

# The ABCs of the SPRC

*DS Tina Blake and DS Sarah Schlieckert*

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**Affirm:** The SPRC affirms the pastor's and staff's performance; the committee's role is not merely receiving and relaying complaints and concerns

**Bridge:** The SPRC is the bridge between the pastor and the congregation, helping persons communicate in healthy ways, in keeping with the guidance of Matthew 18:15-17.

**Confidentiality:** All SPRC meetings are "closed" meetings and all information is to be held in confidence. Any need for public statements or sharing should be discussed by the SPRC and communicated by/through the chair or their designee. The SPRC may not meet without the approval and/or presence of the pastor, or that of the DS. If a church is operating with a Unified Board, the portion of their meetings and work covering SPRC topics should be (1) held as a closed meeting, generally at the end of their general meeting and (2) minutes be kept separately from the rest of those for meetings.

**Deliver:** The SPRC is tasked with delivering all pertinent information to the pastor, though it is not the SPRC's job to share every complaint they hear. The SPRC encourages and supports members, staff and clergy to address disagreements appropriately. The SPRC resists being triangulated between these persons.

**Evaluate:** The SPRC is tasked with evaluating all staff members. This may occur through the SPRC directly completing all staff evaluations, or developing and overseeing a process through which staff evaluations are completed by appropriate supervisors.

**Frequently Meet:** The SPRC must meet at least quarterly (as required by the UMC's Book of Discipline). It is a best practice to meet *monthly* with a new pastor.

**Grace:** The SPRC handles all matters in ways which reflect God's grace given to each of us and our call to show that same grace (and love) to others.

**Hire:** The SPRC is tasked with the hiring of staff. They have ultimate authority over the hiring and firing of staff, though they may designate working teams or specific processes to guide these tasks. Neither the pastor nor any other staff or committee may hire staff without SPRC authorization.

**Identify:** The SPRC works with the pastor(s) to identify goals each year, and to check in regularly on the status and progress of achieving those goals. The SPRC also works with the pastor to determine action steps to achieve identified goals or to address areas of concern.

**Just:** The SPRC acts in a just manner when handling difficult situations. This includes listening to all involved parties without bias and prayerfully and wisely discerning a path forward through various situations. The SPRC is encouraged to reach out to the DS for assistance when challenging situations arise, for guidance in making both just and gracious decisions.

**Knowledgeable:** The SPRC chair and members make every effort to be knowledgeable on topics over which they have authority, including pastoral compensation levels and policies, tax matters, HR best practices and how to resolve conflicts in healthy and Christian ways. The SPRC reaches out to the DS or relevant experts for assistance and guidance when needed.

**Love:** The SPRC handles all matters in love. An excellent summary of what this looks like in practice can be found in 1 Corinthians 13, where Paul describes how the Christian community is called to love each other.

**Mediate:** The SPRC acts as the mediator between individual congregants, staff and the pastor. Persons with concerns should, following the guidance of Matthew 18:15-17, be encouraged to address their concerns specifically with the person. The SPRC (specifically the chair or a designated member) may be needed to help provide structure or support for those types of conversations. The DS can also be a good resource for guidance and sometimes direct involvement when a situation rises to the point of needed informal or formal mediation.

**Never:** Members of the same family living in the same household may not serve together on the SPRC, according to the UMC's Book of Discipline. This means that spouses and parents/children (living in the same household, particularly) should not serve overlapping terms. If such persons are by other positions (such as lay member to annual conference) serving at the same time, a formal policy to have one person recuse themselves from the SPRC is one way to remedy the situation until the positions can be formally adjusted.

**Official:** The chair of the SPRC is the official spokesperson for the committee. As the work of the SPRC is confidential, no member of the committee (nor the pastor) should report out or answer questions about the work of the SPRC.

**Personnel:** The SPRC acts as the Personnel Committee of the church, and as such has responsibility to make sure the basic personnel functions of the church are completed (employment paperwork, evaluations/reviews, determination of compensation and benefits, job descriptions, hiring processes, etc.). The SPRC will often have to work on these pieces in cooperation with other committees, especially the Finance Committee.

**Questions:** The SPRC receives questions from the congregation that relate to the role of the pastor and staff, the appointment process, and other related topics. Answers to such questions should be given only after formal

determination, consensus or guidance from the SPRC. Support for answering questions on these topics can also be requested from the DS.

**Recommends:** Each year the SPRC recommends whether or not the pastor should be reappointed for the following conference year. These recommendations (called advisories) are due toward the end of the calendar year, to guide the work of the Bishop and cabinet in the making of appointments to begin the following July 1.

**Support:** The SPRC supports the pastor(s) and staff in both formal and informal ways. This can include observing Clergy Appreciation Month (October), Administrative Professional's Day (Wednesday of the last full week of April) or other special days such as birthdays, etc. Support also includes making sure clergy and staff are taking time off for sabbath and vacation as well as sick and personal days as their contract provides. Finally, the SPRC regularly considers any specific needs or supports which would be helpful for specific clergy and staff in specific seasons (personal or professional) and seek to provide such support in gracious and appropriate ways.

**Trust:** The SPRC works with the pastor and staff to build a relationship of trust. This includes maintaining confidentiality, reaching out to the DS when a situation exceeds the committee's skill, capacity, knowledge or experience, and surrounding each other and their shared ministry with prayer.

**Unity:** The SPRC works with the Pastor to promote a spirit of unity and cooperation within the congregation and between the clergy, staff and congregation. While unity does not require that all are always in agreement it does require that disagreements are handled graciously, respectfully and in ways which build up each other and their shared ministry.

**Vigilant:** The work of the SPRC is vitally important to the clergy, staff and congregation and it is important that the committee remains vigilant in the work before them, never failing to meet regularly, keep learning in areas they

oversee, and reaching out to the DS and other appropriate experts in areas which are beyond the committee members' experience and knowledge.

**Window:** The SPRC provides a window into the congregation for the Pastor. While the SPRC meetings are not merely opportunities to unload a list of grievances, or things "everyone is saying," the SPRC does need to help the pastor(s) have an accurate understanding of the mood, sense, concerns and affirmations of the congregation. Clergy and staff should not, as a general rule, be surprised by feedback given during their annual reviews/evaluations, but rather have ongoing conversations with the SPRC and supervisors around areas of concern as well as areas of excellence.

**Excellence:** The SPRC expects excellence from the pastor and staff, and works to provide the best possible support, working conditions and compensation to support excellent ministry. Areas of excellence are affirmed regularly and specifically, and areas for growth also identified, also with specific examples, and together steps to improve performance are identified and agreed upon.

**Yearly:** The SPRC completes yearly evaluations and advisory forms, due towards the end of the calendar year (due dates vary by conference).

**Zero:** The SPRC has zero tolerance for disrespect on behalf of or directed towards the pastor, staff or congregation. All persons are expected to conduct themselves in mature, gracious and Christian ways. The DS can help provide specific supports when an SPRC, pastor and congregation are struggling to work together in this way, including the direct support of the DS, conflict medication resources, or other guidance as may be helpful.