

THE POINT OF APPOINTMENTS For the Sake of God's Mission in the World

The Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula-Delaware Area of The United Methodist Church

I. THE PURPOSE OF APPOINTMENTS

Theological and Biblical understandings: God's mission to love and save our world resulted in the most profound "missional appointment" in history. God sent Jesus Christ, not to take care of an institution, but to proclaim in his life, death and resurrection Good News for all people of the world. This remains the primary point and purpose of appointments!

In His risen power and with the promise that He would always be with us, Christ made the "missional appointment" of sending His followers to "go make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28: 18-20). This is still the primary mission of United Methodist laity and clergy, which our appointment system is meant to serve in a creative and dynamic way. This understanding is affirmed in our Book of Discipline, which states that, "Ministry in the Christian church is derived from the ministry of Christ, who calls all persons to receive God's gift of salvation and follow in the way of love and service. All Christian ministry is grounded in the covenant of baptism by which we are initiated into the body of Christ and called into a life of discipleship" (§301.1).

Wesleyan heritage and set-apart ministry: John Wesley's movement to make disciples of Jesus Christ in England and America in the eighteenth century recovered this highly effective itinerant, missional, sending strategy for the sake of the Gospel. He went out and sent out (appointed) others to all kinds of places where there were people who needed to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. As he moved around, he claimed, as we still do, "the world as our parish." In addition to lay persons who serve everywhere they go, we also rejoice that, "Within the church community, there are persons whose gifts, evidence of God's grace, and promise of future usefulness are affirmed by the community, and who respond to God's call by offering themselves in leadership as set-apart ministers, ordained and licensed." (§301.1 and 301.2).

Itinerant clergy and vital congregations: In reflecting on the purpose of set-apart leadership, the Discipline states, "Through ordination and through other offices of pastoral leadership, the Church provides for the continuation of Christ's ministry, which has been committed to the church as a whole. **Without creative use of the diverse gifts of the entire body of Christ, the ministry of the church is less effective. Without responsible leadership, the focus, direction, and continuity of that ministry is diminished**" (§303, emphasis added). In recognition of the importance of these understandings, The United Methodist Church employs the **itinerant system**, and the Bishop and Cabinet of the Baltimore-Washington Conference are committed to and support open itineracy and the protection of the prophetic pulpit and diversity, in accordance with §338.

Full-time and part-time service: Ordained and provisional elders and associate members normally serve full-time in the itinerant system, which means their entire vocational life is devoted to their appointment (§338.1). Yet the Church recognizes that there are times, during a lifetime of ministry, when full-time, itinerant ministry is not optimal. When those clergy may find that their ability to itinerate geographically is limited due to temporary constraints, or that their time for effective ministry is limited due to life circumstances (such as elder care), the clergyperson may declare that in writing to the bishop and the chairperson of the Board of Ordained Ministry as part of the process of requesting limited itineracy and to serve less than full-time (§338.2). Likewise, there are times in the lifecycle of a congregation when it is appropriate to receive pastoral leadership at a less than full-time basis, and so it may be placed on a pastoral charge with other churches (§205.1) and may be designated a circuit or cooperative parish (§205.5).

In summary, the missional appointment system focuses primarily on sending out pastors to collaborate with congregations for the purpose of reaching out to the people in the "world" of that community with the Good News of Jesus Christ that invites them into discipleship. *This can be a joyful and fulfilling adventure of faith for the **clergy** who have chosen to be a part of the United Methodist itinerant, sending system, having vowed to "offer themselves without reserve to be appointed," and also for the vital **congregation** who, as the continuing witnesses for Christ in their community, benefit from the variety of gifts that a variety of*

pastors, over time, bring for strengthening that congregation for their mission of making disciples in that part of God's world.

II: THE PRINCIPLES OF APPOINTMENT

Along with the purpose of mission described above, the following major principles undergird the appointment making process:

A) **PRAYER:** This is God's process, not ours! Therefore, the whole process is filled with prayer through which we seek God's will together. Whatever part you play in this process, you are asked to be in prayer concerning the appointment.

B) **CONSULTATION:** As we fulfill our commitment to prayer, the first consultation is with God in order to hear and discern God's will for every mission field and every clergyperson seeking an appointment. The Cabinet also consults with the congregation through the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) and the pastor. While our primary focus is on the mission of Christ in your community, there is also significant sensitivity to the unique needs of the church, the pastor and his or her family. All contacts throughout the year, including your church conference reports, yearly congregational and pastoral evaluations and profiles, advisories, statistical reports, annual interviews with clergy, communications during training events, emails and meetings with your District Superintendent contribute to this sensitivity and knowledge. There is also a more intensive consultation process involving the District Superintendent, the SPRC and the Pastor during a change of appointment.

C) **OPEN ITINERACY:** Defined in the foundational statement above, one of the important roles and responsibilities of the SPRC is to understand the open itineracy that is a bedrock of the United Methodist Church. The diversity of itinerant ministers is critical to the continued growth of the church of Jesus Christ, as we live it out in The United Methodist Church (§338). The focus is always on appointing the best possible pastor for the unique missional needs of the community and church. Therefore, guided by God's will, appointments are made without regard to race, ethnic origin, gender, color, marital status or age (except for mandatory retirement). Special resourcing concerning cross racial/cross cultural appointments will be provided to pastors and congregations by the Conference and Cabinet. While ability should not prevent a pastor from being appointed to any of our churches, consideration for accessibility and the feasibility of making both the church building and the parsonage accessible must be evaluated.

