

PASTOR PARISH RELATIONS GUIDE



Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. —Galatians 6:2

Transition Strategies for Lay Leadership¹³

As part of the leadership of the church, you have a vital role in the transition process. Your leadership will support steps the pastor will be taking in order to prepare the way for the change. Your leadership will provide support to the congregation during a time of grief and loss. How a pastor leaves the church can either set the church back or provide for an ongoing positive environment for the next pastor and congregation to join in ministry together. Evaluate and plan how you can intentionally and actively support how your pastor leaves the church.

- Most importantly, surround the transition in prayer. Remember to pray for the departing pastor and the arriving pastor in your private prayers and the church community prayers.
- Provide opportunities to acknowledge the change. Some congregations would prefer to move along as if nothing is changing. As a church leader, be active in helping your congregation grieve well.
- Prepare the congregation for the transition. Support the pastor in his work to recall some of the high points, to acknowledge the feelings about the change and to remain focused on the mission of the church as guests will continue to arrive during the time of transition.
- Be constructive in answering the often-asked question: “Why is the pastor leaving us?” As a member of the United Methodist Church you know that pastors will be moving from one appointment to another. Share this information with individuals that ask.
- During the transition ask yourself a simple question: “What should you as a church leader do to prepare for the next pastor before he or she arrives in your church?”
- Listen. As a church leader provide a listening ear rather than a response to comments you hear from members of the congregation. Discourage any gossip as this can be destructive to the life of the church.
- Focus on positive attributes and contributions of the arriving and departing pastors.
- Avoid the temptation to compare the arriving pastor to the departing pastor.
- Affirm the arriving pastor who has been appointed to your church. Open yourself to building a relationship with the arriving pastor and encourage others to do so as well.

Additional resources for transition support

- Utilize “50 Ways to Welcome Your New Pastor” found in this packet on pg. 71.
- Educate yourself about the appointment process by reviewing the FAQ sheet found in this packet on pg. 56 or visit <https://vimeo.com/140807995> to watch Bishop Robert Schnase’s presentation: “Demystifying the Appointment Process.”
- Utilize the “Good Ideas for a Move” checklist for the pastor found in this packet on pg. 17-19. Assist the pastor in completing some of the tasks that are paperwork related.

¹³ Adapted from East Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church Commission on Pastoral Care & Counseling, “Move Pack: A Guide for a Good Move for Pastors & Families,” (2001).

New Appointment Administrative Checklist (for the Church staff or Treasurer)

If your church has a new pastor, the following paperwork should be completed and a copy given to the church treasurer:

- Form I-9: (Employment Eligibility Verification)
- This form must be completed when any new person is added to the payroll. Pastors will complete the I-9 form at the time of their first appointment in Missouri and it will remain on file in the pastor's district office. If the pastor moves districts, the form will move to that district as well. I-9 forms for district superintendents will be housed with the benefits officer in the Topeka office. Download a copy of this form.
- Clergy Support Worksheet
- Even if the compensation package does not change between pastors, a new worksheet needs to be completed for the incoming pastor. The district office will prepare this form, obtain signatures and distribute copies to pastor, treasurer, SPRC chairperson and conference benefits officer.
- Housing Resolution
- A new one is needed each time there is a change in pastor. It is a tax shelter arrangement between a specific pastor and a specific church. The housing resolution must not be retroactive and must be in place prior to the new pastor receiving any pay. Download a sample housing resolution or review the housing resolution Q&A.
- Pastor Pension Contribution (PIP)
- New forms are needed each time there is a change in pastor. If your new pastor wishes to make contributions to his/her pension savings account, two forms need to be completed:
- Contribution Agreement - Because contributions to PIP are done by payroll deduction, a new payroll deduction authorization form must be completed when there is an appointment change. The pastor and church should each keep a copy. Download this form.
- Billing Change Form - The church must send this form to the General Board of Pensions indicating the terms of the contribution agreement (how much will be withheld from the new pastor's salary each month). Download this form.
- Payroll Taxes
- If your pastor is a DSA (district superintendent assignment) or CLM (certified lay minister), you must remit payroll taxes just as you would for the church secretary or other church employees. Failure to do so can result in interest and substantial penalties.

