

INTRODUCTION



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 29:12 NRSV

Introduction

Dear Pastor and Pastor Parish Relations Committee:

The United Methodist system of itinerant ministry roots itself in John Wesley’s vision of spreading scriptural holiness across the land, utilizing both clergy and laity in the fulfillment of this mission. This means we are a sent-system of clergy deployment. God calls ministers to enter United Methodist ministry and sends them from then on. In the Missouri Annual Conference, we practice missional appointment-making. The Bishop and the Cabinet work to place pastors with the gifts and graces to serve a particular community for a particular season of time.

And yet, over the years, we have lost our sense of missional purpose connected to this system of deployment. Our congregations and clergy both have been known to grit their teeth, and with a Midwestern sense of duty, pledge to “get through this.” We would like to encourage a mind shift in the midst of pastoral transitions, suggesting that local churches have an opportunity to grow through the pastoral transition itself. We believe that even through a pastoral leadership change, local churches can grow. Whether expected or unexpected, every pastoral transition affords us the opportunity to pass the baton and participate in a successful handoff of leadership responsibilities while deepening our focus on the mission of the Church.

This is not to say that pastors and congregations will not experience grief and anxiety associated with change. The call to ministry for all Christians comes with great sacrifice and giving. We, the Missouri Annual Conference Clergy Support Team, understand that. We are made up of clergy and laity, all of whom have experienced transitions in ministry – some that were eagerly welcomed and others that aggrieved us and our loved ones. We realize that the process of itineracy and the anxieties that a pastoral change can bring about challenge even for our healthiest clergy and congregations. We also know that the changes felt by our clergy who have been called to this work and pledged to a covenant are also experienced by family and friends who have not been called to the same commitment.

We hope that this guide will help in the process of making a healthy transition in ministry. One guidebook cannot include everything one will experience transition, but we want to provide pastors and their families, as well as Pastor Parish Relations Committees (PPRCs) with resources to be better equipped for the change.

Ministry transitions were common in Scripture, some incredibly beneficial and wisely handled, others not so much. In the spirit of Moses passing the mantle to Joshua, we pray you feel the comfort of the Lord’s presence during this time, remembering that it is the Lord himself who “goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deut. 31). May this new season of pastoral ministry be a fruitful one for you, the congregation and the whole body of Christ.

In Christ,



Rev. Mark Statler
Director of Leadership Excellence



Rev. Linda Harris
Gateway Regional District Superintendent

Passing the Baton to Your Pastoral Successor¹

In a relay race, there is an “incoming” and an “outgoing” runner. At different times, and in different races, runners must play either part. So it is in pastoral transitions. At various times in a typical ministry career, any given pastor will either be handing off the baton or receiving the baton. Pastoral leadership requires competency in both roles.

In the relay race, the incoming sprinter carries the baton and hands it off to the outgoing runner in the changeover zone. Who carries the baton in the pastoral transition? The outgoing pastor! He or she must grasp it firmly, charge full speed into the changeover zone, set aside ego, and realize that if the baton is dropped or the transition is poorly executed, it hurts everyone. Exiting pastors must come into the changeover zone with a 100 percent commitment to success in passing the baton! They will enthusiastically put in the time, work, and effort to make it a smooth and seamless handoff.

At various times in a typical ministry career, any given pastor will either be handing off the baton or receiving the baton. Pastoral leadership requires competency in both roles.

The daunting reality is that, most of the time, pastors in the changeover zone are saying “goodbye” and “hello” simultaneously. Unless the outgoing pastor is retiring or otherwise leaving pastoral ministry, that pastor is at the same time preparing for a new church and learning about a new congregation, culture, and ministry setting. Time demands, attention, and focus are stretched during this pressure-filled juggling act. Fortunately, this relay race is a sprint, and not a marathon.

If you are an outgoing pastor entering into the changeover zone, these five specific behaviors can increase your chances for success:

Engage

Engage the congregation in both a personal and professional way. Personalize the transition and make it real. Own the situation, but never blame the transition on external forces. Be honest and positive about your approval of the change. People in the pews are used to job changes. Draw on that common experience in a positive way, saying things like: “What I’ll be doing next...,” “What I learned here that I’ll take with me...,” “What you folks taught me...”

Professionalize the transition the way anyone in the congregation would want to see in their career life. Like the runner charging into the changeover zone, charge into your concluding days with intentionality and gusto. Make sure loose ends are tied up and records and statistical data are in order. Attend to ministry projects so that things won’t drop through the cracks.

