

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

“The itinerant system is the accepted method of The United Methodist Church by which ordained elders, provisional elders, and associate members are appointed by the bishop to fields of labor. All ordained elders, provisional elders, and associate members shall accept and abide by these appointments. Bishops and cabinets shall commit to and support open itinerancy and the protection of the prophetic pulpit and diversity.” Par. 338, The Book of Discipline 2012.

So begins the section of our Book of Discipline which outlines one of the most significant aspects of the life of the United Methodist pastor. Every actively appointed pastor can share the common story of “Getting the Call”. Sometimes with elation and sometimes deflation. Though at times the experience of such a call is so surprising or unexpected it may seem it was a knee jerk reaction or snap decision; nothing could be farther from the truth. The purpose of this letter is to try to add to our common understanding of how the itinerancy and appointive process are currently being lived out in the California-Pacific Annual Conference. (For a comprehensive read on this topic read The Book of Discipline paragraphs 338-400 and 425-430.)

Assumptions:

Before reviewing the process of itinerancy and appointment making, there are some assumptions that should be named. To begin with, we hold that open itinerancy is a *good* thing. It requires us as a church to be the healthy, growing, changing body of Christ by being open to newness and change. This is the creative process that keeps us relevant. We seek to match the gifts and graces of the clergy with the needs and abilities of ministry settings while at the same time remaining open and inclusive without regard to race, ethnic origin, gender, color, disability, marital status or age. This is a lofty standard, not without challenges, but worthy of a people who claim to be those with “Open Hearts, Open Minds and Open Doors”. We also support intentional movement between districts, conferences and jurisdictions as an additional sign of our connectivity and inclusiveness.

The Appointment Process:

Consultation: Like a good stewardship process, the consultation process is year round and not for just one season or sudden need. The Bishop and cabinet rely on a number of consultative tools to collect information about the local appointment and the pastors of their districts. These are:

1. **Face to Face Meetings:** The primary tool in consultation is a face to face meeting with the District Superintendent (DS) and the SPRC of a local ministry. This might be at the annual Charge Conference, or at the request of the pastor, the SPRC or the DS.
2. **Pastor’s Appointment Request:** This annual form is a tool for tracking the pastor’s years of service in an appointment, family needs and situation, issues and concerns relating to the present and future appointment settings, and the clear statement as to the pastors input as to whether it seems best for the appointment for the pastor to Return, Move or sees Either as viable.
3. **The SPRC Evaluation:** This annual form accompanies the pastor’s form. It provides feedback as to the effectiveness of the ministry relationship, and goals for improvement as well as a

description of the gifts needed and affirmed by the pastoral appointment related to their pastoral leadership.

4. Local Church Profile Form: Each year the local church should update their “Local Church Profile Form” and submit it to the District Office. This provides a critical “Snapshot” of the make-up of the congregation and staffing needs.
5. Tables I, II, III: Are the statistical tables each church submits annually. These tables offer a picture of the health and trajectory of the ministry setting. Information on patterns of membership, professions of faith, stewardship, apportionments, small groups etc. are all indicators as to how the partnership between the pastor and the pastor’s charge is faring.
6. MissionInsite: MissionInsite is an online demographic tool subscribed to by the California-Pacific Annual Conference. This tool provides critical information about the changing nature of our communities and informs the direction the pastoral leadership and ministry community should take to remain relevant and missional to the neighborhood which surrounds them.
7. The Superintendents Appointment Census: Each year the District Superintendent performs a comprehensive “Census Review” of each local church and the pastors serving. This census is a collection of the data from all the sources mentioned above, as well as personal notes from conversations with the pastors and lay leadership. Characteristics of the congregation, concerns and affirmations are listed to be shared with the Bishop and the entire cabinet during the cabinet sessions prior to the appointment making cabinet meetings. The census is also a critical tool passed from the outgoing DS to the incoming DS, enabling the most informed transition possible.

Appointment Discernment:

1. Retirement Requests: The first order of business when beginning the appointment discernment process is to identify those churches that are “Clear Openings” due to a retirement. Retirements are granted when a clergy person who has reached qualified retirement stage sends a written letter of request for retirement to the Bishop at least 120 days prior to the date the retirement is to take effect (See paragraph 358 in The Book of discipline 2012 for full details).
2. Leaves of Absence/Changes in Conference Relationship: Paragraphs 353-357 also define additional categories that pastor’s might fall into which creates a clear opening for an appointment in the church they serve for the coming appointment year.
 - a. Filling a clear opening: At this point, the question is asked; “What are the needs of the church and what pastors are best suited to fill those needs?” This is where the communal knowledge of the Bishop and Cabinet comes into play. The goal is to put the right person in the right place. The initial resource for this is the list of those who reported they are ready to move, those returning from leaves, and those newly commissioned. Sometimes, the best qualified person is currently serving a church and not seeking to move. In this case the discernment is most challenging, as it requires an assessment of the impact of loss to one church and the depth of need in another church.
 - b. Practical Issues: While it is true that all clergy sign on to be open to itinerate, we live in a day of dual careers, and dependent family members etc. The difficulty is discerning when a move is “inconvenient” and when it might be “catastrophic” to a family system. Every effort is made to work through practical issues in a move, keeping a priority on

open itinerancy and the value of the pastor living within the community in which they are called to serve.

- c. Discernment Prayer: Once a pastor has been selected for an appointment, the Bishop invites the host DS to pray for God's discernment in the appointment. After a time of prayer and listening to God's Spirit, the Bishop asks each DS if they felt a confirmation of the appointment in the discernment prayer time. If not, the process repeats. If the response is yes, the appointment is "discerned". The next step is: "The Call".

Making The Appointment:

1. The Call: The call to a pastor who is to be informed they have been discerned for a new appointment in most cases comes from their current DS. If it is to a new district, the current DS calls to inform the pastor they will receive a call from another DS. If the appointment is to another church in the district in which they currently serve, their current DS makes the call.
2. Timeline: The common timeline for the pastor to receive the news of a move, and share this with their family and be in a time of prayer is from 12-24 hours. In some circumstances a longer timeline is needed.
3. Introductory Meeting: When an appointment is moving forward, the DS sets an introductory meeting with the SPRC of the new pastoral charge. Note this is an "introductory meeting" not an "interview" where the SPRC selects and votes on a clergy candidate.

Announcing the Appointment:

1. When an appointment is set in place, a letter of announcement is sent to sending and receiving congregations for distribution, and to be presented usually by the SPRC Chair in the next Sunday service. This is intended to take place simultaneously so that each congregation becomes aware of the changes at the same time.
2. No appointment is final until confirmed by the Bishop at the Annual Conference Session.