

COMMUNICATION



*For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. —Ephesians 2:10 NRSV*

Communication

Leaving Well¹¹

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.

Many clergy do not have an adequate plan for their leaving. This can leave a feeling of incompleteness for the pastor and congregation.

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.

¹¹ *Leading Ideas*, May 21, 2008.

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.

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 *un*successful 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)

The Metaphor: Passing the Baton

The Missouri Cabinet has embraced the ideas found in Jim Ozier and Jim Griffith's book *The Change-Over Zone: Successful Pastoral Transitions* (Abingdon Press, 2016). Whether planned or not, every pastoral transition ends up being an example of passing the baton (as in relay races in track & field sporting events). In itinerant ministry, each pastor is a member of a cosmic relay team passing the responsibilities of shepherding a congregation to another member of the relay team.

It is the Bishop's expectation that pastors leaving an appointment will be cooperative in all pastoral transitions.

One of the images of a pastoral transition is that of "passing the baton." A baton will be given to the next pastor and PPRC at the introductory meeting – and the DS will ask that the baton be placed on the altar. YOU, as the current pastor, can help with the transition by weekly referring to the baton.



We encourage you to embrace the imagery of the baton during the period of the change-over zone – the time from the announcement of your departure through the first 100 days of the incoming pastor's tenure. Keep in mind the following:

- We live in a world where we cannot afford to possess an attitude about pastoral transitions that "we will get through it." Rather, we know that those new to our community and guests to our community during this time have no allegiance and may turn to alternative options or even give up on finding a faith community. Therefore, we need to believe that pastoral change is a time to grow the church.
- Saying goodbye to the outgoing pastor and saying hello to the incoming pastor is for the congregation and in particular, for the first time guests who may visit during this period.
- We believe that there is an opportunity to accelerate growth during the change-over zone and that hinges on how successful the outgoing and incoming pastors are in transferring the relationships of the congregation to one another.
- Embracing this attitude requires a culture change including changing the historical approach to pastoral transitions. This change requires increased communication between the outgoing and incoming pastors and a coordinated effort to ensure the successful transition.

Ideas for Using the Baton

- When the PPRC chair makes the announcement in worship, use the baton, describing the time as a "change-over zone" and how the metaphor of the relay race exchange is how we will approach this time of pastoral transition.
- Lay the baton on the altar, sharing that we will be praying during this time of transition so that the incoming pastor appointed by the Bishop and the Cabinet will be a good fit for the church's mission and vision.



Above: From Campbell UMC in Springfield. After praying over the baton for weeks leading up to receiving associate pastor, Adrienne Denson, Don, the Facilities Coordinator, made a baton holder for her to hang in her new office and was signed by members of the church.

- One week you might pick up the baton and remind people that their next pastor needs the church's prayers, and pray for the pastor and the pastor's family.
- One week you might pass the baton around the sanctuary during worship, and ask each person to hold the baton and offer a silent prayer. This will allow you to tell the incoming pastor on their first Sunday that everyone in our congregation has prayed over this baton and for our "change-over zone" that we might grow through this time of change.
- One week you (or a leader working with the children or youth) might take the baton to Sunday School or youth group, and talk to the kids or youth about the new pastor, and then ask everyone to pray for the new pastor with their hands on the baton. The leader of that class could share that experience in worship.
- One week you might invite the youth group to paint the baton as their contribution.
- One week take the baton on some shut-in visits, telling them about their next pastor, and inviting them to be part of "handing off the baton" by touching it, and tell that story in worship.
- Hold the baton during a children's sermon, talking about you leaving and their next pastor coming, and that this baton will be sitting on the altar for the next pastor. The homebound and children of the congregation are two groups often left out of the conversation when there is a pastoral change. This is a key opportunity to "grow through the change" rather than to simply "get through it."
- Have the outgoing pastor write a note and insert it into the baton for the incoming pastor that can be read or shared publically (private notes should be left in a different capacity).
- Make sure the baton is a part of your First Sunday with the incoming pastor. Incorporate it into the worship service. You can adapt the welcome service from the *United Methodist Book of Worship* (See "An Order for the Celebration of an Appointment" on pg. 595 of the *BOW*) to include the baton as part of the presentation of symbols. You might say something like:

"Name, receive this baton as a symbol of our hopes and plans for the future, and lead us during this time of transition so we might continue to grow in our love of Christ, one another and the world. **Amen.**"
- Invite the pastor, and the pastor's spouse/family, to visit the community and church several different times.
- Take the new family to the schools, introduce them around, and assist in the registration process
- Introduce to key leaders in the church and community
- Introduce the staff (because your staff are going to be anxious about their new boss and church members are going to be anxious for their staff)
- PLEASE help those who ask understand that their next pastor is waiting to attend any business meetings until that person is their next pastor officially. Explain that the next pastor is spending these weeks simply getting to know people and learn culture, before weighing in on any decisions.