Enrich

This is a great teaching moment about how pastoral changes are made within your polity. It’s not a time to apologize for it or blame it. Continue to cast vision for the church’s future under new leadership as you pass the baton. This enrichment function must be done publicly in your closing sermons, Bible studies, and meetings, as well as in personal conversations and other settings.

¹ Jim Ozier, “Passing the Baton to Your Pastoral Successor” at [Leading Ideas](#). Accessed 14 January 2017. This article is adapted from *The Changeover Zone: Successful Pastoral Transitions* by Jim Ozier’s book that he co-authored with Jim Griffith (Abingdon, 2016).

Endear

Endear the congregation to the new pastor. In your role as the exiting pastor, you can do this better than anyone else. Provide as many personal introductions of your successor as possible, in as many ways as possible. For instance, appear with your successor in introductory videos to be shown during worship and at church meetings and gatherings. Make them creative, funny, interesting, and compelling. Many churches use simple techniques like “Five Fun Facts” or “Two Truths and a Lie” in morning worship for three or four Sundays leading up to the new pastor’s arrival. As the master of ceremonies for this brief, fun, interactive time, you should take every opportunity to brag on your successor. Personally escort your successor on a tour of the community and to meet key leaders. Take “selfies” with the new pastor along the way to show on screens, post on YouTube, and include in written communications.

Encourage

Acknowledge that there will be some natural stress and anxiety as the church enters the changeover zone. Encourage people to love your successor in the same way they loved you. Encourage them to meet the challenges of the future, to continue vital ministries and to start new ones. Organize some especially hospitable folks to put together welcome baskets filled with coupons, movie tickets, and other small gestures of greeting to ease your successor’s arrival.

End

Bring to a close your relationships with parishioners. This can be painful for all, including you. But it must be done. Do this within the context of worship, and in all personal and public settings. Honor and respect the friendships you’ve made, but also be mindful of how you have to end the current dynamic of relationships to help your successor get off to a good running start!

How Incoming Pastors Can Navigate the Changeover Zone²

In a relay race, the two runners exchanging the baton run in tandem in their changeover zone lane of 20 meters. For most runners, this distance is covered in about seven steps while the receiving runner grabs hold of the baton and sprints out on the next leg of the relay. If you are an arriving pastor entering into the changeover zone, these six specific behaviors will increase the odds of a smooth and successful transition.

Acquaint

Get to know the church, the community, and the people by every means possible. Conduct a listening tour in which the church, through a series of small group gatherings, has a chance to answer specific questions designed to help you get a deeper grasp of the church's culture. This listening tour is not a "meet and greet," nor is it a time to hear the pastor's vision of the future. It is a time for the new pastor to listen and learn. Sprinkle bits of what you've heard throughout your first months of sermons. This lets the congregation really know you were listening! In addition, study church and community websites, and immerse yourself in the community by visiting important people, places, and events. And while you are there, take "selfies" to share!

If you are an arriving pastor, these six specific behaviors will increase the odds of a smooth and successful transition.

Accentuate

Accentuate the positive. Never criticize or second guess your predecessor or speak poorly of the church or previous pastors. Stay positive and appreciative. Show gratitude in every public setting, especially on Sunday morning. Express thanks effusively to someone or some group every Sunday in worship and at meetings or events during the week.

Analyze

Study the church, its context, community needs, and the impact of the church to date. Analyzing is not the same as judging. Be objective, clear, non-judgmental, and humble in analyzing your context. Find strategic ways to involve others in this analysis. The smartest and safest way is to quickly lead the church into some kind of well-structured process of learning together.

Anticipate

Be ready for the anxieties, concerns, fears, and worries of the church and individuals within the church as they receive you as their new pastor. Put yourself in their shoes. There will be grief, and, in some cases, jubilation. Keep your radar up. It is often helpful to mention in worship the stages of grief that people, and congregations, go through at times of change or loss. Realize that some people going through the stages of grief will "act out," just as a child might do at the loss of a parent or sibling. Guard against internalizing such behaviors or taking it personally, as doing so will interfere with your ability to guide congregants through the stages.

Ask

The questions you ask are critical to understanding the culture of the church. At this point, asking the right questions is more important than giving the right answers. Ask, ask, ask. Show by the very nature of your curiosity and interest that you care about where the church has been, what it is about, and what the community needs. Inquiry can be a new pastor's best friend.

