' time between leaving one church and coming to another may be very helpful to the pastor, especially if the family has children still at home. The new surroundings, neighborhood, routine, travel routes, etc. are matters the pastor and his/her family have to acclimate to. Unfortunately the pastor is too often pressed into immediate service at the church office while the family is left to unpack, move in, find grocery stores, schools, stores to shop in, etc. on their own.

Acclimatizing to a new setting is best done as a full family. When parents/spouses orient independently of each other the process which could take only a few weeks is protracted into months. What is required is some downtime to 'be a family' at this high stress time.

(Note, this isn't to be used by the pastor as a bonus vacation at the beach...rather used as a time when the new church family should 'live' into the new neighborhood, the parsonage without the demands of immediately coming to the church office and trying to establish a new image there. Family time in the first week...church work second week.)

The first full week of the new appointment there should be an agreement that the pastor will be very scarce around the office.

Task: Make sure the church runs smoothly with the new pastor at home with the family rather in the church office.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

## **6. Provide Time for the Congregation to Acclimate**

Typically, pastor's switch on an identified Thursday called 'move day.' This assumes the former pastor preaches one Sunday, and the new pastor is at work in the pulpit the next. This is standard operating procedure and has stood the test of time. However, most UM's would quickly agree our standard process is a bit lacking in terms of acknowledging the emotional impact of saying good-bye and hello for persons who have served as our pastor's. As people of an itinerant methodology, we should have the best processes possible for making healthy transitions.

A significant improvement would ideally involve setting aside two consecutive Sunday worship services between the former pastor leaving and the new pastor arriving. (This would mean that the pastor leaving would negotiate an earlier departure date than normal.) The worship for these back-to-back weeks should be done with laity leading and preaching rather than with clergy. Select key leaders (one for each of the two weeks) from the congregational family who speak and communicate well, and are highly respected by the worshipping community. There are two critical issues, one for each Sunday, which should be considered:

1) On the first Lay Sunday say goodbye to the old. The lay speaker would lead the congregation in sorting through their feelings about the former pastor. Acknowledging feelings of grief (or elation!) are normal. Share a few laughs, a few stories, a few failings, and help the "worshipping" congregation say farewell in a healthy and thoughtful manner to the former pastor, which can be done well without the new pastor present. Saying goodbye often is marginalized and substituted with feelings of denial. It is much better to spend a short time, laity to laity, offering scriptural and anecdotal guidance for grieving and letting go.

2) On the second Lay Sunday say hello to the new. Help the congregation open their hearts and minds to new possibilities with a new pastor for a new era of leadership. Help the congregation make a mental shift to freshness and renewal. Guide them to understand that while change is at times frightening, it's almost always good when we look back. Help prepare them to receive, hear, support, and patiently care for the new pastor. Be especially sensitive in lifting up prayers and suggestions for a spirit of warmth and welcoming.

The strength of these two Sunday's is having lay leadership lead the process with dignity and honesty. Clergy, sometimes seen more as professionals than real people, have a harder time saying what needs to be said without it sounding self-serving or self-deprecating. When a congregation hears from one of their own number, a person respected and known, it can be very helpful and wonderfully moving.

If you can arrange only one Sunday between pastors, divide the above tasks using two speakers in the one service. It's less effective than having two distinct Sundays, but it's still better than pretending people are simply replaceable parts in the UM itinerant church machine.

Task: Identify speaker(s) for Sunday(s) when the no appointed pastor is present. Arrange for laity to lead all other aspects of the service; liturgy, music, sermon, prayers, etc.)

Coordinator for the above task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **7. The New Pastor's First Sunday – Preaching Only**

The new pastor will have NO IDEA of the rhythm of worship at a new location. While we are a connected denomination, and much of the structure is similar from church to church, each church has its own "comfort zone." Because a new pastor has no idea of a churches worship traditions the pastor by default ends up imposing his or her own sense of worship on the new congregation. To avoid this scenario, a full worship service should be established where all roles except the sermon are presented by laity who know the tasks and can do them well. The intent is to give the pastor a chance to see and hear worship as it's normally done in the new setting...and thereby allowing him or her to get a feeling before being having to step totally into the worship leadership role. This could actually go on for a few weeks or until the new pastor has a good grasp and sense of 'normal' for the congregation, and if multiple services are involved, it allows time to address each different setting specifically.

Task: Sign up lay leaders to handle all worship tasks except sermon.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **8. Welcoming the New Pastor as Part of Worship**

The first worship service with the new pastor and family present should include a ritual of welcome. This could include the ritual printed in the **UM Book of Worship** for *Receiving a New Pastor*.

The introductions of the pastor and family should be a meaningful part of the service. Gifts of welcome and gifts that show acceptance of the appointment are appropriate. A new stole is a nice suggestion...or a new Bible as a symbol of the congregation's willingness to be led by this person, or both and more. Perhaps simply presenting them his or her "new" business cards or other forms of greeting is enough. The point is to invest in the person who is coming to lead you in matters of spiritual life.

Task: Review the ritual in the Book of Worship, prepare the necessary gifts, and identify the necessary speakers and presenters as the ritual calls for. Make sure there is time in the worship service for the ritual.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **9. A reception line is always appropriate.**

On the first Sunday, the pastor and his or her family have an opportunity to meet and greet in a formal reception line. This can be done well, or poorly, depending on how much thought is put into it.

Some folks like the single line approach, where folks wait for a turn to shake hands and exchange greetings and names. This works in smaller situations where the line has the potential of moving along within reasonable limits. In a larger congregation, this line can grow quite long and the wait can reach into the hours. Long lines can also clog up hallways and doorways, making any movement of people almost embarrassing to manage.

Some folks like to have punch and cookies which is all well and good, but how do folks get to the refreshment if they're trapped in lines?

A few moments of thought may provide the best way of allowing folks to mill around the refreshments until the line is down to a few folks, and then they can step in and take a turn. The line is always manageable, the people don't perish for lack of something cool to drink and a sweet to keep energy up, and those who have less time can negotiate forward allowing those who have a bit more time to socialize to wait a bit while chatting with others stirring about the room.

Always put folks alongside the new pastor (and his or her family) who know most of the people in the congregation. Consider placing a "prompter" down the line who makes sure each person has a name tag, and is engaged conversationally in such a way that they can be reminded that this is just a quick greeting (as opposed to a recital of family history, who knows who and from where, etc.) Make sure to pass any important details to the greeters at the side of the pastor so they can assist in making the greeting of each person as meaningful as possible.

The golden rule is to keep this a time of dignity without becoming tedious and long.

Task: Set up a receiving line and refreshments for the first Sunday the pastor is present.  
Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **10. Provide the "First Week of Meals"**

Boxes, boxes, everywhere boxes. To minimize stress, full meals – including disposable plates, plastic glasses and silverware, etc. and should be dropped by the parsonage. Breakfasts can be sweet rolls and juices or something similar. Lunches can be sandwiches from a store or homemade, it doesn't matter much. A whole day's provisions may be dropped off mid-day. In any case, provide a meal until the pastor's home "kitchen" is in order and they can easily provide for themselves.

If there are very small children, babysitting help might be greatly appreciated. If there are children who might be more under foot than helpful in the unpacking process, offer to have church families take them for a time, if the new family is comfortable doing so.

Adults may offer to help the new family unpack, but don't be surprised if it's rejected – a good deal of trust is called for to have unknown persons sift through personal belongings, box by

box. Just providing time for the adults of the new parsonage family to work through unpacking together may be enough of a gift.

Task: Arrange for meals for the first few days, or until the unpacking is well in hand. Check to see if any help is needed in the unpacking process.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **11. The Personal Finance Paperwork**

As soon as is appropriate, the chief financial officer of the church should arrange to sit with the pastor and exchange all necessary information for payroll, pension, deductions, etc.

Caution: if it's helpful to include the spouse at this time, plan for his/her participation. All decisions and agreements should be put in writing and signed by both parties. Make a note of birthdays, anniversaries, etc. for church publication at a later time.

Be aware this is NOT the time to unload all the news and blues of the churches financial status. That function should be done at a later time. This step can actually be done before the move actually takes place...discreetly.

Especially vital is making sure the pastor has income in a timely manner during the first four weeks. Some churches pay ahead for two weeks, some ahead for a month...some pay after. Depending on what type of payroll situation a pastor is coming from and what kind he or she is entering into, it can be a long time between salary checks. Do what you can to keep the family from being financially 'stranded' while waiting for the first paycheck to come through.

Task: Make sure all salary, tax, and family information is updated and all questions are answered in regards to income.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **12. Guide the "Community Tour"**

In the first few days, or even immediately before taking residence, it would be extremely helpful for someone from the church with a large vehicle to take the new family on a full tour of the area, citing places of growth, sharing history, and giving insights to the community history and future; it's people, problems, and such. Schools, shops, restaurants, etc. should be included.