Have *fun* with the transition:

- Take a selfie of you and the next pastor; post on social media and show in worship.
- Record a short video of you and the next pastor together – you could say how glad you are that... is coming to the church as their next pastor. Theodosia UMC in the Ozarks made a video about passing the baton. They really embraced the concept and had fun with it. Check it out: <https://www.facebook.com/253993474613025/videos/1576640472348312/>.

- Urge PPRC to think about how they will welcome the pastor on moving day – and to think about that first Sunday and greeting the new pastor as s/he picks up the baton
- Mirror your electronic and social media announcements to that of the public announcement in worship. Consider using video (this can be done cheaply and easily on most smartphones) to help bring the metaphor off the baton to life. At the very list, take a photo of the baton and insert into the announcement.

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.

Sermon Ideas for the Change-Over Zone

From *First and Last Words: Preaching in the Midst of Transition* by Robert Kaylor¹²

1. Make it a message about new beginnings.

I have developed a pattern of using the text of Abram's call in Genesis 12 as a paradigm for ending and starting a new pastorate. In fact, I have preached nearly the exact same sermon on both my first and last Sundays since the principles still apply. Genesis 12 is the text that begins the whole traveling narrative of the Bible and sets the tone for the story that is to come. God calls Abram to go on a journey where the destination is uncertain and, because he faithfully goes, God blesses him so that he and his family will be a blessing to the whole world. The church I am leaving is going on a journey into the unknown, and so is the one to whom I have come. We have been called to journey together: to be blessed so that we can be a blessing to our community and to the world. All that God requires of us is faith and the willingness to take the first step. So, when God calls, we haul, even if that means we leave behind the familiar and step into the new and the strange.

I often wonder if Abram was afraid to take that first step, but did it anyway. As I stand in front of a congregation full of faces that I do not yet know, I know that I always feel a little bit anxious. "Is anyone feeling a little scared this morning?" I asked a congregation on my first Sunday. When they raised their hands I was relieved that I was not the only one! In spite of our fear in the midst of uncertainty, we recognize that God has called us to the journey together. If I'm leaving, the same fear applies as both pastor and congregation wonder what's next. A good transition will help us get over that fear because the more we walk together on the journey, the more we will see it as a blessing that has come to us and will work through us.

2. Turn the congregation toward the future.

"The past is never dead," wrote William Faulkner. "It's not even past." If I've been serving a congregation for a long time, we have a past together and the congregation to which I'm going also has a past without me. It's tempting to dwell on those pasts and while they're never dead, a transition happens best when both congregation and pastor take the best of their pasts and turn them toward a mutually fulfilling future. A good transition sermon will focus on the new thing God will do in the life of both pastor and congregation. Notice that Jesus' own farewell discourse in John is less about where they've been together but about the future they will share because of God's resurrecting and renewing power. Paint a picture of your hopes and dreams for the congregation. Give them a glimpse of the Promised Land that looms over the horizon. God told Abram that the land toward which he was walking would be a place of multiplied blessings. Give people a sense of what life will be like when they keep walking in obedience to God.

3. Share some of yourself and how God has brought you to this place.

The final sermon is a chance for you to express what God has been teaching you during your time together as pastor and congregation. How have you grown? How have they blessed you? Share your heart and thanksgiving for the worship, work, and witness you have done together. Even if your tenure has been a rocky one, there is always something to bless and something to learn.

¹² <http://www.seedbed.com/first-and-last-words-preaching-in-the-midst-of-transition/>

If it's your first sermon in new church, however, you will want to share some of your story and about some of the twists and turns of God's grace that have brought you to this place. Yes, you can share the story of your call to ministry one more time! More specifically, express your excitement about the call of God to this particular place of ministry. Remember, the sermon is not primarily about you, just like Abram's call wasn't the result of his stellar resume, but it is an opportunity to share why you believe God has brought you together for such a time as this.