50 Ways to Welcome your New Pastor¹⁴

From the Lewis Center for Church Leadership Prepared by Robert Crossman

Prepare to welcome your new pastor

1. Open your hearts and decide that you are going to love your new pastor.
2. Begin praying daily for the new pastor and family, even as you continue to pray for your departing pastor and family.
3. Invite church members individually to send cards of welcome and encouragement to the incoming pastor.
4. Know that welcoming your new pastor in genuine and effective ways lays the ground work for a healthy and vital relationship and the development of stable, long-term ministries together.
5. Plan for the transition. Occasionally important welcoming gestures are missed with everyone thinking someone else is handling these details.
6. Appoint a specific liaison person to whom the pastor can go for help and information during the transition.

Say goodbye to your current pastor in a healthy way

7. Show love, regard, and even grief, for your departing pastor. This is one of the best things you can do for the new pastor.
8. Acknowledge the change in public ways. Especially in the case of a much-beloved pastor, this allows the congregation better to let go and receive the new pastor.
9. Provide the congregation the opportunity to say thank you and goodbye to the outgoing pastor, even if things have not always gone well.
10. Find appropriate occasions — in worship and at other times — to thank the outgoing pastor.

11. Express appreciation in ways that are consistent with what you have done in the past.
12. Consider giving the pastor the last two weeks off. This helps the pastor enter the new situation rested and gives an emotional buffer between one pastor's last Sunday and another pastor's first Sunday.
13. Plan goodbye celebrations prior to the beginning of the two weeks off.
14. Provide information to the local media about the outgoing pastor's accomplishments and future plans.
15. Do not invite the former pastor to return for weddings, funerals, or baptisms. This allows your former pastor to engage fully with his or her new congregation, and it establishes your new pastor as everyone's pastor from the beginning.

Make things move-in ready

16. Make sure the parsonage and pastor's office are clean and ready. Offer to provide help or a cleaning service if needed.
17. Determine if the parsonage is in need of repairs or painting. Consult the outgoing and incoming pastors about timing so as not to disrupt the lives of either party. Do not ask a new pastor to move into a parsonage "under construction."
18. Consult the new pastor on any paint, design, or furnishings issues.
19. Offer to have someone cut the parsonage grass.
20. Make sure the new pastor and church officials are clear on how moving expenses are paid and all matters related

¹⁴ Originally found at Lewis Center's Leading Ideas: https://www.churchleadership.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/50_Ways_to_Welcome_New_Pastor.pdf. Dr. Robert Crossman, Minister of New Church Starts and Congregational Development for the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church, is the primary author of this document. The Lewis Center staff and others provided suggestions and editorial assistance.

to compensation, benefits, and reimbursement policies.

Welcome your pastor on moving day

21. Stock the parsonage refrigerator and pantry with some staples.
22. Make sure there are kid-friendly foods and snacks in the refrigerator if children are arriving.
23. Have a small group on hand to greet the new pastor and family when they arrive and to help as needed.
24. Offer child care if there is an infant or toddler in the household.
25. Invite children in the household to do things with others of their same age.
26. Welcome any youth in the household by having church youth group members stop by and offer to show them around.

Continue the welcome during the entry period

27. Take food over for the first few days.
Many churches continue the practice of having a “pounding” for the new pastor when persons bring food items.
28. Provide a map with directions to local dry cleaners, grocery store, drug store, veterinarian, etc., and information on local options for internet and cable television providers.
29. Give gift certificates to several of your favorite restaurants in the community.
30. Give the pastor and family a welcome reception on the first Sunday.
31. Plan a worship celebration of the new appointment.
32. Invite the new pastor to any social events held by Sunday School classes or other groups in the early months.
33. Make sure the pastor’s spouse and children, if applicable, are invited to Sunday School and other appropriate small groups.
34. Continue to remember your new pastor and family in your daily prayers.