²By Jim Ozier on April 27, 2016 [Leading Ideas](#).

Set aside daily self-reflection time to ask yourself honestly: “How am I coming across?” “Am I being genuine and authentic?” “Am I being sensitive, gracious, and courteous?” “Are my behaviors what I hope to see in others?” One of the most often voiced complaints heard in times of transition is, “Our new pastor just doesn’t seem very self-aware.”

Answer

Respond to the many questions that will come your way in a humble, but transparent way. Avoid answering from a position of authority. You have to earn authority, and that takes time. Instead, respond from a self-revelatory position that indicates: “It’s not my personal agenda, but the church’s agenda and the mission field’s agendas, and I want to do everything possible to learn more about both.”

“All Things New”

As I was driving back to my office after taking my husband to the airport, I was a little worried because he was flying on an airline that had had a plane crash the day before. My concern prompted me to reflect on my life as I sped along. “I love my life!” I thought to myself.

I was driving my beloved 10-year-old car. I thought to myself, “I like my car!” I couldn’t imagine getting a new one. I thought about the

As a society, even the church, we minimize the grief, sadness, and loss that all of us experience when we move — whether it’s a planned and accepted move or not.

house that my husband and I had owned for 13 years, and after all the work we’d put into it, it was just the way we wanted it. “I like my house!” We had owned the house for the last 13 years because I had served the same church for that long, and, yes, “I love my church!” All of this was motivated by my original concern for my husband, so I concluded my litany by saying, “I love my husband of 21 years!” (You can tell from this litany that I’m not quick to change major components of my life!)

I dared to think out loud, “What a wonderful life! What could go wrong on a day like today?” I no sooner walked into my office than I was handed a message requesting me to call the bishop. After reaching him, I discovered that everything in my life was about to change — except my husband.

Within weeks, the house was sold. I purchased a new car. (My old sports car wasn’t going to do well out in the hills where I was to be the new district superintendent.) I said goodbye to my wonderful church and all my friends, and I moved away from the city I had lived in for the last 20 years.

“I am making all things new,” it says in the scriptures (Revelation 21:5). I discovered that “all things new” can be a painful experience. Suddenly I had a new address and phone number (which I frequently forgot) and a new home (where I didn’t always know where things were). I had a new car with features that were a mystery to me at times. (One night I couldn’t find the switch to turn on the bright headlights.) I had a new job in a new office in a new town with a new set of people to work with and to develop into friends. Quite frankly, “all things new” brought a new experience of many tears and frustrations, loneliness and uncertainty.

Throughout the experience, the greatest discovery for me was how much we as a society, even the church, minimize the grief, sadness, and loss that all of us experience when we move — whether it’s a planned and accepted move or not. As a pastor, I know that people are forever dealing with their anger in one way or another. I learned that some anger is really redirected and unresolved sadness. It’s a lot easier to be mad than sad. Some people encouraged me to be mad because it’s not as scary as sad — but I’ve just felt sad.

None of the things on my list of “all things new” was life threatening, but all of them brought a sense of loss and a corresponding sense of grief. I cannot bring myself to say that everything is all right. It probably will be, but I am not there yet. Psalm 30:11 says that God will turn our sadness (mourning) into joy. I wait upon the Lord.

~ By Sally Dyck on June 10, 2009 at:

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/all-things-new/>.

Prayer and Scripture Resources

Prayer for Times of Transition and Change

May today there be peace within.
May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.
May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.
May you use those gifts that you have received,
and pass on the love that has been given to you
May you be confident knowing you are a child of God.
Let this presence settle into your bones,
and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.
It is there for each and every one of us.

~attributed to St. Thérèse of Lisieux and St. Theresa of Avila

Dear God,
On this day I ask You to grant this request?
May I know who I am and what I am,
Every moment of every day.
May I be a catalyst for light and love,
And bring inspiration to those whose eyes I meet.
May I have the strength to stand tall in the face of conflict,
And the courage to speak my voice, even when I'm scared.
May I have the humility to follow my heart,
And the passion to live my soul's desires.
May I seek to know the highest truth
And dismiss the gravitational pull of my lower self.
May I embrace and love the totality of myself?
My darkness as well as my light.
May I be brave enough to hear my heart?
To let it soften so that I may gracefully
Choose faith over fear.
Today is my day to surrender anything that stands
Between the sacredness of my humanity and my divinity.
May I be drenched in my Holiness
And engulfed by Your love.
May all else melt away.
And so it is.