A separate tour for pastor can be done on a subsequent day to orient him or her to the hospitals, nursing homes, nearby churches, etc. Likewise, a separate tour for the spouse that highlights his or her needs could be helpful too.

Task: Arrange for the new pastor to have a tour of the community. Arrange for the family to get the same treatment for what they would like to see as well.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. Plan a Big "Welcome Banquet"**

A special "all church" welcome banquet should be planned, and it may be that a Sunday after church isn't the best time. Whatever date/time is selected take pains to promote the date as early as possible and anticipate this occasion with humor, fun, and warmth. Providing a festive celebratory atmosphere is appropriate.

Task: Plan the welcome banquet, food, and entertainment, for the new parsonage family.  
Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

**14. Walk Through the Church Finances**

In the first week of office work, (which may be the second week of residency?) set up a meeting where the new pastor and the Chair of finance, and other key chairpersons, can talk frankly and confidentially about the churches financial condition, stewardship health, investments, etc. This should be done with a minimum of three people so as to avoid the perception of one person manipulating the situation.

Task: Honest review of the church's spiritual health.  
Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

Task: Honest and "open book" review of church financial status.  
Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

**15. Calendar clearing, working styles and priorities**

In the first week of office work, (which may be the second week of residency) the Administrative assistant (secretary) should identify time to accomplish the following:

- Calendar coordination
- Meetings upcoming
- Office protocols

Task: Review the upcoming church calendar and areas needing attention. Make plans for the pastor and administrative assistant to attend the Great Start Workshop (July 23, 2009) at Simpsonwood.  
Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **16. Set up "Neighborhood Welcome Groups"**

One person should be assigned to set up regional "welcome" gatherings at various members' homes. Hosts should be selected based on their involvement in the life of the church as much as possible: this gets the pastor into the homes of the active folks as soon as possible. Also, other members attending can learn where some of their key church leaders live. The gathering should start at a certain time, and people should be encouraged to be present on time as much as possible (as opposed to a walk through where people come and go at leisure) the evening should conclude within 1.5 hours, maximum.

Every person on the total church mailing list should be divided into regions with a host/hostess for each area. Each person on the subsequent lists should receive a short invitation from their assigned host/hostess in a hand-addressed envelope. Do not rely only on word of mouth, or just notices in the bulletin, or email/phone calls; instead, use all of these.

The welcome meetings should be in the evenings, as appropriate, and should be set up over a 4 to 6 week period. One or two person(s) should volunteer to travel to all the gatherings with the pastor (and spouse when appropriate) – stay for the gathering – and handle all matters of introducing the new pastor and (spouse.) It's important that this person be able to attend all gatherings to provide continuity and reflection from a consistent perspective.

This task can become cumbersome if not thought through. The pastor will be exhausted if too much is packed into a short time, and what is meant as a gift can become a chore. The point is to offer a way for the pastor to meet and greet the congregation without making it a complete chore. It may be helpful to consult with the new pastor for input on this particular step to get some ideas and feedback before launching a full scale plan.

Nametags must be provided for all guests and worn at all times.

Task: Set up the gatherings and make sure the pastor/family get to each on time.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **17. Provide a "Shut-In" Tour**

In the first week of office work, (which may be the second week of residency) someone familiar with the pastoral roles of the church should take the new pastor to visit all shut-in's and elderly that could benefit from a visit. Also included on this portion of the trip, if not covered in another way, is a drive by of all the area hospitals that your congregation uses. Homemade maps should be provided if helpful, or a GPS would make a nice welcome gift if the new pastor hasn't already purchased one.

Task: Arrange for pastor to visit shut-in's and nursing homes in the community.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **18. Set up "Meet the Chairperson" Lunches.**

Each program ministry chairperson should be contacted and arrangements made to coordinate with the new pastor's schedule. These lunches should take place within weeks 2-4...as is reasonable to do so.

These meetings **shouldn't be** "business" meetings where grand visions are unpacked, or even goals are reviewed. (Business matters should be reviewed at later meetings...) This first go 'round with each Chairperson should be an introductory and relational visit. "Who are you, what do you like, where are you from..." etc. Keep it simple.

Task: Set up lunch meetings with various chairpersons and the pastor; let the pastor have some say in the scheduling of these meetings. The sooner these meetings are set up the more likelihood they'll happen.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **19. Plan a "Staff Retreat"**

Within 4 to 8 weeks of the new pastor's arrival, the staff needs to identify, plan, and implement a full staff retreat. The function of this gathering is to work out roles, responsibilities, styles, interests, and direction.

This is a retreat that may be best led by someone gifted in matters of group process, someone not related to the congregation or to the new or previous pastor, though much of the structure should be shaped by desires of the new pastor. Retreat details from A to Z, should be handled by someone on the staff in consultation with the pastor. Too often the new pastor has no idea where to begin with the structure (formal an informal) of the new congregation to pull off such a critical event.

Task: Set up a full staff retreat; site, times, resources, etc.)

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **20. Have SPRC Do Extra "Follow Up Meetings"**

The SPRC should work hard in the first 6 months to make sure the new pastor is getting the support and resources necessary to get involved and be effective. This means more meetings than usual, some at the church, some in homes, and some informally over a meal at a restaurant. Many shorter meetings are better than fewer long ones. Help the pastor feel supported and connected to the SPRC. Listen to the needs articulated. Help the pastor to hear the needs articulated by the congregation. This intensity should last up to the Christmas holidays.

Task: Adopt a list of meeting dates for the committee and pastor to handle small matters while they're small and to make sure questions are being handled.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

**21. Plan a "First Anniversary Party"**

On the first anniversary Sunday, a special celebration should be planned as a matter of encouragement and celebration. This is helpful because the first year is the toughest.

Task: Arrange for a special celebration, in worship? or as a meal afterward, or both?

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Saying Goodbye**

Saying goodbye is just as critical as a healthy hello, but sometimes more complicated. Dealing with the past can be fraught with concerns about how some things are said, addressed, left out, included, and there is sometimes as much negative baggage as there is positive. Because there is so many ways to think about the past, so many angles to consider, it's all the more important that a goodbye be done very well and as thoroughly as possible. Each church will need to address its unique situation prayerfully and thoughtfully in this component. Here are a few possibilities to help stir your thoughts as you plan.

### **1. A farewell banquet.**

This should be a festive and happy time where good days and incidents are celebrated. This event should be done a few weeks before the last Sunday, at a time when most of the congregation can be present. The meal should be excellent; there could be a time of story telling by good story tellers, reflecting on the pastors high and notable points. Humor is always a great way to mitigate the hurt of separation, so use it to help the situation without becoming goofy or cheap.

Use a different team for the farewell banquet than for the welcoming banquet for the new pastor to prevent burnout. However, it is essential that these two teams stay in constant contact with one another sharing ideas, plans, and details.

Task: Arrange for a special celebration.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **2. An appropriate gift**

An appropriate gift is something given to the pastor so he or she can remember you, a wall hanging of the church building, a memento of a project or ministry developed, etc., is more appropriate and meaningful for a pastor to take away from his or her time with you. Big gifts or big checks for a dear sum of money are not appropriate for a pastor moving to a new location. (If a pastor is retiring from your congregation, a gift should represent something else and should be given at a time when a larger gathering of people from other congregations the pastor has served should be invited to participate and attend. Even in this situation, caution and care should be taken in regards to a gift.) Some churches paint themselves into a corner on 'departing gifts' by doing too much just one time, thereby establishing an imaginary expectation for the next pastor and the next, etc. This is a scenario that can quickly spiral out of appropriateness but cannot be stopped without a

degree of embarrassment. Limit the cost and put energy into the thoughtfulness of the gift instead.

If cash is determined to be the best option, a one time request for a love offering can be mailed out without pressure to participate. It is NEVER appropriate to use church funds for padding a love offering or purchasing a parting gift. Church funds are given for ministry and it is a violation to use the money for this kind of purpose. Consider too a gift to a ministry in the name of the pastor, a charity or scholarship fund. Pastors should be honored for their service, but a bonus check isn't part of our culture nor should it find a foothold.

Task: Arrange for an appropriate gift(s) for the pastor and his or her family.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

### **3. A farewell worship moment**

It is appropriate to have some time set aside in the pastor's last worship service for the purposes of saying goodbye and acknowledging his or her years of service with you. Select a lay person of ability and respect to share some reflections and appreciations regarding the pastor's tenure.

