

WHO SHOULD BE TEACHING THESE PROTOCOLS?

The outgoing pastor and the Committee on Pastor-Parish Relations have the responsibility of teaching the congregation about the issues and protocols related to pastoral transitions. An article or series of articles in the church newsletter alerting members of the congregation to the emotions and issues of a pastoral transition may be helpful.

PRACTICAL ISSUES TO KEEP IN MIND

Pastors have different styles of leadership and congregations have different personalities. The new pastor is not expected to be a clone of the former pastor.

The official date of transition is July 1st. Salary and benefits, if any, are paid through the month of June. Health Care Program costs are a cost to the congregation and do not change with a change in pastor.

Moving can be accomplished in the week before and the week after July 1st.

Pastors need to move as soon as the parsonage they are moving into is vacant. Remember there is probably a pastor waiting for you to vacate your parsonage so that he or she can move. There will very likely be even more pastors in the line.

Painting and redecorating need to be done after the move. Even though this is somewhat inconvenient, moving of subsequent pastors must not be held up by painting, etc.

In the event that major work must be done on a parsonage to make it livable, temporary living arrangements for the pastor and parsonage family must be made. The responsibility for making the arrangements lies with the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee of the receiving congregation. The cost of these interim living arrangements is to be borne by the receiving congregation.

At the request of your District Superintendent, Pastor Transition Consultants will assist congregations with transitions in clergy leadership. This transition process involves 2-3 meetings between incoming and outgoing pastors and the receiving congregation. Contact your District Superintendent for more information.

Protocols

Relating To Transitions in Clergy Leadership



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This brochure is intended to outline and give direction to pastors and congregations regarding issues connected to transitions in clergy leadership. It is the responsibility of the pastor (both outgoing/former and incoming/current) and the Pastor-Parish Relations committee to teach the congregation about the issues and protocols of pastoral leadership transitions.

Protocol, generally defined as etiquette, delineates proper and professional behavior among pastors. It is a generally ill-defined area of potential cooperation and conflict between colleagues. A pastoral move can be a source of good or ill feelings between colleagues. The following is a guideline to facilitate cooperation and good feelings between former and new pastors, and health for the parish in question:

WHY PROTOCOL?

First and foremost, a clear understanding of protocol is vital for serving the needs of the congregation. The people of any congregation need to be clear about who their pastor is, and the new pastor needs to be able to build the pastoral relationship with her/his new congregants. The needs of the people require clear understanding and boundaries between the present and former pastor.

Protocol also serves the needs of the fellowship of pastors, who must respect each other's boundaries and honor each other's pastorates. Relationships of mutual respect and support are vital to a connectional denomination. Pastors who stay involved in former congregations are displaying a lack of respect for their colleagues.

BOUNDARIES – A SENSITIVE AREA

Every leaving or former pastor must respect the boundaries. Former pastors need to be clear to themselves

and to their congregations that, after the move, the pastoral relationship ends. An outgoing or former pastor must communicate that, "I can be your friend, but I cannot be your pastor." The closer the geographical proximity of the new and former pastors the greater the need to be clear about the boundaries, and about who is and who is not the pastor in each congregation.

If people from their former parish contact them because they think of the pastor as a friend, the pastor must tell them they will not listen to reports on the church or the new pastor. Even if some part of the former pastor does want to know how the old church and their successor pastor are doing, it is clearly wrong and undermining to encourage such reports.

"But can't I be invited back to help officiate at a wedding or funeral for people I have known and loved for so long?"

A former pastor cannot perform pastoral functions for former parishioners or their families, whether in the church or in outside functions, because that is just a betrayal of the boundaries. That being said, people may ask their new pastor to invite a former pastor to help officiate at a wedding or funeral. When former pastors are invited to participate in such events they do so in an assisting role. It is the present pastor's prerogative whether to initiate the invitation and how to define the cooperation with the former pastor. Family members or funeral directors do not make contact with former pastors. The contact is made by the current pastor.

GRIEF & PASTORAL TRANSITIONS

There is a grief process on the part of both the clergy and the members of the congregation losing its pastor. This is true even if the relationship between the pastor and parish has been less than ideal.

In the time between the announcement of leaving and the actual leaving, the transition and its issues need to be talked about openly. Clergy should not put off saying goodbye. Clergy should not act as if nothing has changed. Something *is* changing in the clergy person's life; something *is* changing in the congregation's life. This needs to be acknowledged and worked with.

It is important to remember that the grieving process does not end with the actual departure of the pastor. It goes on and affects the development of relationships with the new pastor. The new pastor is also still grieving about her or his loss. Both the congregation and the pastor need to be aware that these dynamics are at work.

WAYS TO WORK THROUGH GRIEF

A congregation-wide farewell event needs to be held. This can be done close to the time of the actual move. However, this is not the only time that goodbyes are expressed.

A "ritual of transition" during the Sunday worship is a good idea. Resources for such a ritual are available in the United Methodist Book of Worship.