Preaching your first and last words to a congregation is both a privilege and an opportunity. Bless your people so that whether you are coming together or coming apart, you will both be a blessing!

Sermon Ideas for the First 100 Days

In Jim Ozier and Jim Griffith's *The Change-Over Zone: Successful Pastoral Transitions*, they outline seven strategic components of preaching throughout the first three months of a new appointment.

1. Introduce yourself and your family in real-life vignettes (this should occur over time in multiple sermons).
2. Include **humor** as a way to get through resistance and anxiety.
3. Reveal your heart and passion.
4. Demonstrate your character, personality and professionalism.
5. Share favorite scriptures and how you apply the Bible to daily life.
6. Lift up community history and values to connect with the congregation.
7. Indicate how much you care about your new church and are excited to be here.

“Every sermon delivered in the first one hundred days must contain humor...Laughter is good for the heart, and group laughter is good for the group...laughter brings life and hope and begins to set the tone for other interactions the congregation will have with the incoming pastor.”

~Ozier and Griffith, *The Change-Over Zone*, p. 81

Preach a sermon series that sets the framework for your ministry:

1. Start with your faith story.
2. Outline your personal mission statement.
3. Work through your favorite scripture text.
4. Work through what you think an effective church looks like.

See also Bob Farr and Kay Kotan's *The Necessary Nine* (Abingdon Press, 2016), Ch. 8 “Preach and Worship Well”

Clergy and Social Media Ethics

- Say goodbye with grace
- Be gracious in telling the truth
- Be gracious in recalling the good times
- Be gracious in pastoral care
- Be gracious in dealing with conflict
- Be gracious in expressing thankfulness
- Be gracious with your family
- Be gracious to yourself with your emotions
- Transitions are made easier through transparency
- Outline clear expectation and boundaries
- Follow the “orthodox” traditions of distance
- No presiding at weddings or funerals without the express permission of the following pastor).
- Don’t forget ¶2702.1.7 (relationships and/or behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor).
- Think with intentionality about how to build healthy distances.
- Think intentionally about your approach to social media including: friend lists, privacy settings, unfollowing, unfriending, removing previous church from Newsfeed, and family communications. If you need technical advice on how to approach your social media presence during the transition, consider checking out: <http://hackingchristianity.net/?p=7626>

3 Simple Rules for Social Media

Social Media Guidelines for The Missouri United Methodists



DO NO HARM

One of the benefits of social media is that it provides the opportunity to share views, thoughts, joys and concerns about all areas of life. Our social media contributions can be very effective tools for ministry if we are careful to apply caution before we post. We will be careful that our posts are not “doing harm” by insulting or damaging the reputation of others. We will make sure our posts are respectful and in good taste. And we remember: Everything we post—status updates, comments, tweets, blogs—becomes public immediately after we click “send” (even if we’re using a limited access setting). We can’t take it back once it’s out there, so we will use discernment with everything we post.

TO THINK ABOUT: Is the post “doing harm” to the reputation of the church, Christ or another person or organization?

Can the post be interpreted as harmful, offensive, rude or distasteful?

If using the post as an outlet to vent, is there a more productive, less public way to do so?

DO GOOD

Social media is one of the most effective methods of church networking and communicating today. When used properly, it can have a significant encouraging influence on our readers and become a powerful tool for delivering the Gospel message to a large audience that extends beyond our contact list. It is a great tool for networking and providing the world with news about our church and ministry. It also is a very useful tool for obtaining feedback and ideas from our audience and can be used to gain insight for sermons, Bible study topics, worship times, needs of the community, etc. The “good” and positive uses of social media are endless.

TO THINK ABOUT: Can the post be described as “good”?

Will it help the Kingdom and fellow believers? How will it be perceived by non-believers? How will the post be received by people with different cultural or faith backgrounds?

Are we communicating effectively by asking questions in addition to providing information?