Not all pastorates are equal. Some appointments don't go well, some go heavenly. Some pastorates are too short, some are too long. Most are a mixture of all this, and there is plenty to pick and choose from on both sides of the "effectiveness" ledger. List and talk of the good things, avoid the hard things. If this means walking around a '700 pound gorilla' in the sanctuary, then do so. This is not a time for overly frank honesty and brutal truth telling at the expense of a safe and genuine goodbye done with good will and grace.

a. Take time for a sacred moment; invite the pastor to the railing for a laying on of hands in prayer, and or some special music for the pastor and spouse, or consider a litany read and shared by the congregation acknowledging the pastor's leadership, friendship, and spiritual guidance. One way or another make a way to put a holy shroud on and over the pastor's tenure with you.

b. Take some time to share a few insights, reflections, and good wishes. Keep this light without becoming clownish; keep it meaningful and dignified without becoming morose.

c. Offer a token gift at this time, a plaque, or an engraved desk ornament, a "goodie" bag with favorite candies, trinkets, and comforts, for the journey to the next church, something modest but meaningfully appropriate for a time of worship. (This is a second gift, different than the one given at the banquet which might be a golf club or more pedestrian kind of gift that may not play as well in a worship setting as it does at a casual evening banquet.)

Task: Arrange for a speaker(s) to use some worship time on the former pastor's last Sunday to provide for a fond farewell with worshipful dignity and class.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Put Day-to-day Administration in the hands of others for a brief time**

Try to put the administration of the church, the day-to-day details, in the hands of other staff or volunteers for as long as is feasible to do so. This allows the church to run as efficiently as possible allowing the new pastor to focus a bit more heavily on relationships and visitation.

Task: Arrange for assignment of routine tasks of administration to be handled by staff and volunteers for the immediate few weeks or months.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

## Quick Sheet of Coordinators

### Hello Tasks

1. Task: Contact new pastor and get proper spelling of name, (be sure to clarify titles, formal and informational name preference and the use of initials.), desired designs, order stationary and cards.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Task: Have church members write notes of welcome to new pastor prior to arriving at the parsonage.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Task: Have Trustees inspect the parsonage, plan any updates and repairs, and make sure work is done as soon as possible.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Task: Plan a fun way to welcome the new pastor and family as they move into the new parsonage/community.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Task: Make sure the church runs smoothly with the new pastor at home with the family rather in the church office.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Task: Identify speaker(s) for Sunday(s) when the no appointed pastor is present. Arrange for laity to lead all other aspects of the service; liturgy, music, sermon, prayers, etc.)

Coordinator for the above task: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Task: Sign up lay leaders to handle all worship tasks except sermon.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Task: Review the ritual in the Book of Worship, prepare the necessary gifts, and identify the necessary speakers and presenters as the ritual calls for. Make sure there is time in the worship service for the ritual.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Task: Set up a receiving line and refreshments for the first Sunday the pastor is present.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Task: Arrange for meals for the first few days, or until the unpacking is well in hand. Check to see if any help is needed in the unpacking process.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

11. Task: Make sure all salary, tax, and family information is updated and all questions are answered in regards to income.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

12. Task: Arrange for the new pastor to have a tour of the community. Arrange for the family to get the same treatment for what they would like to see as well.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

13. Task: Plan the welcome banquet, food, and entertainment, for the new parsonage family.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

14. Task: Honest review of the church's spiritual health.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

Task: Honest and "open book" review of church financial status.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

15. Task: Review the upcoming church calendar and areas needing attention. Make plans for the pastor and administrative assistant to attend the Great Start Workshop (July 23, 2009) at Simpsonwood.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

16. Task: Set up the gatherings and make sure the pastor/family get to each on time.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

17. Task: Arrange for pastor to visit shut-in's and nursing homes in the community.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

18. Task: Set up lunch meetings with various chairpersons and the pastor; let the pastor have some say in the scheduling of these meetings. The sooner these meetings are set up the more likelihood they'll happen.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

19. Task: Set up a full staff retreat; site, times, resources, etc.)

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

20. Task: Adopt a list of meeting dates for the committee and pastor to handle small matters while they're small and to make sure questions are being handled.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

21. Task: Arrange for a special celebration, in worship? or as a meal afterward, or both?

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Good bye Tasks**

1. Task: Arrange for a special celebration.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Task: Arrange for an appropriate gift(s) for the pastor and his or her family.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Task: Arrange for a speaker to use some worship time on the former pastor's last Sunday to say a fond farewell with worshipful dignity and class.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Task: Arrange for assignment of routine tasks of administration to be handled by staff and volunteers for the immediate few weeks or months.

Coordinator for this task: \_\_\_\_\_

# Good Ideas for a Move

For many people, the thought of moving brings with it a sense of being overwhelmed regardless of whether you have six months or six days to prepare for the event. Moving means pulling up roots and then actively replanting yourself in a new home, a new community, and a new life.

As United Methodists, we have a heritage grounded in John Wesley's circuit riders who traveled to spread God's word wherever they were needed. Today, "incarnation" is real to you as you find yourself preparing to move to serve a new church. Whether you are moving alone or with family or with pets, this is a time when life may be exciting and/or it may be excruciatingly difficult. At the times when our lives feel overloaded, we may have difficulty sorting out just what needs to be done to help us transition to the next stage.

In this section, you will find concrete ideas and suggestions to help facilitate a smooth move. The reality of how to get it all done and determining what needs to be done is one place to begin your journey.

## Before the Move

### Pastor—Prepare Ye the Way

- Prepare the way for your successor. Help provide him or her with information and introductions to key areas and persons in the life of the church and the community. Begin to prepare the congregation to welcome and receive a new pastor gladly.
- Meet with the new pastor when possible to give an overview of the church's ministry, goals, and vision. Utilize the time together to answer questions and share information that will contribute to the health of the church.
- Resist any desire to share information that may prevent the incoming pastor from being free to express his or her own vision for the church. Allow yourself to surrender any unfulfilled dreams you have for your ministry with this particular church so the incoming pastor can find a receptive environment to nurture his or her own dreams.
- Recognize that both of you are colleagues in ministry and both are experiencing a move. Consider how you might mutually support one another.

### Who's Who

- Discuss with your successor what you can do to be helpful.
- Remember some new pastors appreciate background on congregational members either from you or from a trusted member of the congregation while others want to approach new people with no preconceptions.
- Do your best when you are discussing people to provide only necessary information in an unbiased way.
- Do not share information that will not contribute to the health of the church.
- Do not prejudice the incoming pastor by making specific comments about specific members.
- Provide a list of churches in the community. Include the pastors' names and phone numbers; highlight the names of those in charge of the ministerial association or those on-call when a pastor is out of town.

### Administrative Checklist

The following items should be prepared for the incoming pastor to facilitate a smooth transition. Enroll the assistance of church leaders to spread out the administrative work and to ensure everything is current and in order for the incoming pastor.

#### Membership & Other Records

- Be sure the membership roll is current and up-to-date.
- Provide a list of all changes to the roll since the last charge conference.
- Make a list of homebound members, phone numbers, and directions to their homes.
- Provide a record of baptisms and marriages.
- Provide pertinent files: Charge Conference records, Annual Report forms, etc.

#### Pastoral Care

- Provide a list of those needing close pastoral care due to serious illness, recent deaths, etc.
- Provide a list of scheduled weddings requiring premarital counseling.
- Provide a list of area hospitals and nursing homes with their phone numbers and information about how to obtain clergy identification, if needed.
- Provide a list of members in college or in the military. Include addresses and any notes that may be helpful.

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### **Personnel/Church Leadership/Volunteers**

- Provide names and positions of persons employed by the church and terms of their employment.
- Provide a list of who is responsible for the bulletin, newsletter, etc.
- Provide a list of Administrative Board/Council members.
- Provide a list of Sunday school teachers, youth leaders/workers, etc.
- Provide a list of individuals available for pulpit supply.

### **Policies**

- Leave a copy of all church policies—for child safety, building use, weddings, funerals, personnel, etc.
- Leave information in reference to any ongoing arrangements with individuals or groups—AA, Boy or Girl Scouts, etc.

### **Church Schedule**

- Provide a meeting schedule for Board/Council, Committees, UMM, UMW, UMY, etc.
- Provide dates for events scheduled by the church. Include annual events such as Christmas Bazaar, Soup Kitchen, Mother-Daughter dinners, etc.
- Provide information pertaining to pending legal matters—wills, possible liability situations.
- Provide a list of continuing ecumenical experiences, such as a community Thanksgiving service with the local churches rotating the host church.

### **The Church Building**

- Leave your set of keys, well-identified.
- Provide name(s) and phone numbers of those who open/close the building(s) on Sundays.
- Put together a file of any warranties, maintenance contracts, and manuals on all office equipment, heating/cooling systems, etc.
- Be sure the pastor's office is cleaned thoroughly and in good repair.
- Leave a list of any maintenance items requiring attention or a schedule of things on the docket.

