



United Methodist Churches of Indiana

What is MISSIONAL about Making Pastoral Appointments?

As the 2018 “appointment season” begins to unfold, the following is intentionally provided by Bishop Trimble and the Appointive Cabinet (10 Conference Superintendents in 10 districts) as a way to make pastors and congregation leadership more aware of the process for pastoral appointments in The United Methodist Church in Indiana. All too often, the process can look complex, arbitrary, or even mysterious when left to speculation. But in fact, there is a specific pattern and method in Indiana that may be a surprise to even the most “seasoned” United Methodist. The desired outcome of pastoral appointments is to bring about transformation of lives in the mission field of vital congregations through the Good News of Jesus Christ. The following discussion provides the backdrop for the selection process for the vast majority of full-time pastoral appointments (but is not intended to be a detailed description of the United Methodist appointment process).

Fundamental to much of our MISSIONAL appointment making is the profile work that is done as a collaborative effort in consultation between Conference Superintendents, pastors, and Staff Parish Relations Committees (SPRC). This consultative process is central for the purpose of identifying the well-documented factors of a PROFILE that will be essential for matching the next leader for disciple making ministry. Missional decision making is focused first on the ministry of Jesus Christ. Church can no longer be about what we like, it must be about the One (Jesus) we love.

Whether the pastoral vacancy has been the result of a retirement, a church with a pastor who has been appointed to a different church, a request for pastoral change from the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC), or other factors, a well-documented PROFILE will be central to successfully providing for the next chapter in ministry. The process works from the perspective of effectively filling vacancies, so the church PROFILE tells the story of the prospective congregation and community in an attempt to answer the questions about what kind of pastor is best suited for the next chapter in that particular ministry setting.

The profile will include gathering information about important attributes, values, activities and ministries of the church’s current setting, as well as sharing about characteristics that are desirable for the next pastor to lead the congregation and community well beyond the church walls for the purpose and mission of Jesus Christ. Completed in consultation with the SPRC and the Conference Superintendent of the district, the profile is shared in written form with all the

members of Appointive Cabinet, the Executive Assistant to the Bishop, and Bishop Trimble to prepare for the work of discernment.

Profiles are also a part of the process for pastors. Pastor Profiles take shape in a variety of ways including a “profile form,” summer conversation meetings with the Conference Superintendents, clergy assessment, and indicators for leadership and disciple making outcomes in the ministry setting. In the case of Provisional Elders, Associate Members, and Elders, each pastor has vowed to be fully itinerant (willing to move when so appointed by the Bishop). Itinerancy is expected unless the pastor has filed a “limited itinerancy form” with the Conference Superintendent of the district detailing a request for special consideration, understanding the possible limiting effects if granted. Limited itinerancy requests may be granted but are not guaranteed.

The method of “filling” an open appointment is a discernment process that very quickly is surrounded in prayer. With Bishop Trimble and the Conference Superintendents praying over the attributes and needs identified in the church’s profile, the process for each church appointment includes a time for prayer and a time of silent reflection that the Holy Spirit will guide our understanding and open our hearts and minds to the will of God as a new pastoral leader is identified.

Only after a time of prayer does a discussion begin to take place about naming possible pastors for the profiled church. After a time for discussing and nominating potential pastors, there is another pause for prayer before a vote of recommendation is made and a resulting appointment is made by our bishop. It is not unusual for that process to last an hour or more to arrive at the final selection for a church. In keeping with the prayer focus in our appointive work, lay and clergy are encouraged to lift up the bishop and Appointive Cabinet in prayer in a particular way during this season.

So what is ‘missional’ about all of this?

- We believe that the prayer-filled process leads us to discern God’s will in making appointments that will glorify the work of Christ in a particular ministry setting.
- We believe that missional appointments will be strategic in attempts to match the characteristics of the congregation and community with the gifts and strengths of the pastor to maximize our fruitfulness in the transforming work of reaching people with the Gospel and leading them to become and live as disciples of Jesus. We will expect to be very intentional to pair our brightest and best pastors with churches that have demonstrated a high degree of readiness to make disciples.

Even so, there will likely be challenges to personal assumptions along the way. For example there will, of course, be times when the compensation levels are a minor factor in missional appointment making. And many churches will desire a “young pastor” with a family to live in the parsonage. Missional appointment making is focused on matching profiles and ministry, not ages. More specifically, Bishop Trimble and Cabinet believe the Gospel calls us to make appointments based on the spiritual gifts, emotional intelligence, and personal hunger to lead others to Christ and be His disciples, of our pastors and our congregations, rather than a particular pastor’s “seniority in ministry” or being limited by race, gender, age, or other external factors.

We have heard it said many times that making one good appointment is easy, making one hundred good appointments is much more difficult. In practice, that is very true but we will continue to be in conversation with pastors, local church leaders, and Conference leadership so that we can be in the best possible place to be missional in our appointment making work for the mission of Jesus Christ!

- Larry K. Whitehead, Dean of the Appointive Cabinet
Conference Superintendent serving the North District

[for more detailed appointment making information, you are invited to review paragraphs 338, and 425-428 in the 2016 Book of Discipline]