STAY IN LOVE WITH GOD

Social media is a great way to find meaningful devotional materials, thought provoking blogs, inspiring worship videos and media resources, and current articles and tools for our ministry. Users have reported that their social media usage helps keep them informed and enthusiastic about their ministry on a daily basis. While it can definitely help us “stay in love with God,” it also can be very distracting. We will make sure our use of social media does not occupy so much of our time that we are no longer participating in meaningful Bible study, devotional times, worship and conversations with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Social media can serve as a tool to aid, promote and conduct discussions, studies and devotional times, but should not be our primary source of interaction with the world.

TO THINK ABOUT: How is/can social media helping me to stay in love with God? How is it hindering me?

How am I helping others stay in love with God by my social media contributions?

REMEMBER

Our character and faith is reflected in each post we make, so if we are not sure about something, we won't post it.

Social Media Guidelines

Social Media and Pastoral Moves

By Thomas G. James And Lovett H. Weems, Jr. On June 4, 2014 Leading Ideas

What should pastors do about their social media relationships when they move from one pastoral assignment to another? Do you “unfriend” all former members on Facebook and “unfollow” them on Twitter? After all, members in the church you are leaving may be watching to see if you post affectionate notes about your new church. You might find yourself curious about what your former members have to say about your departure or your successor. And people in your new church may monitor how you interact with your former members, as might the new pastor of the church you are leaving.

With sensitivity and conversations, we can honor our past ministry and relationships while honoring the colleagues following us as well.

As with the changes that take place in your personal relationships, social media changes are dictated by several factors including the nature of the relationships, the boundaries that you have already established, and a good healthy dose of common sense.

Avoid overusing social media during a transition. One simple way to ease your shift into a different set of social media relationships is to scale back your social media use during your transition. Posting frequent status updates, liberally commenting on other people’s posts, or “liking” everything on your homepage can easily become a distraction and waste time when your attention needs to be elsewhere. Keeping a “low profile” on social media may be the simplest way to manage the many different relational dynamics at play in a time of transition.

Don’t rely on social media to get to know your new congregants. Social media is designed for staying in touch with others, not as a primary avenue for developing new personal relationships. Use social media as a supplementary way of keeping up to date with people, but never as a substitute for face-to-face ministry.

Manage social media contacts in the church you are leaving. Some moving pastors choose to “unfriend” everyone from their former church, eliminating the temptation to continue to act as their pastor. Another alternative is to move previous church members to a list with limited access to your profile. People on this list would not be able to see new wall posts or pictures of your life in the new church. Advanced settings on Facebook permit you to create sub-lists for different categories of friends and set different levels of access to organize Facebook friends into different groups to receive different posts. In addition to grouping people by past and current congregations, you may also want to create other groupings for family or classmates from high school, college, or seminary. Whichever option you choose, it is important to state clearly in advance how you will handle this transition to avoid hurt feelings. If former parishioners remain as Facebook friends and Twitter followers, remember you are no longer their pastor. Talk about your plan and your new relationship on social media just as you talk about other changes and boundaries that come into play because of your transition. Let people know what is changing and what is not in your relationship, including through social media. Begin with conversations with church leaders, but eventually share the plan broadly.

Bruce Reyes-Chow, a Presbyterian pastor, worked with the church he was leaving to develop a “covenant” both to ensure a healthy transition and to remind everyone of the importance of the relationship between pastor and congregation (*The Definitive-ish Guide for Using Social Media in the Church*, Shook Foil Books, 2012). It reminded everyone that great self-restraint was required to allow for a relationship with the new pastor to flourish.

Check for guidelines. Increasingly, there are denominational and judicatory expectations for pastors both in the use of social media and in how it should be handled when there is a pastoral transition. Check to see if there are such guidelines or rules that apply in your situation. But no statement or document can capture the complexity of these and other dynamics that go on during times filled with such mixed feelings of joy and grief by all involved. As Reyes-Chow puts it, “The line over which we must not cross when it comes to pastoral transitions is wide and gray, thanks to the expansive nature of social media.” It is hard to strike the perfect balance, but with sensitivity and conversations, we can come close enough to honor our past ministry and relationships while honoring the colleagues following us as well.

Sample Communication

[Pastoral Change Announcement from PPRC-this should be sent to the congregation shortly after it is announced on a Sunday morning from the PPRC]

Dear Church Family,

I want to let our Grace UMC family know about a leadership transition in our church. Our pastor, *Mark Methodist*, is being appointed to another congregation in our United Methodist connection, *First UMC in Somewhereville*, MO.

