



Crossroads District

Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church

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DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT
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June 26, 2020

Dear Crossroads District Staff Parish Relations Committee Chairs,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ:

I write to you to express my awareness, concern, and support in light of the multiple issues looming in society that have had a particular impact on our roles to support the pastor and congregation relationship. Among the many issues that have directly impacted our church operations, the Coronavirus pandemic that mandated closure of all public gatherings for several months has affected churches the most. This forced churches to figure out alternative ways to worship, church operations were impacted, extra precautions and concerns have been raised for reopening, and there has been more than normal to contend with. A recent rise in cases in some of our local areas and the number of members of our churches at risk for complications from this virus has further complicated our considerations. Our own Bishop Robert Schnase has encouraged pastors to work carefully with their leadership teams and decide what to do based on regulations from national and local authorities, but there have been differing opinions and feelings about reopening in some congregations. Pastors have been at the heart of most of these conversations and they have been under tremendous pressure to lead during this time. Some of your congregations have had the additional challenge of experiencing appointment changes during this time as well which has made things more difficult.

So my message is an appeal to Staff Parish Relations Committees to be in special support of your pastoral leaders during this time. You have been elected because you are trusted to care for the relationship between the staff and the congregation. Times of perilous crisis such as the present bring a special spotlight on the importance and the true blessing of your role to attend to this pastor and congregation relationship. I would like to offer some recommendations based on conversations we are having in Cabinet to assist your work in these unique circumstances that I hope you will consider.

Pastoral Assessments were ordinarily due by this time, but these are not being required in the same way for this year. The Assessment process that we have been using for the last couple of years has been designed to assess the pastor/congregation relationship under ordinary conditions of ministry. Obviously, this has not been an ordinary year and much of our attention has been placed upon making dramatic adjustments to how we function as the church. Since this has been such an unusual year, an assessment is not being required in its usual form this year. We have come up with some alternative questions to help your leaders to have a balcony view conversation about how your pastoral and congregational leaders have handled the pandemic together. Here are some questions that we suggest to assist this conversation:

1. What kind of adaptive learning did we have to do during this time?
2. What did we do well?
3. What did we not do so well?
4. What did we learn about ourselves during this time?
5. What do we need to do going forward to remain effective?

If you want to use the normal assessment form this year, a copy of the form is included with this letter. If you want to submit your completed assessment notes, you can do so by September 1st before we begin our Fall activities and functions. But again, you are not being required to do so.

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For those of you who are experiencing **pastoral appointment changes**, please know that the Bishop has understood this as an appointment season in general. Due to challenges to schedules, closures, movement in society, and other dynamics already mentioned above, we understand if you have to make adjustments to ending and starting dates, moving dates, and more for the outgoing and incoming pastor during this season. The only constant is that the official appointment and salary for the outgoing pastor ends on June 30, 2020, and the new appointment and salary officially begins for the incoming pastor on July 1, 2020. We will be finalizing compensation forms soon since, in some cases, our introductions could not be held in person.

Please also give special consideration to the need of **vacation time for your pastor** right now. Some pastors had to work at an accelerated pace for extended hours during the pandemic to navigate technology, engage difficult conversations, exercise pastoral ministry with extreme limitations, and endure additional personal issues and stress during these last few months. Time to detach, rest, and seek spiritual renewal is critical to help pastors sustain and be at their best in ministry. I hope you will support your pastor to take some time away and help the congregation understand the pastor's need for such time.

Finally, as you lead in this time, please know also that I am **praying for you as well** as additional demands have also been made of you. Thank you for your willingness to engage and absorb the unusual pressures that you have had to withstand in your role. Please know that you offer a tremendous and precious service to the life and well-being of your congregation by caring for the staff-congregation relationship. On behalf of our Bishop, our Cabinet, and our pastors, thank you for offering your faithful Christian service in this way. Please know also that you are not alone in your work. It is my pleasure to support you in any way that is possible through the resources of the District office. Please do not hesitate to contact me.

May God's, peace, and hope strengthen, comfort, and guide you through these days of your special ministry.

Most Respectfully and Sincerely,

Marcus

Rev. Dr. Marcus A. L. Freeman, III

Superintendent

Crossroads District Office

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