### **Parsonage Administration**

- Leave a set of keys, well-identified.
- Put together a file of all appliance manuals and warranties—refrigerator, dishwasher, washer, dryer, heating/air conditioning unit, etc.
- Identify switches or fuse box circuits.
- Leave your new address and phone number in the parsonage and church office in the event any mail needs to be forwarded to you.

## **Household Checklist**

### **At Least One Month Before Moving Day**

(or as soon as you know you are moving if it is less than a month)

- Begin to gather moving supplies, boxes, tape, and markers. Let the sorting and packing begin!
- Secure a moving company or make a truck rental reservation.
  - Review the conference policy for estimates from movers.
  - Choose reputable movers. Ask for suggestions from the church or current pastor regarding ones they have had good experiences with.
  - Consider getting estimates from movers where you now live and from your destination. Sometimes, significant savings can be found.
  - Be specific when you provide information to the movers for estimates. Watch for ambiguous information in an estimate. Be clear on whether or not the bid includes an assumption for a certain number of boxes; some movers tag additional costs beyond a set number of boxes.
  - Determine if you are selecting replacement value or a flat amount for damages, if you decide to secure insurance.
  - Make sure you have a written contract of your agreement.
- Obtain an IRS Change of Address form (Form 8822) by calling 1-800-829-1040 or by going to the IRS website, [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) and then clicking on "forms" to download a request form.
- Contact the Board of Elections in the county of your new residence to request a form to change your voter registration.
- Notify the post office of your change of address. From your local post office, you can pick up change of address packets, including change of address postcards.
- Change your address with any magazines or other periodicals you receive. Many have a toll-free number listed near the front of the publication under subscriptions or on their web site. Remember some require 60 to 90 days to activate a change.
- Email friends or businesses if your email address will be changing with your move.

- Request medical, dental, and veterinarian records for all family members and pets. You will need to do so in writing to include a signature of release. Some doctors will release copies directly to you while others will require the records be sent directly to your new doctors.
- Schedule a parsonage review to allow a walk-through and list-making of repairs or improvements that need to be made. Prioritize the list for those things needing immediate attention and those that can be scheduled over time.

### About Two Weeks Before Moving

- Be sure the phone and other utilities are in the church's name to avoid the need for security deposits and to ensure the current phone number will be continued. If the phone and utilities are in the current pastor's name, you will need to request they be listed in the church name or your name.
- Notify your insurance company of the changes to your household and/or car insurance policy addresses.
- Notify your Internet service and cable providers of termination of service date.
- Inform your long distance phone company of your move.
- Arrange to close or transfer your bank account.

### The Day Before Moving

- Supplies:** Put together a box of any supplies you may need, including a few small packing boxes, scissors, tape, a marker, tools, etc.
- The Essentials:** Pack a special box of bed linens, pillows, towels, toilet paper, alarm clock, and phone for the first night in your new house. Include any tools you will need to put beds together. Mark the box well or keep it with you so you will be ready to put the beds together that first night without completely unpacking everything. If your new home needs shower curtains, make sure you pack the hanging rings with your curtains, or your first soothing shower could be days away.
- A Comfort Box:** Pick some things that will pamper you a bit—a favorite CD and your CD player, a comfort treat, phone numbers of friends (so you can call if you have a "dark night of the soul"), a favorite book, and a bottle of Tylenol for those aches and pains. If you are moving with a family, take time to create a family comfort box. Be sure everyone selects some items of personal comfort and fun.

## After The Move

### Unpacking

Take time to get unpacked before you throw yourself into the work of the church. You need to get settled, and if you moved with your family, all of you need to be a part of this process. Unpacking will only be harder if you wait, and it will become an energy drain.

- Try to get one space—perhaps the living room—in good shape as soon as possible so you will have one space where you can escape the clutter of boxes. Creating a sacred nook where you can enjoy your home and retreat and renew until the rest of the home comes together is a good thing!

### Getting Oriented

- Get maps of the local area so you can begin to get oriented.
- Schedule some "drive around" time to see your new town. Stop in some local shops and businesses; tell the people you are new in town and ask what you should check out in the area. Most people are glad to share their knowledge.
- Plan a day of exploration after you have moved. Make it fun and adventurous. Journey with your family or, if you moved alone, invite someone to join you for the day.
- Subscribe to the local paper. Begin to watch for activities that might interest you and would allow you to become acquainted with your new town and perhaps meet some people.
- Be mindful, if you have children, that children depend on adults to help them figure out how to adapt to a new environment. Encourage their involvement in the activities and opportunities that include other children or teens.

### Kids Get Oriented

If you are moving with school-aged children or teenagers, an opportunity to see the school and check out other kids from afar is very important. A change of schools is a major transition for all youth and requires extra planning and sensitivity. If at all possible, try to visit the school while it is in session and things are "real." Allow some unstructured time to walk around the building, see the playground, look at the bathrooms, and visit the cafeteria. Some ideas for the structured part of the visit are listed below.

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### School Visit Checklist

- Request a school calendar so you will know the grading periods, beginning and ending dates, and days off.
- Request a school handbook.
- Request your child or teen's class schedule, or if they cannot register yet, ask for a copy of a typical schedule for their grade.
- Ask the hours of the school day.
- Inquire about bus transportation, or if your teen expects to drive, ask about the car policy.
- Inquire about special services you are interested in—such as tutoring or advanced program classes.
- Inquire about the school's college prep curriculum if you have a college bound teen. Also ask about the percentage of graduating students who go to college.
- Inquire about what vocational training is available if you have a teen interested in vocational training. Inquire about job placement assistance after graduating.
- Inquire about what sports and clubs are available. Find out if they meet/practice during the school day or at other times. Find out if your children will still be eligible to try out or be involved in activities their first year of the move. Some schools establish teams, etc., very early while others encourage newcomers.
- Inquire about your child or teen's teacher(s) and ask about his or her teaching style.
- Ask if your child could meet and connect with a peer in advance of your move.

## Take Time for Your Life

*Stay connected  
with your friends  
and people  
who will  
support and  
encourage you.*



- Stay connected with your spiritual disciplines. Although times of transition place extra demands on our time and energy, it is important to maintain our regular patterns of keeping faith with God.
- Recognize the importance of ritual and routine. Personal and family rituals should be maintained and perhaps some new ones should be established. Rituals and traditions remind us of who we are and what is important to us. Are some of your rituals and traditions having meals together as a family or meeting your friends every Friday night for a meal out? Or having a regular movie night or Saturday morning walk or hike? Consider establishing some new self-care routines and shaping your new home so it will have its own identity as "home." Be intentional in honoring your rituals and traditions. Remember maintaining routine for children and teens is crucially important.
- Stay connected with your friends and people who will support and encourage you, especially during this year of transition. Utilize phone calls, letters, and email to nurture those connections and to care for yourself.
- Establish clear boundaries for your time off for Sabbath, fun, and renewal. You should designate and honor a day off for personal time as well as for time with those in your inner circle. Set reasonable expectations for work time. Although ministry often feels like a job 24 hours a day, it is important to adapt and take adequate time for meals and spiritual, physical, and emotional renewal. The old saying says it best: "You cannot pour water from an empty pitcher."
- Take a vacation your first summer. Taking time to renew and replenish yourself will allow you to pastor the church better than if you were to work straight through the summer. If you have moved with your family, they will appreciate some family time being honored as well. A new year in a new place is always better with some time away.

# Good Grief

## Grief Defined

Grief is a process inherent in transition or change. Any pastoral change and move will bring on feelings of grief and loss among the pastor and family, church congregation, and community. Understanding how grief may feel to us and how it may express itself in our lives may help us cope with the emotions we will experience. Grief is always more than sorrow. It is the raw feelings at the center of the whole process that engages the person in adjusting to changed circumstances. Feelings include the deep fears of the mourner, prospects for loneliness, and the obstacles a person must face as she or he finds a new way of living.

## Types of Grief

**Preparatory Grief:** Sometimes also referred to as "anticipatory grief," i.e., "in anticipation of an event which means loss/separation." Preparatory grief references the possibility of an event—a move—that is likely to be known early in the process only by the pastor, pastor's family, Staff Parish Relations Committee, District Superintendent, and Bishop. It is a time of "wondering" if it will happen and if so, what it will be like if and when it does happen.

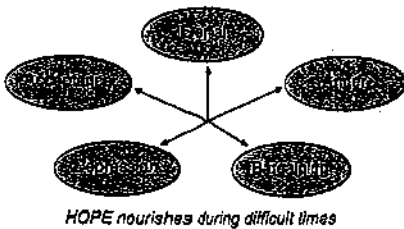
**Intense Grief:** An announcement of the event "expected to happen" has occurred. That means loss/separation begins to occur, and the pastor, pastor's family, and parishioners' behavior is affected by event. There may be open expression of thoughts and feelings, which may be positive or negative or of mixed emotions. There may be withdrawal and avoidance as one begins the "grief process" and feelings begin to intensify.