Mark has served us well for *9* years. He has helped lead us through governance board changes, moved us out into the community through Winter Outreach and reconnected us to the neighborhood through our school partnership with District 9. Together with his family, we have seen *23* baptisms and *44* confirmands and *12* weddings and far too many funerals. We have shared each other's joys and sorrows, we have lightened each other's loads. Together, we have laughed and cried, prayed and worshipped, together we have lived.

If you're like me, when you hear this, you may feel stunned, and then sad. You'll probably wonder, "What's next?" I want to help you through that process. Our Pastor Parish Relations Committee met with our District Superintendent last week and outlined what we believe to be *Grace UMC's* values and vision for living out the Great Commandment and Commission. We shared with her what we envision for the church in the coming years – the hopes, dreams and challenges we might face. That conversation will help the Missouri Cabinet (made up of the Bishop and District Superintendents all over the state) identify a pastor with gifts that will hopefully serve as a strong match to our local church's ministry context. If you have questions about the process, I encourage you to reach out to me or to *Rex, Mattie or Hank* on our leadership board.

There will be a lot of change in the coming year, but let me say what is not changing. Our church's leadership is committed to the mission of making disciples for the transformation of the world. We hope you are in agreement that this mission is unchanging and it is the work of all disciples to co-partner with God to help in this work.

There will be opportunities in Pastor *Mark's* final weeks to celebrate our shared ministry and thank him and his family for the gifts they have brought into the lives of us at *Grace*. Please take time in the coming weeks to wish Pastor *Mark* Godspeed in his new appointment. I know he will appreciate your prayers during this time of transition.

Peace in Christ,

F. Asbury

Pastor Parish Relations Committee chairperson

Sample Communication

[Incoming Pastor Announcement from PPRC]

Dear Church Family,

Since we announced the news of Pastor **Methodist's** forthcoming departure at the end of June to serve as **new position**, we have been in deep prayer that God would send us a strong spiritual leader to guide us into our next season and help us live out our vision. We believe our prayers have been answered! We learned this week that our Bishop plans to appoint The Rev. **Molly** Methodist to **First UMC**.

Pastor **Molly** is a dynamic preacher ([hyperlink to one of her video recorded sermons](#)) with a deep desire to see people grow closer in their relationship with God through Jesus Christ. She is currently **former position** with primary focus on **description**, but with extensive experience in worship planning, leadership development and staff training. Prior to her work at **former church**, she served as **Molly** has plans to marry this summer to

insert quote from Molly

Over the course of the next several weeks, you will have an opportunity to celebrate Pastor **Methodist's** ministry, as well as express your appreciation and to wish her well in her new ministry. Throughout July, the Staff Parish Relations Committee will be coordinating welcoming opportunities for you to meet Pastor **Molly** in small group settings as she begins her time in leadership here.

This move becomes official at Annual Conference in June. **Molly's** first Sunday with us will be June 28. Please keep **Molly** and her family, Pastor **Methodist** and our church in your prayers.

Peace in Christ,

F. Asbury

Pastor Parish Relations Committee chairperson

Sample Communication

[Last email of outgoing pastor/how our relationship will change]

Dear Church Family,

Since I love to have the last word, let me share a few thoughts before my departure as your pastor. I included some of these thoughts in the letter to the congregation that appeared in this week's e-newsletter, but I thought I would spend some more time reflecting with you on how our relationship will change after this Sunday.

Many of you know that an essential character of our denomination is the itinerant ministry. While changes in clergy leadership are inevitable, we are fortunate to be in a system in which pastoral succession occurs efficiently, without extensive interim periods or gaps in pastoral coverage. At the same time, this efficiency can cause some natural tensions.

What that means is that as quickly as you say good bye to me, you will be greeting your next pastor. Rev. **Molly Methodist** will be in the church office Wed., June 22 and Thurs., June 23 and will preach June 26. Due to an already scheduled vacation, she will be absent Sun., July 3 but Lay Servant **Marcus Methodist** is leading in worship that Sunday. There are many benefits to such a rapid pastoral transition, but it does become incumbent on the congregation and the outgoing pastor to make appropriate space and time for grieving and discovering what their forthcoming relationship will be like.