Help the new pastor become familiar with the congregation

35. Introduce yourself to the pastor repeatedly! You have one name to learn; your pastor has many names to learn.
36. Wear name tags. Even if name tags are not a tradition, the congregation can wear them for a few weeks to help the pastor learn names.
37. Provide a current pictorial directory of all the church members, if available.
38. Provide an up-to-date list of all church committees and officers.
39. Provide the new pastor with a tour of where things are kept inside the church and perhaps a floor plan of the facilities.
40. Orient the new pastor to information systems and the way records are kept.
41. Make sure the pastor has a list of home bound or nursing home members, a list of those struggling with long term illness, and a list of those still in grief over recent deaths in the family. Better yet, take the pastor for an introduction to each of these households.
42. Have an appropriate person offer to go with the pastor for introductions and support if there are particularly urgent pastoral situations (a member near death or the family of a member who has just died).
43. Have a lay official offer to take the pastor to meet church members in their businesses or other work settings, if they are easily accessible.
44. Offer to help arrange small group sessions to meet and talk with the congregation.
45. Create a “church yellow pages” (a list of people in the church who have specific skills that a newcomer may find beneficial.... auto mechanic, doctor, dentist, dry cleaners, book store, office supply, etc.).

Help the new pastor connect to the community

46. Provide local media with information about the new pastor.

47. Provide a list of hospitals, nursing homes, and community service agencies.
48. Introduce your new pastor to other clergy in the community. Provide information on any ecumenical activities or associations.
49. Introduce the new pastor to public and community leaders.
50. Ask church members in civic clubs to take the new pastor to one of their meetings.

Suggestions for Churches with a Single Pastor¹⁵

All clergy face many challenges. But single persons in ministry can face a unique set of challenges around maintaining boundaries, privacy, and social connections, particularly if they serve in a congregation that has only been served in the past by married clergy. Some of the best advice for churches comes from a young single pastor — “congregations and pastors both should work on the tender balance between being supportive and allowing privacy.”

Church members can often subconsciously communicate the assumption that they expect their pastor to be married. For example, a single clergyman starting ministry in a new congregation was asked repeatedly “When will be meeting your wife?” or “Will your wife be teaching Sunday School or serving on the altar guild?” Similarly, congregants can project the assumption that marriage is normative for or sought by everyone when they drop hints about eligible friends the pastor might like to meet. While these kinds of comments are generally well intended, they can make a single person feel awkward, judged, or even inadequate. Congregations need to be sensitive to and accepting of different marital statuses among clergy.

It is easy for single clergy to fall into the trap of letting the church become their primary social outlet and support network. This is especially true if they have left behind friends and family to begin ministry in a new church and community. It is important to recognize that all clergy, but especially single clergy, need to build a set of relationships and friendships outside the church — people for whom they are not the “pastor.” This may mean that they seek opportunities for involvement beyond the church, such as book clubs, sports teams, or community groups, and find people who share common interests. Churches can encourage them to take time off to renew themselves and to connect with friends and family. Encourage them to connect with other clergy in the community that you feel will be supportive colleagues.

Single clergy often feel they are navigating a minefield when it comes to dating. In addition to fix-up attempts, they have concerns about a lack of privacy, the potential for rumors and ill-informed assumptions, and questions about when and how to let the congregation know about a serious relationship. These all can leave a single clergyperson vulnerable and confused. You can help by recognizing that it is normal and important for them to date. Trust the pastor to operate within their own level of comfort regarding how much they share with the congregation.

It is important that the congregation be aware of norms and expectations about whether it is appropriate for pastors to date congregants. Denominations or judicatories normally have clearly defined policies on this question, usually not permitting such dating. Both pastor and congregation must understand these policies and their rationale. Appropriate church leaders may need to educate the congregation about the policies. But always remember that great sensitivity is required so that this issue does not loom too large in people’s minds or distract from the larger issues in establishing the pastor’s ministry.

Single clergy who are parents may also feel they are vulnerable or open to special scrutiny. Pay attention to expectations for evening meetings and the need for childcare. Such care will also benefit other church members. The church does not have special responsibility for the pastor’s childcare

¹⁵ © Copyright 2014 Lewis Center for Church Leadership. All rights reserved. Subscribe now to Leading Ideas, the Lewis Center’s free e-newsletter, for information, resources, and strategies for forward-thinking church leaders. www.churchleadership.com/leadingideas

but should do everything possible to make possible the active participation of those with young children.

Lewis Fellows, participants in a Lewis Center leadership development program for young clergy, contributed to this resource. For more information, please visit churchleadership.com/programs/young_clergy.htm.