**Acute Grief:** Experienced during the short time before and after the event of loss/separation. Most all experiences are for a last or first time, i.e., the last council on ministries meeting, last baptism, last worship service, or the first worship service, first meetings. This time and experience is unique in that it overlaps the time before and after the move.

**Subsequent Grief:** The experience of "mourning" that follows the event of loss/separation. "Mourning" refers to a process of recovery and adjustment to the loss of significant relationships/experiences in one's life. "Mourning" is a time of regaining control of and stability in emotions. This is an experience of "bringing to closure," of letting go of what has been and welcoming what is to be.

**Grief Work:** The "work of grieving" any and all dynamics that inhibit or facilitate those experiences which make for grief resolution. Much has been written about the levels of grief, grief trajectories, stages of grief, grief states, and more; all of which could help explain grief related to moving. For purposes here, grief expert Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' stages of grief are helpful to provide some understanding of how grief around a pastoral change/move may show up in your own life.<sup>1</sup>

## The Stages of Grief: Our Coping Mechanisms



**Denial:** Characterized by phrases such as, "It's not true. There must be some mistake!" Even when the pastor has requested the move, some of the dynamic of denial prevails, i.e., "Is this really happening?" "Is this real or a dream (or nightmare!)"

**Anger:** Characterized by phrases such as, "Why me?" "How could this be happening?" Even when a pastor requests a move, anger is often present in the form of: "How come it had to happen this way?" "Why couldn't something be done to make it different or better?"

**Bargaining:** Characterized by phrases such as, "Yes, me, but..." This stage involves the attempt to postpone in our mind the inevitable and may include bargaining with God and with each other. There may be "wishful thinking," i.e., "If only that (some experience of support) could have happened before, this wouldn't be happening." Or it might be expressed as, "If only I had..." "If only I had handled this differently or done that another way, we wouldn't need to move now."

**Depression:** Characterized by phrases such as, "Yes, me." "It really is happening," and strong feelings of sadness, despair, sense of helplessness, i.e., "It's all going to happen no matter what I do." This stage is likely to occur even when people are faced with a change that is positive and perhaps even exciting as well as with a change that is sad and brings clear feelings of loss.

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Acceptance: Characterized by words such as, "Yes, me. It's a real part of life." This is the time when we have come to terms with the reality of our situation—the reality of saying goodbye in order to say hello.

*Although it is not one of the five stages of grief, Kubler-Ross also speaks to the power of*

Hope: Characterized by the words "I hope..." and that hope changes as each of the above stages is experienced. At first it may be, "I hope there will not be too much fuss about it," and, "I hope our last week together can be joyful and we can celebrate." Hope is the ability to focus on the possibilities of what may be—either for the future or for the present. Hope is what nourishes us in times of stress or when we are unsettled because we do not know precisely what the future may hold for us.

## Coping with Grief

### Reminders about Good Grief:

- The experience is cyclical and goes back and forth, in and out of the various stages.
- It is not a step process in which the grief work is complete when one arrives at acceptance.
- It is worth remembering that family members, parishioners of all ages, and community persons will have similar experiences, and "where three or four are gathered together," there may well be a mix of feelings, i.e., some people who are angry, others who are depressed, and others yet who are acceptant.
- When we face life-shaking losses, we are graced with the chance to recognize the One who truly is our strength. If we embrace our grief challenges with God's guidance, God can stretch us to new heights. The ultimate, best, most desirable outcome of grief work is growth.
  - Grief or loss usually connects us to other times in our lives when we experienced loss, and therefore our emotions become intensified. Pay attention to old losses this move may have "kicked up" for you. The losses may be from different parts of your life—everything from disappointments you experienced to family milestones (children leaving for kindergarten, college, or independent living), or divorce and death of loved ones.
  - A significant loss, such as a pastoral move, can bring up feelings—good and bad—from one's repertoire of previous losses. Think of a chain. Consider the individual links of the chain as representing one's life losses. A chain of links representing losses that have been processed to healthy resolution can provide strength to the person with that chain of losses. A healthy chain can anchor the person who is grieving in a new storm in life. The chain links can be a reference point of wisdom, hope, and comfort. Conversely, a chain of losses with links of unresolved grief can act as a chain of bondage to past losses, hindering or even preventing healthy grief resolution and transition.
  - It is natural to question God. Doubt, fear, anger, and confusion are very present with loss. God can handle our questions and our emotions, including our anger. God invites our conversation: "*Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:6-7).
- How we experience grief can be compared to the waves of the ocean in that we cannot always anticipate how strong or how gentle each wave may be. During this ongoing process of letting go and moving forward, our emotions may be unpredictable to us.
- Remember the value of tears. H. Norman Wright writes in *Recovering from the Losses of Life*: "*Tears are the vehicle with which God has equipped us to express the deepest feelings words cannot express. We summon tears when in our weakness we cannot find words to express the deep emotions that we feel. Tears can express everything from jubilation to devastation. When words fail us, tears step in to help.*"<sup>1</sup>
- When family members don't share our experience or understand our feelings—because of individual differences—stress in the grieving process can be greatly exacerbated. Appreciate and allow for individual styles and timing as members of our personal family and church family process their own grief. This will prevent additional stress and unnecessary pressure. Be careful not to shame anyone in your family system who may not work through the grief as quickly as others might.

During this ongoing process of letting go and moving forward, our emotions may be unpredictable to us.



### Grief Resolution

Grief resolution is the entire experience of grief from the time the pastor, pastor's family, Staff Parish Relations Committee, District Superintendent, and Bishop know of the possibility of a move until "settling in" and "peaceful acceptance" has been experienced in the new environment.

- Resolution will always occur when openness, honesty, and courage are present.
- Grieving a loss (mourning) is the expression of grief. It is a *process*. Grief work takes time and energy. Do not expect everyone around you to deal with grief as you might. We are all unique in this process.
- The *less* openness, honesty, and courage present, the greater the likelihood of "unresolved grief," i.e., anger that did not get resolved, some experience that was neglected or ignored.

- The *more* attention given to genuine expression of appropriate thought/feeling concerning the move, the healthier the grief process and the greater likelihood of "healthy closure."
- The more intentional we are to "grieving well," the more positive the transition will be for everyone involved, including the new pastor and congregation.
- We should consider a prayerful partnership. Be encouraged by and encourage the prayerful partnership of all involved in the move and the grieving process surrounding the change. Not only are the Bishop, District Superintendent, Staff Parish Relations Committee, congregation, and pastoral family involved in the move, but God is also central in the whole plan, purpose, and process. *"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope"* (Jeremiah 29:11).
- Even when we work to allow resolution, one hundred percent resolution or absolute closure is not likely to happen. We all are likely to have some "unfinished business" due to a circumstance or situation.
- In your grief, recognize your busyness is an attempt to avoid dealing with the loss you feel. Be mindful of your grief.
- Healing from a loss or significant change requires time and compassion. Try to be patient with yourself and those around you. Grief is a normal, appropriate response to loss. It is unique to the person experiencing it. There is no set timetable for its completion.
- No shortcuts exist for working through our feelings of loss. Trust the process of healing.

### Works Cited

- <sup>1</sup>Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death and Dying*. New York, NY, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1969.  
<sup>1</sup>Wright, H. Norman. *Recovering from the Losses of Life*. Nashville, TN, Lifeway Press, 1998

### Books to Consider

- Praying Our Goodbyes* by Joyce Rupp. Ivy Books, 1992.  
*On Death and Dying* by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. Touchstone, 1997.  
*The Grief Recovery Handbook* by John W. James and Russell Friedman. Harpercollins, 1998.

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# Making the Change

## Coping with Your Transition as Pastor

Many ways exist to cope with grief, some of which may work for one person but do not work for another person. Determining what works for you becomes critically important. Although similarities of expressions of joy or anger may be present among persons, each person's own expression of anger is individual and unique. It helps to identify your own "usual way" of expressing such feelings, and through that style, express the grief as fully as possible. You may want to attempt some new ways as a method for growing more in your understanding and skills.

"Sharing the grief" with others is most critical. Initially, it may be a close friend or your spouse or District Superintendent or one or two select Staff Parish Relations Committee persons. Sharing enables expression rather than suppression (and perhaps depression). When the move is announced, more open sharing is not only permitted but also encouraged! Special experiences—both positive and negative or joyful and painful—can be recalled and shared. Consider this story: A pastor had been at a church for a number of years, and it had been announced for a week that the pastor would be moving in June. A woman, a long-time member, approached the pastor and said, "A lot of good things have happened while you were here (and she named a couple). I am sad to see you leaving." The pastor responded, "Oh, I'll be around for a while yet," and then changed the subject. As a result, neither the parishioner nor the pastor had full expression of genuine feelings.