So, I offer to you some guidelines to navigating this awkward space. Many of these ideas were discussed with all pastors making a move at our conference's Right Start workshop in May. I realize that many of you in this congregation have gone through pastoral transitions in the past, but, this is my first time and the process of writing this statement and sharing it with you is a beneficial exercise.

What will it mean for me to no longer be your pastor?

Simply put, it means that I will be released from the responsibility of preaching, leading, and providing pastoral care for this particular congregation. It will no longer be appropriate for me to do weddings and funerals at **First UMC**, and I will not be involved with the future direction of this church. In other words, when pastoral matters arise among you, there is no expectation that I will be involved in it. And when major decisions are to be made regarding the church's future, I will in no way be a part of these discussions.

Does that mean that any communications with me are inappropriate?

Though I will no longer be your pastor, we will continue to be brothers and sisters in Christ. As part of Christ's body, we will still be responsible for rejoicing in each other's triumphs and bearing each other's burdens. I welcome updates on how you and your family are doing, just as I know you would welcome such news from me. But here are some guidelines for discerning what news to share with me. 1) Make sure that your new pastor already knows the news you would share with me; 2) Make sure that the news is of a public nature and already available for general knowledge; 3) Make sure that the news is not of a confidential nature, such that it would best be kept in the context of a pastor-parishioner relationship. If those three criteria are met, then I am open to sharing with you the critical life-stage moments that make life so rich and compelling. Simply remember that there should be no expectation that I will respond to you as anything more than a fellow sister in Christ.

Do I want to hear “how things are going at the church?”

This community has been a part of my vocational discernment and call to ministry. Therefore, **First UMC** will always have a special place in my heart. I will be praying for God’s spirit to lead you into what I know will be a bright, faithful future. But again, I would ask you to use the following criteria in discerning what kinds of church news to share with me: 1) Have you, for whatever reason, refrained from sharing this news, or your opinions regarding the news, with the new pastor? 2) Are you seeking my opinion or feedback regarding this news? 3) Are you sharing this news with me simply to draw a contrast between how things were done under my leadership? If the answer to any of those questions is yes, then it is truly wisest to refrain from sharing with me any news about what is happening at the church.

How does Facebook figure into our new relationship?

There are many schools of thought on how Facebook plays a role in pastoral ministry. I am Facebook friends with many of you, and have enjoyed interacting with you through it. We often use it to share with others a glimpse into our personal and family lives, and I have used it to celebrate the ministries of **First UMC**. We must remember that the persona we project via Facebook is often a one-dimensional, largely optimistic rendering of how things are actually going. Therefore, to say you have a Facebook “friend” is quite different from the kinds of intimate, deep “friendships” you might have with a person face to face.

Because our “virtual” relationships will never be a suitable substitute for genuine personal interactions, and must never rise to the level of relationships you develop with your pastor and others in the church, I see no need to “unfriend” any of you who are currently “friends” with me on Facebook. You will begin to notice that after my departure, many of my posts will primarily be about the establishment of my new life in **Townville** and ministry throughout the conference. And again, because of the nature of Facebook, most of those “updates” will be largely positive. Please know that those posts will never be meant to denigrate the fruitful, sacred time we have shared together.

What will be my relationship with the new pastor?

All clergy in the United Methodist Church are ordained into a covenant communion, in which we support each other as colleagues in Christ. **Methodist** and I will likely be in conversation together periodically over the months to come, but they will mostly be prompted by her initiative to contact me, rather than my intrusion into her work. The bottom line is that I will do everything I can to ensure her successful start as your new pastor, and I will be available to her for whatever she needs. Pastor **Methodist** is an immensely talented pastor. Her appointment here is a blessing to you.

Your future is bright.

One of the things I was most grateful for shortly after my arrival as your pastor **seven** years ago is there was a real interest in making a difference in how we do ministry. For that reason, I was given a great deal of permission to make some hard but necessary changes. The fact that you welcomed my leadership and my ideas so warmly and openly is a testament to the amazing hospitality and readiness of this congregation. My prayer for you is that you would offer Pastor **Methodist** that same hospitality and grace to be your next spiritual leader. By pressing on to continue the vision that God has established for us, you honor our work over the past **seven** years.