Suggestions for Churches with a Young Pastor¹⁶

Churches that receive a young pastor need to remember how lucky they are. Many congregations say they want a younger pastor, but few have the opportunity. They ought not, however, assume their church will automatically reach younger people simply because of the age of the pastor. Having a young pastor might improve the likelihood of a congregation connecting with young people, but not without openness to other kinds of change. Congregations sincere in their desire to work with a younger pastor to reach emerging generations must be flexible and open to new ideas and possibilities. Take the initiative in asking the young pastor for ways in which your church can become more inviting for younger people.

Congregants are encouraged to treat a young clergyperson as a pastor, not as they would act toward their children or grandchildren. It can be helpful to consider how one regards other young professionals. A patient being treated by a young doctor, for example, may not be able to help thinking, “That doctor is young enough to be my child or grandchild.” But that kind of thinking is quickly set aside in deference to the doctor’s professional role. In the end, many older people find themselves reassured when dealing a younger professional who has the benefit of more recent training. This is the same kind of regard the congregation can offer to a young pastor. Show respect for your pastor by avoiding any remarks about age that could appear to lessen the pastor’s standing. One reason such support is important is that, while laity quickly discover the gifts younger clergy bring and accept their leadership, the same may not be true for staff now supervised by someone younger than they are. Pay special attention to language you and others use for young clergywomen, who routinely report the use of “little lady,” “cute,” and “darling.”

Church members can also take time to remember what it was like to be young or to be responsible for a young family. Then they may not be too quick to criticize a young pastor who struggles with the number of night meetings on the calendar. Expecting around the clock availability from a pastor is unreasonable, regardless of his or her age.

Remember how important your support and care can be for young pastors. Many patterns and attitudes are shaped in those early years of ministry. Pray for them. Invite them for a meal. Understand their special challenges. Many are away from their support networks. Increasing numbers bring substantial educational debt. Be their advocate for adequate compensation, proper parsonage standards, and observance of maternity and paternity leave. Also encourage habits that can sustain the pastor over a long-term ministry such as regular Sabbath, time for renewal and sermon preparation, vacation time, and continuing education.

Younger and older generations in the church would do well to keep in mind the adage “We’re all in this together.” Especially within the community of faith, what unites us in Christ is far greater than what divides us as representatives of one generation or another. We are called in “all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love and making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:2-4 NRSV)

¹⁶ Adapted from *The Crisis of Younger Clergy* by Ann A. Michel and Lovett H. Weems, Jr. (Abingdon Press, 2008) with additions from young clergy participants in the Lewis Center’s Lewis Fellows Program. Used by permission

What the Church Can Expect in the First 100 Days

Pastors have expectations of their congregations in the beginning of a new relationship. Congregations certainly have expectations of their pastor and often, multiple and sometimes contradictory expectations. What can you expect from your pastor in the first 100 days of a new pastoral appointment?

1. **Settling into a new home.** Perhaps you've moved before. You know there are endless tasks and to-do lists in the days and weeks, even months, following a move. Moving is one of life's major stressors. This can be amplified by the number of people moving as part of the pastoral transition. Help communicate empathy and corral support for this challenging time in your pastor's life.
2. **Engagement with the community.** Remember this may be the first time your pastor has lived in this community. In order to be a pastor who leads an outward focused church, the pastor must get to know the community
3. **Asking questions.** Your pastor is learning on the job. An essential part of learning is asking questions. Try to hear these questions as a way of learning about the community and about the people that make up the community. You can assist your pastor in asking good questions of the community yourself. The listening tour will be helpful in getting these questions out in the open.
4. **Some people will leave and others will resurface.** Even in the most successful transitions, there will be some people who leave. In fact, pastoral transitions often afford someone who has been ambivalent about the church an excuse to look elsewhere. There might be others who have been central to leadership who depart, sometimes even directly blaming the new pastor for their exit. This is not a time for you or the pastor to panic despite the pain. Wise leaders expect this and even plan for it. A season of change is also an opportunity for new people to enter into the community and others to step up into leadership.
5. **The unknown.** It's hard to predict what to expect. Churches are made up of people with lots of ideas (good and bad), hurts and hang ups. Pastors, despite being professionals, are people, too, with their own set of ideas (good and bad), hurts and hang ups. Like any new relationship, there will be things that happen that cause confusion and pain on both sides. The key to success is communication. Communicate. Communicate. Communicate throughout the change-over zone.