### Support for the Journey

*Allow yourself  
to be  
overwhelmed  
by grace.*



- Keep a journal and a commitment to make at least one entry a day that is at least one sentence long. If you wish to include a longer entry, do so. Journaling is especially helpful in the early days and weeks as there are limits to the number of persons with whom sad or uncertain feelings can be shared. Later, as the move date approaches, your focus may shift to some special happenings you want to be sure to remember and so note in your journal. At a new parish, it helps to record special experiences and to allow expression of special feelings when everyone is still "unknown" and trust is still developing.
- Make a list and schedule of what you feel needs to be completed before leaving: church records all in order, junk to be removed from parsonage, lunch dates you want to have with certain community persons, school records for children, etc. Be sure to allow time for spontaneous events and drop-in visits. Plan for visits to "favorite spots" for family and/or individual family members.
- Develop a support group of people willing to focus on grief.
- Make a list of people in your support network you can call upon. Think about the different friends and family you might call upon, depending on what you need. Some friends might be better with a tearful day while others might be more helpful with making a list of what you need to get done. Having a list of people and asking for the support of others before your moment of need helps to make it easier for you to pick up the phone and ask for support when you do need it.
- Be aware of the pain you are *all* feeling brought about by the change in appointment. When people share various experiences of life together, they develop what we call relationships. Generally, the more experiences shared, the deeper the relationships become. A longer duration of time may also deepen our relationships with one another. Pastors and parishioners share in some of the deepest experiences of life, such as birth, marriage, illness and death. A number of those experiences may be shared over a prolonged period of time, and thus, the relationships between pastors and parishioners become a matter of very deep and profound feelings. We cannot go through change in our relationships without pain. This is true for us all: pastors, the families of pastors, and congregations.
- Plan for extra spiritual and emotional self-care at this time.
- Have family conferences regularly and discuss what is happening and how everyone is feeling. If you have close friends who are like family include a time for sharing feelings. The time surrounding a move is tough and is a vulnerable time for everyone. Providing a built-in time for sharing will help prevent a build up of unexpressed emotion.
- Have a "This is Your Life" party for some friends. You can recall and share special events/experiences through pictures, poems, songs, clowning, or whatever you would like that reveals to those friends what you have appreciated and the memories you are taking with you.
- Cooperate with and assist church leadership as they prepare farewell events. Let them know your preferences (reasonable ones!). It is not fair to either of you to plan a time or an event that does not work for you. Let them know your feelings while also respecting theirs.

- Allow love to prevail. The relationship we have with any person is unique. No two relationships are the same. In the past, our experiences with parents, grandparents, teachers, schoolmates, ministers, and friends have nurtured many deep relationships. The actual setting of those experiences may have been years ago, yet they are still a vital part of our lives, sustaining us by the memories of those wonderful relationships. And yet, we must be willing to develop new relationships in the ever-changing experiences of life. We need to bear all things within the framework of love.
- Love bears all things.  
*Believes all things.*  
*Hopes all things.*  
*Endures all things.*  
*Love never ends* (I Corinthians 13:7-8).
- Write a hymn or song that expresses your feelings.
- Keep a time of meditation/reflection.
- Exercise additional prayer. Any sudden change we encounter in life needs to be under-girded with extra prayer. Many people are unable to cope with change because they have not learned to put the matter into the care of a loving God.
- Cry, scream, and laugh as "fitting."

### Lessons to Remember

- Change is usually not easy to handle. We need to spend time processing the change and all its pros and cons, real, possible, and imagined.
- God is still in control of your life even in the midst of chaos, even if you cannot feel God's presence.
- "Don't borrow trouble from tomorrow." Anticipated troubles often do not occur, waste precious energy, and fill one's mind with negative thoughts.
- Live for today. Sometimes keeping your focus on what is immediately in front of you will nourish you and prevent overload. Dwelling on events planned for six, three, or even one month later can sometimes cause you to become overwhelmed and to lose your deep sense of peace. Keeping your focus does not mean you deny or do not deal with the future or what requires your attention. It does mean you do not get lost in the future and miss out on today.
- Allow yourself to be overwhelmed by grace. Recognize the vast love God has for you. God uses your friends, acquaintances, and church members as a portrayal of God's love. Be open and gladly receive offers from friends. Allow yourself to be vulnerable. It takes too much energy to hide from your feelings and needs. Allow yourself to be lifted up by prayer.
- Allow friends to help you. Let them know what your needs are. It may take an attitude adjustment to "receive" gracefully. For some of us, the proverb, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," is so ingrained that receiving gracefully is a difficult adjustment. Learning to receive from others also allows us to receive gracefully from God.

### Books to Consider

*Kitchen Table Wisdom, Stories that Heal* by Rachel Naomi Remen, MD. Riverhead, 1997.  
*Gift of the Red Bird, A Spiritual Encounter* by Paula D'Arcy. Crossroad, 1996.  
*Gold in Your Memories, Sacred Moments, Glimpses of God* by Macrina Weiderkehr. Ave Maria, 1998.

### Transition Strategies for Pastors

Provide opportunities to acknowledge the change. Some pastors say, "When I leave a congregation, I simply want to 'fold up my tent and steal away into the night.'" That kind of "quick exit" does not permit feelings, such as grief and love, to be expressed.

Prepare the congregation for the transition. A pastor can utilize some of his or her remaining time to recall some of the high points of his or her tenure of ministry. But care must be exercised not to get into setting an agenda for the new pastor who will be coming on the scene in the near future.

Share in a positive way the need for good ministerial etiquette regarding your involvement in the lives of your church members after you leave their church appointment. Affirm the ways they have touched your life and you have touched theirs while being clear you will *not* be returning to the church for visits, weddings, funerals, or other events they might want and expect you to participate in. If you spend some time educating the congregation by publicly addressing this issue—including placing notes from you in the bulletin or newsletter—then all involved will be prepared to make a place in their hearts and their church for the new pastor.

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Be constructive in answering the often-asked question: "Reverend, why are you leaving us?" As pastors in The United Methodist system, know we will be moving from one appointment to another. This is the rule and not the exception. We need to be *constructive*; not *destructive* in the ministerial experience we call "the pastoral move."

During the transition, ask yourself a simple question: "What would you like an outgoing pastor to do for you before you move into that appointment?" The way an outgoing pastor leaves the church he or she has been serving can either set that church back years or provide for an ongoing setting for the new pastor and congregation. How you leave your church will remain a legacy to the church and its leadership forever. Seek to leave well.

Consider preparing a written or taped overview of the church for the new pastor who follows you. That is, provide some constructive observations about the church. Here again, be careful about setting an agenda for the new pastor. Do not attempt to editorialize about people in the congregation. Allow the new pastor to develop his or her own relationships without your biases. This overview might contain suggestions such as: "We had a stewardship campaign several years ago that we have considered doing again." It should be a sharing of information that may be helpful but is not trying to sell the vision you had for the church.

*Remember the pastor who is coming to replace you in your private prayers.*

### **Create a Positive Focus**

*Do your best to focus on the positive attributes and contributions of the pastor who preceded you and acknowledge the feelings of the congregation for their former pastor. Usually, listening is the best response.*

*Avoid the temptation to compare the new congregation to your old one. Like people, each congregation has its own personality and history. Each congregation needs to feel they have your full attention and are seen and heard for who they actually are and not seen in comparison to another congregation.*

*Graciously affirm yourself as a pastor. This does not mean you say to the congregation: "I am my own person," as if to indicate you go about doing everything your own way. Rather, affirming yourself as a pastor means you are: visible, available, sociable, positive.*

*Affirm your new congregation. Do not neglect to express your gratitude to them for their kindnesses to you. Build joy and love into your relationship together. Remember we all want to be loved and liked, and so, even when you may be missing and longing for the familiar congregation you had or your new folks may be longing for their old pastor, you both want and need to be loved for who you are.*

*Listen. In this process, you can discover who this new congregation is and what their needs are. What is it they want to tell you?*

*Remember your new congregation in your private prayers.*

### **Books to Consider**

*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church. The United Methodist Publishing House.*  
*Saying Goodbye, A Time of Growth for Congregations and Pastors* by Edward A. White. Alban Institute, 1995.  
*Ending Well, Starting Strong: Your Personal Pastorate Start-Up Workshop* by Roy M. Oswald.  
Alban Institute, 1995. (Six Audiocassettes.)