D) **THE LENGTH OF APPOINTMENTS:** Appointments within the United Methodist Church are made on a year-to-year basis. That being said, we continue to work toward longer tenures in appointments to nurture stability and continuity in our parishes. However, it is possible that any pastor or any church, for missional reasons, may have a change in appointment in any given year. While salary or seniority levels are taken into consideration, they are not the determinative factors in making appointments.

E) **THE CONFERENCE STRATEGY:** The mission of the Conference is to inspire and equip local faith communities to develop disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. All appointments place major emphasis on the commitments and effectiveness of pastor and congregation as they team together in living out their vision and mission.

F) **The 2016 Book of Discipline:** In accordance with the Discipline, all appointments are made through an appointive, "sending" system, not a "call" system. The District Superintendents are an extension of the Bishop's superintending role, and, with the Bishop, compose the Cabinet. After prayer and consultation, the Bishop makes all appointments for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ in our world.

III. THE PROCESS OF APPOINTMENT

A short definition of this appointment process is: Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and in consultation with the pastor and congregation, the assigning of a person to a mission field who will serve, lead and minister to help nurture discipleship and meet the missional needs of the community and the world. The steps taken to undergird this process include:

1. Cabinet discusses and lists the missional needs of communities in our conference and how to be accomplish missionally strategic appointments.

2. A change in appointment may be requested by a pastor (including a request for limited itineracy based on temporary constraints, to go on leave, to retire, or move to or from extension ministry) and/or a SPRC. Such a request is part of the consultation process but does not guarantee a move. A change may also be initiated by the Bishop and Cabinet without the request of either a pastor or congregation.
3. When a new appointment is being considered for a church, the missional needs of its community and the profile of the congregation are presented to the Bishop and Cabinet by the District Superintendent of that church. That presentation is based upon her or his experience and consultation (see Principles B) with that church.
 - i. The Bishop and the Cabinet then enter into a time of prayer seeking God's guidance for the names of pastors who could bring gifts to the missional needs of that community and church.
 - ii. After prayer, those names are offered and listed, and consideration is given to each pastor's profile and gifts for the mission that is needed. A consensus is sought in this process.
 - iii. Following the discussion with the District Superintendents, the Bishop makes the final decision. Prayer is then offered for the mission of Christ in that community, the church, the pastor, and God's presence in the rest of the process.
4. A District Superintendent will contact the pastor to be appointed and share with her or him information about the community and church, and the missional reasons we believe this appointment is God's will.
5. The pastor will be given a reasonable amount of time to pray and reflect on the appointment. Pastors are expected to keep this matter confidential outside of one or two confidants. If a pastor wishes to ask the Bishop and Cabinet to reconsider the appointment, she or he will do so in writing with a primary focus on the missional reasons. [Other reasons for not moving or limiting itineracy (such as family and personal concerns) should have been previously noted in the advisory form and accompanied by a request for limited itineracy by November 15, of each year.] The Bishop and Cabinet will receive the request for reconsideration and in prayer make the final decision as to whether the appointment will proceed.
6. The District Superintendent will then convene the SPRC of the receiving church to introduce the pastor and provide information about the pastor and the missional reasons we believe this appointment is God's will. The SPRC will have the opportunity for discussion and questions with the pastor. If the committee or pastor wish to ask the Bishop and Cabinet to reconsider the appointment **for missional reasons**, they must do so before the close of that meeting. This entire process is to be kept in confidence.
7. If there is a request for reconsideration at the above meeting, the SPRC must put the request in writing to the District Superintendent within 24 hours. The Bishop and Cabinet will prayerfully make the final decision as to whether the appointment will proceed.
8. When the appointment is moving forward, the District Superintendent will convene the pastor's present SPRC so that the pastor may share that he or she is being reappointed. At that same meeting the District Superintendent will review the church's profile with the SPRC as the first step in preparing to appoint a new pastor to that church. The steps beginning at number 3 will then follow for that now "open" church.
9. As there are several steps in each appointment process, the announcement of the new pastor shall be made in consultation with the District Superintendent. A date for the announcement will be named and the appointment kept confidential until the announcement is made. For those not in attendance, the SPRC will ensure that the new pastor is introduced to the congregation via newsletter, email or other suitable means.
10. The pastor and members of the SPRC will enroll and complete the online sessions in preparation for required attendance in the New Appointment Workshop. The district office will

send registration information for the online sessions. The required New Appointment Workshop is currently scheduled for June 7, 2025, 9am - 3pm.

11. At the Annual Conference session, the appointment will be "fixed" (announced) by the Bishop.
12. A newly appointed pastor and a representative of the congregation will receive a document entitled, A Missional Epistle, from the Bishop and superintendent. The Missional Epistle highlights the reasons this appointment has been made and the shared work that should be undertaken for the sake of God's mission in the world. The Missional Epistle is to be shared with the congregation by the lay member to annual conference or a representative of the SPRC.
13. In churches/charges where there is no change in the appointed clergy, the Sunday following Annual Conference, the Lay Member to Conference and/or SPRC member shall announce to the congregation that the bishop has reappointed the pastor(s) for another year.

Thank you for your prayerful and faithful participation with God and your Bishop and Cabinet in the appointment making process.

If you have any questions, please contact your District Superintendent. If you do not know who he or she is, you may call the Conference office to obtain that information.

"Best of All, God is with Us"
John Wesley