

The Process of Appointment-Making
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October 31, 2018

Cabinets take the work of appointment-making very seriously. Pastoral leadership in a local church has a profound affect on how strong that community's witness can be. It is seldom the case that a local church will rise above the level of its pastoral leadership, at least for an extended period of time. It is also true that a change in appointment affects local churches, the pastor, their families and the mission surrounding them.

Consultation (see *Book of Discipline*, paragraph 426) is the United Methodist way of placing pastors and local churches together. It is the process by which a bishop and district superintendent "confer" with the pastor and the committee on pastor-parish relations. The criteria for this discernment are listed in the *Book of Discipline*, paragraph 427. We have not found it appropriate to have extended conversations with laity who are not members of SPRC about appointments of pastors. This disempowers the leaders who are actually authorized to do this work.

As Paragraph 426 notes, "consultation is not merely notification." In practice, the cabinet does not reach closure on an appointment without taking seriously two other conversation partners—the authorized lay leaders (SPRC) and the pastor. When consultation has been robust, extended and serious, there is a more informed and healthier decision. And, in the end, consultation is "advisory," meaning, the final decision is lodged in the office of bishop working with the appointive cabinet. There has been an emphasis on longer appointments in recent years and both laity and clergy feel the benefit of this extended ministry together when it is an effective one. Demands on the supply of prepared clergy to serve our larger, more complex churches have put pressure on longer appointments.

In the Florida Conference, the appointive cabinet includes the eight district superintendents, the director of new church development, the assistant to the bishop, and the bishop. Our process of consultation is an extended season each year. In **December**, we meet for twenty-four hours to reflect on potential changes in each district. In January, pastors and congregations complete profiles (BOD, 427), which describe the unique histories, callings, gifts, challenges, resources and hopes of each. District superintendents are encouraged to set aside and publicize days when they can listen to pastors and pastor-parish relations committees reflect on where they are. The importance of this step cannot be overemphasized—it is an unhurried time for exploratory conversation, and it comes early in the process of consultation and appointment-making.

At the end of **January** we have a compiled list of all of those churches that anticipate a change in pastoral leadership, and also a list of those pastors who are seeking a change in their appointment. Changes can be precipitated by retirement, illness, conflict, decline, a change in calling, family circumstances, or simply the sense that one's work in a particular community has been completed. Change can be initiated by either the local church or the pastor, or the bishop and appointive cabinet.

In **February** we seek to surface three to four names for every local church that anticipates a change. We hold each other accountable in the practice of open itineracy, that is, that women and ethnic minority pastors are considered for placement along with men and Anglos. In Florida, we are gifted with an increasing number of ethnic pastors who represent our global church. Care in preparing pastors and churches for cross-cultural ministry is particularly

important. The itinerant system simply means that we go, as clergy, where we are sent (BOD, 338). We also affirm that open itineracy gives a greater degree of freedom to God's Spirit for guidance and discernment in matching the gifts of pastoral leaders with the needs and opportunities of local churches. Through this process we feel God's dreams for a community might be fulfilled by a polity that honors a pastor's willingness to be sent and a congregation's willingness to receive by the grace of God and through the appointment making process.

In **March**, having conducted conversations with both pastors and pastor-parish relations committees, the appointive cabinet meets again to "project" appointments. We are required to have an appointment for every elder in full connection. We attempt to make full-time appointments of local pastors, a category of leaders who attend the course of study rather than seminary, but we are not required to do so, and this is a function of capacity. Deacons extend the ministry of the local church in the world, and seek out their own appointments, which are then blessed by the cabinet.

In this March meeting, we ordinarily place those who are graduating from seminary (with a Master of Divinity degree) first. We then work with churches by a declining salary range, in order, but we do not appoint clergy based on salary. We seek to help clergy in not losing salary and compensation when they transition to a new appointment, but this is sometimes a factor of capacity. Each year a growing number of churches request to have their clergy compensation lowered in order to alleviate budget constraints. This, as one can imagine, has a profound impact on the larger system in which we work and make appointments as it will always negatively impact the pastor who follows a decision to decrease a salary. Logically, it also negatively impacts the local church whose capacity is also decreasing.

Calls are made to pastors and local churches, with the discernment of the bishop and appointive cabinet. If substantive work has been done, these calls have a greater likelihood of being received well. Pastors and local churches have a period in which they can make a request, in writing, of a reconsideration of the appointment. We reflect on these requests when we meet for a day in **April**. This is not a perfunctory meeting; we have made changes based on these requests, but they need to be for missional reasons.

In late April there is an "Announcement Sunday," in which pastors and local churches make public (in the worship services) their appointment for the coming year. These appointments are then distributed on the conference website and in social media later that afternoon, and celebrated at the annual conference meeting in early **June**.

Most recently we have paid more attention to the "onboarding" of pastors in particularly complex settings—some cross-cultural appointments, some large churches, some local churches with a recent history of conflict and complexity. Onboarding is facilitated by an outside resource person and includes meetings with lay leaders, staff and the newly assigned pastor.

The pastor moves to the new assignment at the beginning of **July**. Superintendents participate in the transition by offering expressions of hospitality along with the local churches, and by checking in, at times through visits and at times by phone conversation. The appointive cabinet then holds a virtual meeting in mid-July, as a form of accountability for the support and oversight of the women and men who are beginning new ministries.

The process, which extends over eight months, is intended to offer space for ongoing listening, support, conversation and prayer. Ultimately, our greatest goal in this process is to further the mission of making disciples for the transformation of the world (BOD, 120). The heart of this

mission exists at the local church level and it is for this reason that we spend such time, care and attention on the appointment making process.

+For more on appointment-making, see the document, "Appointment-Making in a Time of Mission" at <https://www.flumc.org/blogdetail/appointment-making-in-a-time-of-mission-2016-3854950>.

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