## **A Systems Perspective on Moving**

The study of family systems is a study of the processes of human interaction. While this field of inquiry began by studying nuclear families, the observations and insights have helped many to understand the dynamics that occur in any group or human community. The church is a human community, and as the body of Christ, we are a family of believers who find our unity in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Remembering how people and church families tend to function in a group (i.e., system) can help us through the chaotic time of a move. People under extreme stress are more likely to respond with reactive responses rather than with prayerful, purposeful responses. Paying attention to the family systems dynamics may help us gain some distance and objectivity and may ultimately help us become more purposeful in what we say and do for the glory of God.

### ***Leaving and Entering a Congregation***

#### ***The Significance Of Separation Processes***

The idea that once your appointment is announced the pastor becomes a Lame Duck is a myth, and according to Edwin Friedman in Chapter 10 of his book, *Generation to Generation*, it is, to say the very least, also short-sighted.<sup>1</sup> The change of leaders is one of the most emotionally charged events any family system endures. The nature of your separation from a congregation can have more lasting effects in that congregation than all your previous years of effort to build and shape the faith within that church family. How you function through the leaving process may make a more lasting witness to your faith and the gospel you proclaim than all your passionately preached messages from the pulpit. Leaving is a time to walk the walk more than talk the talk. It is a time to convert your deepest felt beliefs into a guard for your tongue and a guide for your actions.

During the time of transition, the Staff Parish Relations committee, Pastor, District Superintendent, and Bishop are all subject to endless triangulations. They are constantly being pulled to balance all the voices and expressed needs of the local and larger church system. Using the concept of an emotional triangle helps to bring some objectivity to the emotional processes present in a change of leaders. In gaining objectivity about the emotional processes, we may find ourselves in a better place to control our reactivity and responses to the change.

Friedman suggests that ceremonies marking the end of a given clergy-congregational relationship are often more important for the future of the congregation than the ceremonies initiating the beginning of a new pastor-parish relationship.<sup>2</sup> Rituals, which publicly release the congregation from dependency upon the leaving pastor, significantly increase the ability of the congregation to move on under new leadership.

#### ***Strategies of Separation***

A pastor-congregation separation in many ways has all the emotional processes of a marital divorce. The following are some coping strategies from a systems perspective.

**Regulate your own emotional reactivity to others.** The best thing you can do is to stay rooted and grounded in your spiritual disciplines of prayer, meditation, journaling, and Bible study etc. Those disciplines will help you find purposeful responses to all the emotional reactivity coming at you. The partner who did not initiate the separation will tend to be more reactive. It will be up to the initiating partner to be prepared for the reactivity and to regulate his or her own reactivity. Unregulated, the reactivity will escalate, deepening the pain of separation and leaving long-term wounds.

**Permit reactivity in the other.** Allow others to express their reactivity without the need to control what they say or the way they feel. This requires being present as opposed to fleeing or retreating because their reactivity is uncomfortable. The challenge is to be present but not add to the reactivity by forming a reactive feedback loop. If you can watch the fire burn without trying to put it out or throw gas on it, you will promote the other's ability to move on with the least amount of emotional baggage.

**Engage actively in the transition process.** Here, you can help your congregational partners see what they look like from the perspective of their new partner. One way to do this is to help them clarify and articulate their congregational identity through the annual and long-term church profiles. Their new pastor will be selected on the basis of that information. Help them to articulate what gifts they will need in their new pastor. Again, this must be done in a non-reactive way so it is clear you are not trying to control the process but rather are trying to help them clarify their needs.

**Stay in touch after the separation.** While it is good etiquette that pastors not return to our former parish for at least a year, contact with former parishioners is still likely. How we handle those contacts will either

promote separation or encourage unhealthy dependencies. Therefore, any pastoral functions, such as weddings and funerals involving former parishioners, are inappropriate. The continued contact that fosters further separation involves detriangling and continued disengagement. This means responding to complaints about the new pastor with disinterest. If we refuse to conspire in an emotional alliance with former parishioners against a successor, we promote further separation. No one else has as much power as you have to promote a healthy separation and the ways to deal more effectively with our own grief.

**Strategies for entering a congregational family.** When you move into a new congregation, you have no guarantee your predecessors handled their leaving well. Two major variables affect the nature of the baggage your new congregation may be carrying: a) the length of the congregation's "marriages" (the number of years pastors usually stay at that church), and b) the nature of the previous separations and how those "break-ups" were handled. The following three strategies for entering arise from the body of family system theory:

*Avoid interfering with or rearranging the triangles in the established relationship system.* The model most applicable is that of a "blended family." In this situation one partner marries into an established family relationship system. The one coming in "skates on thin ice" when he or she tries to fix or rearrange the relationship patterns that already exist. Expressing ideas or suggesting changes is one thing; but coming on as the fixer or the re-arranger is another. When a harmless suggestion results in a strong emotional reaction, the root of that reaction is most likely the threat of change to a pre-existing triangle in the relationship system.

*Be wary of efforts by members of the congregation to triangle you with the "departed" or with other members of the system.* Friedman suggests all triangling remarks are residue from unresolved issues.<sup>3</sup> They are attempts to get the pastor to take one or another side. A new relationship based upon "triangling out" a third party is based on a false intimacy. Remove the third party and the relationship dies. Triangling remarks about the congregation's "ex" partner are hard to resist because the remarks are usually presented in a manner that praises the new minister by comparison. Refusing to become a replacement in the old triangles can force a resolution of the residue left by the previous partner.

*Work at creating as many direct one-to-one relationships as possible with key members of the "family."* More than developing new programs, work at being grafted into the emotional processes of the body. Building relationships will lay the foundation for a longer stay, lead to the greater chance your programs will be accepted, and in the end, leave less residue when it comes time for you to leave.

**Building on the past for the future.** The process of entering a congregation is in many ways really a response to the residue of former separations. Many congregations are on the rebound and looking for a new partner whose qualities are the opposite of the former partner. The inference is the differences will somehow heal their pain and solve their problems. In fact, the changes that result from grafting these different qualities into the body bring a different kind of unexpected pain. From a family systems perspective, this means the nature of the new connections is primarily a function of the nature of the previous separations.

When your move is announced, you are anything but a Lame Duck. You are entering one of the most crucial and effective times of your ministry. The way you separate from a congregation has future consequences for that family of faith.

## Triangles in a Pastoral Move

Family system theory suggests that triangles occur more frequently and with greater intensity when we are going through some kind of life stress. Since moving qualifies as a significant life stress, you may wish to think through some of the triangles with which a pastor might be confronted. An attempt will be made to describe some of the common triangles, but this is by no means intended to be an exhaustive list nor is it absolute.

### Basic Triangle Processes

Triangles are one of the basic processes of human emotional functioning. When God created more than two persons, the door was open for people to build alliances or to involve another person in the emotional interaction between two people. Triangle theory tries to take a step back in order to look at the way relationships between three persons interact and actually shift emotional energy from one relationship to another.

Triangles occur when the relationship between two people becomes anxious, conflicted, or uncomfortable. When this happens, a third party will be "triangled in" to ease the emotional intensity. This process operates automatically, often without conscious awareness or intent. It is a natural process that is descriptive of the way human beings operate in community.

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Sometimes two people will set aside their discomfort with each other to help someone who is characterized as a "victim" and "needy," or at other times, to defend against someone who is characterized as a "villain" and "a problem." Another common formation of a triangle is when one person takes on the role of mediator, peacemaker, or fix-it person for the relationship between the other two. The effect of every triangle is that one person's behavior becomes a function of the relationship between the other two corners.

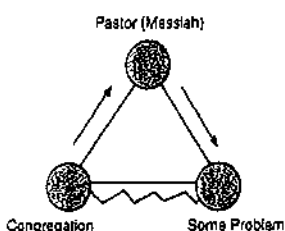
The following are some signs that you are in a triangle: You feel torn between the pull of others. You feel a conflict between two of your loyalties. Someone is reacting toward you in an extreme and excessive manner, far beyond what might be considered normal. You feel yourself pulled into gossip about the flaws of another. You feel the need to rescue someone. You come home and want to kick the dog because of some unpleasant happening in your day.

The goal of understanding triangle processes is to lift our level of functioning to an intentional and purposeful level. This means overcoming the pressures that the corners of the triangle place on you so you act in an intentional way rather than in a purely reactive, impulsive way. This is, in part, what being self-differentiated means. You are acting in a more self-differentiated way when you purposefully relate to each of the other two sides independently of their relationship with each other.

Another thing to note is that one corner of the triangle may be something other than another person. It also may be an idea, issue, or group of people. It may even be God. As a pastor, you may very well want to develop the spiritual art of "triangling" God into your relationships with others.