~Debbie Ford

Gentle One,
Guard us in our sleep.
Guide us in our days.
Grant us in your peace.
Give us your ways.
Gentle One, go with us. Amen.

Gracious God,

Today I am reminded of my ordination vows. I promised to go where appointed. Just as Abraham moved from Haran, just as Ruth and Naomi moved to Bethlehem, just as Jesus' disciples were called to move and follow him, so may I remain faithful to your call upon my life to serve your people. For you have promised to be with me at all times and in all places. "I will go...if you lead me." Amen.

~From the East Ohio Conference's "A Guide to a Good Move for Pastors and Families

God of Love,

You are with us in every transition and change.

As we enter into this new era with excitement and even some anxiety,

we recall your deep compassion, presence, and abounding love.

We thank you for the gifts, talents and skills with which you have blessed us.

We thank you for the experiences that have brought us to this moment.

We thank you for the work of others that gives breadth and depth to our own work.

Be with us as we move forward, rejoicing with you and supporting one another.

We ask this in your Holy Name. Amen.

~Joseph P. Shadle

"In Times of Transition"

In life and death

we belong to God

from the joys of new birth
to the grief of a final breath

from a morning's farewell
to an evening's welcome

from one place
to another

God make Your presence known

Amen.

~Bruce Reyes-Chow

Open wide the window of our spirits, O Lord,
and fill us full of light;

open wide the door of our hearts,

that we may receive and entertain thee

with all our powers of adoration and love. Amen.

~Christina G. Rossetti

Searching the Scriptures

Reading scripture in pursuit of meaning is a spiritual discipline called *lectio divina* or holy reading. Choose a passage below or choose one of your favorites. You will read each passage four times.

1. **Lectio:** *Listening to the Word of God or Reading of God's Word*
In your first reading, become aware of any word or phrase that catches your attention – a word or phrase.
2. **Meditatio:** *Reflecting on the Word of God*
As you listen to the Word of God for the second time, be aware of any reflection or thought that you become aware of as you listened – a reflection or thought.
3. **Oratio:** *Responding to the Word of God – Affective Prayer*
On the third time, be aware of any prayer that rises up within you that expresses what you are experiencing in this Word of God.
4. **Contemplatio:** *Resting in the Word of God – Contemplation*
For the fourth and final time, sit with the Word of God and allow God to speak to you in the silence of your hearts. God's first language is silence.

Psalms 4, 5, 103:1-5, 121, 130, 131, 139

Proverbs 3:5-6

Jeremiah 29:11

Matthew 6:25-34, 13:31-33

Mark 1:16-20, 6:30-44

Luke 1:46-55, 9:1-6

John 15:1-11, 21:15-19

Romans 8:28-30

I Corinthians 1:3-9

Ephesians 2:10

Colossians 3:12-17

1 Peter 2:9, 21, 5:7

2 Peter 1:3-11

Liturgies for Sending/Receiving

The United Methodist Book of Worship provides [An Order of Farewell to a Pastor](#) (BOW 598) and [An Order for the Celebration of an Appointment](#) (BOW 595). It is strongly encouraged that the Pastor Parish Relations Committee take responsibility for designing and leading these components of worship.

Initial Contact with New Church

1. The District Superintendent will usually introduce the new pastor to the Pastor Parish Relations Committee for a time of getting acquainted and sharing basic information. This is an introduction, not an interview.
2. A mutually convenient time will allow the new pastor to visit the new parsonage (if applicable). A representative of the Pastor Parish Relations Committee and/or Trustees might also visit with the incoming pastor to discuss moving arrangements and other parsonage related details (see #1 under Moving Days 2022).

The District Superintendent will work with the incoming pastor to review the salary support package. The incoming pastor and the chair of Pastor Parish Relations Committee must sign the new pastoral support form. At least 50% of the Professional/Continuing Education expenses should be available to you as the new pastor (and you should ensure that 50% is available to the pastor moving into your current appointment).

3. The chair or a representative of the Pastor Parish Relations Committee could also provide helpful information and resources that are important to new people in the community, i.e., health care, pharmacy, schools, contacts for repairs and services, local media and other services.
4. Any formal meeting, other than the introductory meeting of the Pastor Parish Relations Committee should wait until after the appointment has been officially “fixed” at Annual Conference (June 11-12, 2022) and after the physical move has occurred.

