

# **THE CLERGY APPOINTMENT PROCESS**



**The Indiana Area  
of  
The United Methodist Church**

**Bishop Michael J. Coyner**

## **A Word About Our Process**

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

- the appointment of pastors and churches is based upon the missional needs of the church, not a process of hiring pastors who suit the preferences of the local church leadership
- every church is appointed a pastor and every pastor is appointed to a church
- the Bishop/Cabinet serve as the “search committee” to find the right pastor/congregation match -- pastors have freedom for preaching the gospel without fear of being “fired”
- congregations can ask for a pastoral change at Annual Conference time without having to go through a painful “fight” to remove a pastor
- pastors can ask for a change of appointment without losing their job
- pastors can be appointed on the basis of their gifts and grace for ministry, without regard to their gender, ethnic background, or age
- local congregations are served by a pastor whose fitness and effectiveness for ministry are monitored by the Board of Ordained Ministry
- both the appointed pastors and the congregations to which they are appointed belong to a connection which can provide support, training, mediation, and prayerful supervision
- moving costs for pastors are paid through Conference apportionments, not by the local church or the pastor

## **The People Involved in the Appointment Process**

All Clergy (ordained Elders, ordained Deacons, commissioned Ministers, and Local Pastors) are appointed to their places of ministry by the Bishop assigned to the Indiana Area. The Bishop works through the District Superintendents, who help the Bishop by supervising a portion of the Area, called a District. In addition, the Board of Ordained Ministry of the Conference (composed of laity and clergy) approves clergy for ministry, deems them appointable, monitors their fitness, and provides for their continuing education, removal from ministry, retirement, and other changes of their status. The local congregation is represented in the Appointment Process by the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee (or in larger churches it may be called the Staff-Parish Relations Committee) that is elected by the annual Charge Conference of the congregation. .

## **The Meaning of “Consultation”**

Consultation is the on-going process of the Bishop and Cabinet being in relationship with the pastors and the congregations of the Annual Conference. It includes those times when the DS visits the congregation, conducts the annual Charge Conference, meets regularly with the pastor, and various other informal opportunities to know and to understand the situation of ministry in that pastor/congregation appointment. Consultation also includes the specific opportunity each year for the pastor and for the PPRC to advise the DS about the pastoral appointment for the upcoming year - either requesting a continuation of appointment or a change of appointment. And of course, consultation includes the steps of the Appointment Process when the DS works with the PPRC during the time of a pastoral change.

# How the Appointment Process Works

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

1. The District Superintendent (DS) of that church meets with the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee (PPRC) to discuss the needs of the congregation for pastoral leadership. Together they develop a “profile” of the congregation, the community, and the pastor leadership needs of the congregation to be in ministry to that community.
2. The DS takes that Profile to the Cabinet (The Bishop and all the District Superintendents) and they thoroughly discuss the needs of that congregation. Together the Cabinet considers all of the available clergy of the Conference and selects the person who best matches this Profile. This selection is based upon the needs of the congregation, and the Cabinet selects the best available pastor to match those needs, without regard to that pastor’s gender, age, or ethnic background.
3. The selected pastor is contacted by the Cabinet and informed that he/she is to be appointed to the church. The pastor is provided with the Profile developed by the PPRC and with any other relevant information that the Cabinet has available. The pastor is asked not to contact anyone other than immediate family about this selection, but to prayerfully consider this appointment and to give a response to the Cabinet.
4. The pastor informs the Cabinet of his/her acceptance of this appointment. If the pastor for sufficient reason does not want to accept the appointment, then he/she puts into writing to the Bishop a request for the appointment to be reconsidered. The Bishop and Cabinet will determine if the appointment is to be reconsidered, in which case the Cabinet repeats step #2 above and selects another pastor for this appointment.
5. Once the selected pastor has agreed to the appointment, the Cabinet contacts the PPRC Chairperson to arrange a meeting with the new pastor, called an Introduction. Normally the DS will not divulge the name of the new pastor prior to this meeting.
6. The new pastor and the PPRC meet with the DS present and presiding, in order to discuss the ministry needs of the congregation, the ministry gifts and experience of the pastor, and the basis of this “match”. Unless serious concerns are raised, or new data or insights emerge, then it is understood that this is the new appointment. However, if such emerge, then the PPRC may put into writing to the Bishop a request for the appointment to be reconsidered. The Bishop and Cabinet will determine if the appointment is to be reconsidered, in which case the Cabinet repeats step #2 above and selects another pastor for this appointment.
7. The new pastoral appointment is announced by the PPRC Chairperson in a Sunday service or by letter to the congregation after the pastor has had an opportunity to share this announcement with the PPRC at his/her previous appointment (which means that church is “open” and the Process begins at step #1 for that congregation).

## Other Notes About Appointments

1. Appointments and appointment changes are normally made at Annual Conference time. Obvious exceptions include unexpected deaths or other events that remove a pastor from his/her appointment in between Annual Conferences.
2. In the appointment of clergy to serve as Associate Pastors on the staff of a church, then the Appointment Process normally includes a time for the current Senior Pastor and the proposed Associate Pastor to meet prior to the meeting in step #6 with the PPRC. This meeting of the two pastors is to help ensure a good working relationship on the church staff. If either pastor has concerns about this working relationship, that may be reason for the Bishop and Cabinet to reconsider the appointment.
3. All appointments are made for one year at a time. However, it is the philosophy of this Bishop and Cabinet that longevity is desirable in pastoral appointments and if both the pastor and PPRC recommend the continuation of an appointment we will attempt to honor that request.
4. Part-time appointments and supply pastor assignments are negotiated directly by the District Superintendent involved, and then those are brought to the Cabinet for consideration and approval by the Bishop and Cabinet.
5. The Bishop and Cabinet are responsible for making effective pastoral appointments to all of the congregations every year, so sometimes it is necessary to move a pastor from an appointment where both the pastor and PPRC has requested continuation. Such changes are never made without careful consideration of the impact upon everyone involved.
6. Some pastors are in situations where their willingness to move to new appointments is limited by special concerns (such as geography, family needs, etc.). In such cases, the Bishop and Cabinet are also limited in their ability to provide appointment opportunities which fully meet the experience and salary expectations of the pastor. This “limited itinerancy” may even mean that the pastor will have to choose a Leave of Absence or Honorable Location rather than to be able to accept an available appointment. The Bishop and Cabinet pledge themselves to be sensitive to the needs of pastors whose willingness to move is limited by special concerns. However, the ordination vows of United Methodist clergy include the promise to go where we are needed in ministry.
7. The Bishop and Cabinet are given the responsibility of caring for the good of the whole Conference, not just any one church or any one pastor. Sometimes pastors or churches are asked to sacrifice their own preferences for the good of the ministry of the whole body.