Finally, as neat as a three-sided relationship is, we must also be aware that a pure isolated triangle practically never exists. More likely, layers of triangles interlock with one another. Add a fourth or fifth person to the mix, and the possible triangles multiply rapidly, increasing the complexity of the system significantly. The following are suggestions for possible triangles you may find yourself in as you change churches.

### The "Great Messiah" Triangle

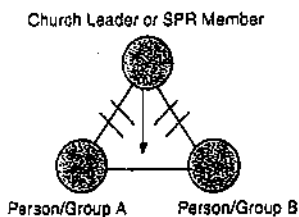


The seduction of this triangle for the new pastor is that your new congregation believes you can fix its problems. Because you really want to please them, you jump into your best fix-it mode. Typical problems presented may include: low attendance, lack of visitation, a poor financial position, struggling Sunday school, etc.

It is healthy to realize that because of the homeostasis (the forces that keep things running the same way) you may not be able to fix the problem completely. Giving the problem back to your new congregation and leading them in finding their own resources to fix the problem is one strategy of healthy leadership.

To manage your own reactivity in this triangle, think for a moment about how you are being manipulated by the hopes of your new congregation. Evaluate how you feel about the problem they are presenting. Be aware of how the problem triggers anxiousness in you. Strive to avoid an impulsive response to the fears and anxiousness; act with prayerful, purposeful intention.

### The "Meddling" Triangle



Closely related to the "Great Messiah" triangle is the "Meddling" triangle. Once again the pastor is invited, but in a more subtle way, to be the fix-it person. This time the danger is in trying to fix a relationship that she or he is not in.

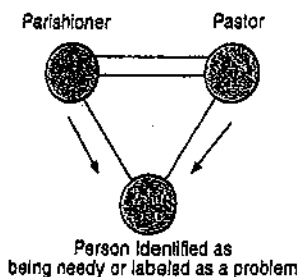
As a new pastor, you may be sought by persons wishing to build an alliance with you against another person or group. Realizing there is conflict within the body, you may then feel the impulse to step in to mediate or fix the conflict.

It is helpful to remember the basics of a triangle. You can have a relationship with Person/Group A, and you can have a relationship with Person/Group B, but you cannot have the relationship *between* Person/Group A and Person/Group B. Give the responsibility for fixing the problem back to those who are in the relationship with one another. Encourage the use of their spiritual resources for resolving the difficulty. You will function best when you stay focused on the relationships you are actually in and trust God to work in the relationships you are not in.

Frequently, when you try to fix a relationship you are not in, you find yourself pushed back or cut off from both persons/groups. Another result is that Person/Group A & Person/Group B may team up, set aside their problem, and make you the problem. In the latter scenario, the pastor has fixed their problem with each other by becoming a greater problem. Choose wisely: Do you want to solve a problem by becoming a greater problem in your new congregation?

Acting in a self-differentiated way means not allowing your relationship with Person/Group A to affect your relationship with Person/Group B or vice versa. It means either purposefully becoming the problem that allows them to set aside their problem or refraining from fixing it and giving the problem back to them to fix. It means being the pastor of the whole flock and resisting attempts at binding loyalties that exclude others.

### The "Need for Closeness" Triangle

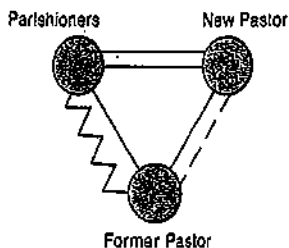


Sometimes the need for the pastor and parishioners to feel close with one another leads to the formation of a triangle. Here, teaming up to defend against someone or teaming up to help someone generates the closeness. A negative way of building closeness is to focus on a threat or an enemy of the body. This is a closeness built upon fear and sometimes generates paranoia. A positive way to build closeness is to focus on the mission of the church. This is a closeness built upon a common vision (or the hopes and dreams) people have for their church.

Remember closeness between two people built in the ways mentioned will always require a third corner which may be a person or an issue. In some sense, it is a false closeness because it is dependent on a third party.

This triangle is not the only way to build closeness. Closeness may also be built through opportunities for playful fellowship. Consider how you will respond to the need to build closeness with your new parishioners. Who or what are the enemies, visions, issues, or playtimes that will bring you together?

### The "Former Pastor" Triangle

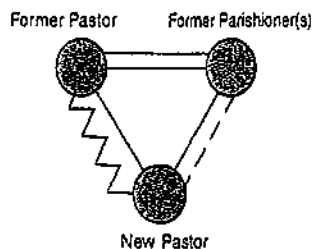


A particular example of the "Need for Closeness" triangle is that of building closeness at the expense of your colleague and predecessor. If your new parishioners have found something to dislike about their former pastor, you can bet you will hear about it. Sharing the flaws of your predecessor may be an attempt to build closeness with you as well as an attempt to shape your behavior through binding loyalties.

Remember that building closeness on this basis is dependent upon a third party. Once the former pastor becomes just a memory, the closeness dissipates. One strategy for healthy leadership may be to substitute pastor-bashing

with vision-casting. Resist being critical of your colleague with parishioners. If you must vent, do it somewhere outside your congregation or system. Turn conversations from gossip about another to talk about people's hopes and dreams.

### The "Grieving Leaving" Triangle



Moving brings the grief of changing your pastoral role with persons you have grown to love and care for. There is no question that it is hard to leave and let go of the pastoral role for loved ones in our former churches.

However, the dynamics according to triangle processes are as follows: If you keep former parishioners dependent upon your pastoral care, they will not need to turn to their new pastor for care. The results may include a rejection of the new pastor or at the very least a distant relationship. Further, you may also find yourself in a conflict with your pastoral colleague.

Not keeping good pastoral role boundaries shifts our opinions about our colleague into the relationship.

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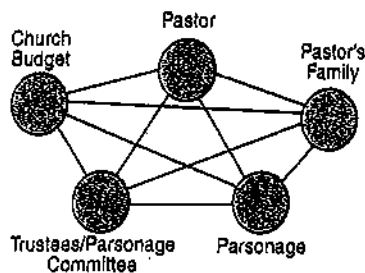
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## The "Parsonage" Triangles

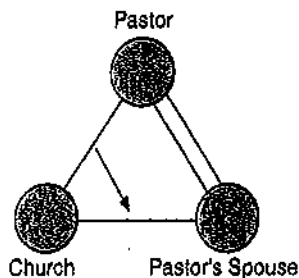


One of the more complex triangle systems revolves around the pastor and the parsonage. As you can see by the diagram, the pastor must manage many interlocking triangles. There are at least eight interlocking triangles in the diagram.

In the case of interlocking triangles, issues in any one of the relationships may move quickly to another relationship. For example, it is possible that the emotional energy in the pastor's family relationship with the parsonage may move into the relationship the trustees have with the church budget.

Here, the new pastor stands in the middle, juggling and processing many competing values, i.e., the love and comfort of one's family, acceptable living conditions in the parsonage, sacrificing or compromising to please the Trustees/Parsonage Committee, and the commitment toward missions in the church budget. At the very least, the pastor's family and the pastor must agree to acceptable conditions and acceptable sacrifices. Otherwise, resentment will build and flow to other relationships in the system.

## The "Pastor's Love" Triangle



As you begin your new appointment, parishioners and family members will be watching to see how you balance your love for the church with your love for your family. Both will pull at you with their need for attention.

Sometimes, the pastor's spouse or children find themselves growing resentful of the church because of the relationship between the pastor and the church. This happens whether the relationship is good or bad. Often, pastors make sacrifices to accommodate the church that affect the spouse or family. Be aware this is a situation ripe for resentment and anger.

Traditionally, this triangle's process places expectations upon the pastor's spouse or children that are a direct consequence of the expectations the church has placed on the pastor. Often, persons in the church have difficulty relating to the pastor's family independent of their relationship to the pastor. The pastor will be tempted to try to mediate or act as a buffer in the relationship between the church and spouse. The pastor will benefit from being self-defined and vocal about how he or she will meet the needs of both loves (i.e., in defining when work time is and when family time is).

## Things to Remember about Triangles

Triangles are a fact of life. Whether or not they will spin themselves out in the ways described here, you will most likely still feel caught in the middle in some area of your life. The important things to remember are:

- Stay focused on the relationships you are actually in.
- Stay focused on your own functioning.
- Manage your own reactivity to what is being pushed on you.
- And most importantly, build your relationship with God so you will have some idea of what pleases God as you work your way through the complex web of triangle processes.

## Works Cited

- <sup>1</sup>Friedman, Edwin H. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1985.  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid.  
<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

## Books to Consider

- Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* by Edwin H. Friedman. Guilford Press, 1985.  
*Creating a Healthier Church* by Ronald W. Richardson. Fortress Press, 1996.  
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