I am absolutely convinced that God’s Holy Spirit will continue to work among you, and that the future of **First UMC** and our broader community is a bright one indeed. I have been so honored to

be your pastor. Thank you for allowing me into the sacred and holy spaces of the intentional community of Christ that is **First UMC**.

In Christ+
Pastor

Change-Over Zone (Pastoral Transition) FAQs

These are sample Frequently Asked Questions to share with the congregation as you work through the pastoral transition.

1. When do these changes take effect?

Pastor Wesley's last Sunday at *Church* is anticipated to be in late June. The next Senior Pastor's first Sunday will be in early July.

2. How does the appointment process work in the United Methodist Church? Will we choose our next pastor?

The bishop is given the responsibility of making all pastoral appointments. We are in the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church, which is served by Bishop Robert Farr. Bishop Farr appoints all clergy in Missouri, and these appointments are made official at Annual Conference which meets the first week in June. The Bishop and his cabinet will look at the appointment needs throughout the state, taking into consideration the needs of each church, the gifts and talents of each pastor, etc.

Our Pastor Parish Relations Committee (PPRC) will consult with our District Superintendent, *insert name*, about the appointment process and communicate the desires of our church, but the role of PPRC is advisory only. Our District Superintendent will report the advice of the PPRC to the Bishop and Cabinet.

The chair of our PPRC is *insert name*. Please direct any questions that you have regarding the process to *her/him* at [*insert email address*](#).

3. How will this change impact the mission & vision of our church?

The mission and vision of our church will not change. *Pastor Wesley* has been an outstanding leader for *Church* but the mission and vision of the church is carried out by the congregation. We have strong leadership. The capable leadership of the current pastors, staff, and lay members will continue during the transition.

4. How will this change impact the tenure of our church staff?

We anticipate that all staff will stay in their current positions. Our church staff is hired internally and hiring decisions for the staff beyond the pastors are not directed by the Conference.

5. Will there be a reception for *Pastor Wesley*?

We will hold a thank you and farewell reception for *Pastor Wesley* this summer. *He/she* has walked alongside many of us as we experienced our moments of greatest joy and deepest sorrow. This will be a heartfelt reception where we can share our appreciation and well wishes with *him/her*. More details will be shared in the coming months.

6. How will *Pastor Wesley* interact with the next pastor, both during the transition and after?

Pastor Wesley will have many opportunities to talk with and mentor the next pastor that will be appointed. We expect to have ongoing discussions over the next few months with our lead staff and the next pastor.

7. **Will *Pastor Wesley* still have a relationship with our congregation?**

For the good of the church, it is necessary for *Pastor Wesley* to allow the new pastor to build relationships and establish credibility without interference or divided loyalties. *He/she* has always told us that we must be committed to the mission of our church, regardless of who the pastor may be.

8. **How can I make the transition easier for the new pastor?**

We ask that you keep an open heart and mind through this process. It is an anxious but hopeful time for everyone. Remember, this is a learning process for both the pastor and the congregation and there will be challenges along the way. The first few weeks after the arrival of a new pastor will involve getting to know one another. The new pastor will then begin working with church leadership and understanding expectations and the culture of the church. Change is difficult, but it is also a chance to revitalize, refocus, and recommit to the mission and life of the church.

If you are involved in church ministries or activities, continue doing so. Throughout the history of *Church*, the strength has been in the people, not just the leadership.

9. **What can I do today to help with this transition?**

The most important thing we can do is pray. Pray for the people of our church, for *Pastor Wesley*, for the Bishop and Cabinet, and for our pastors, staff, and leadership. Pray that God would lead us through this transition. Reaffirm to yourself and others that this is God's church. As in everything, we can expect great things from our gracious God.

Appropriate Transparency and Oversharing

- Process your current issues privately.
- Cultivate an inner circle – these are not members of your congregation. Great options for your inner circle include professionals trained in working with clergy.
- Share publically only what you have already processed privately.
- Share what will help the listener, not you (e.g., avoid “vaguebooking”).
- Recognize the difference between being vulnerable versus oversharing.
- Be aware of your emotional state when communicating.
- Oversharing mistakes include: sharing before you have finished processing what you had experienced. Or, making your post, talk, sermon, illustration more about you than the congregation/audience.
- Work with your paid and volunteer staff regarding the local social media culture and expectations regarding online presence.