Moving Days 2022

1. The move out day will be **June 28**. The move in day will be **June 29**. The receiving church is responsible for moving costs for full-time pastors. The incoming pastor should get at least two bids for moving. It is suggested that the moving pastor make the arrangements with the mover only after consultation with the Pastor Parish Relations Chair of the receiving church. Most movers require a certified check or cash BEFORE unloading, so previous arrangements with the church treasurer should be made by the Pastor Parish Relations Committee.

While the church is responsible for basic moving costs (up to \$5,000) of normal household items, it is not responsible for: packing or special handling of extraordinary items (animals, collections, large libraries, exotic birds, etc.). Neither are churches required to reimburse for meals. They should not pay volunteers. The IRS may consider payments to a church’s own members as inappropriate “private inurement.” Whatever is paid on behalf of or reimbursed to the pastor should be reported to the pastor on the W-2 issued by the church the following January. Since the end of 2017, such payments for move costs are taxable income.

Bids for moving by a commercial mover are helpful in making the selection. While there are occasions when U-Haul trucks and volunteer help may be negotiated, it is never appropriate to move household goods in a private stock truck.

2. Pastors moving from one charge to a new one should recognize that there will be some overlap in work and pastoral care, and that official pay of the new appointment will begin on July 1. This means that those arriving at a church will not technically begin the appointment until July 1 but should be prepared to offer care and answers questions as soon as they arrive on June 28.

Churches receiving pastors from outside the Annual Conference or as their first appointment should recognize that the first day of work for that pastor will be July 1, when the date pay also begins, though they also may need to provide limited care and begin preparing for their first Sunday ahead of the official start of their appointment.

3. The Annual Conference has fund available for moving expenses for full-time pastors under appointment. Up to **\$1,500** can be reimbursed to churches meeting the guidelines outlined in the Missouri Conference Journal (Cf. 2021 Journal, 127).

Common Moving Courtesies

- Moving is a good time for the local church to have the Pastor Parish Relations and Trustees Chair inspect the parsonage with the present residents at a mutually convenient time. List and arrange to repair all things that require attention. Request an “Annual Parsonage Inspection Form” from your district office. These forms are traditionally due every March 1.
- Leave a clean, “ready-to-move into” parsonage, the way you would like to find it. If you cannot clean the house yourself, make sure someone has cleaned thoroughly before your successor arrives. Mow the lawn, trim the shrubs, and dispose of all trash!
- Leave a list of idiosyncrasies of the house you are leaving. The new residents may need to know where all the hidden switches are, which cabinet doors don’t open, who owns the friendly Great Dane. Note where the water and gas shut-off valves are located and where you keep the garage door opener, hidden keys, etc.
- Make sure the utilities are ON. Utilities should be in the name of the church so that there is no interruption in service or need to pay a deposit.
- Assure continuation of telephone service to the parsonage. You may sign a release at the phone company to allow the new resident to have the same number. The bill will be sent to the new pastor. This allows the listing to be in the pastor’s name.
- Pay all of your bills before leaving or make arrangements to do so. Not to do so reflects upon the ministry and handicaps your successor. There should be at least 50% of your Professional/Continuing Education Expenses remaining in the church budget for the new pastor.
- Damage to the parsonage beyond the normal wear and tear is the responsibility of the outgoing pastor. Pastors will be billed for excessive damage caused by family or pets.
- Plan to be out of the clean house you are leaving no later than **Tuesday, June 28th**. This will allow the incoming pastor to tell the mover when to arrive. If this is not possible, make arrangements with the incoming pastor and the District Superintendent well before moving day.

It's a Matter of Ethics

In Missouri, we are trying to encourage a change in the culture that invites more conversation, engagement and coordination in pastoral transitions. This work is primarily done prior to the new appointive year. There may be occasion for the new pastor to consult with the previous pastor on matters related to orientation and onboarding, but this is done at the request of the incoming pastor.

Once a new pastor comes to an appointment, they are afforded all the rights and responsibilities of the office. This means the pastor has left the previous appointment and turned that ministry over to a new pastor.

It is not ethical for a pastor to return to a previous appointment to conduct weddings or funerals or to take part in an ongoing function of the church or perform pastoral functions. A former pastor may participate in weddings or funerals **ONLY** at the initiation and direct invitation of the pastor in charge.

It is helpful for the laity to assist in the adjustment of the new pastor by not asking the former pastor to return, except as a friend or visitor.