

## When Your Pastor's Appointment is Ending

### The Ending Begins Immediately

Begin praying for your congregation, for the transition, for your pastor's new appointment, for the pastor who will be appointed as your new pastor.

Work with your pastor to begin planning the transition.

Do not encourage or expect your pastor to begin new initiatives.

As the time draws near, mention the transition with increasing frequency.

### Wrap Up Well

Consult with the pastor to prepare essential information for your new pastor and to be sure important files are up to date. Collection of the information can be distributed among leaders and staff. (See: [TRANSITION CHECKLIST for Appointment Changes](#))

S/PPRC: Ensure that staff job descriptions and evaluations are up to date.

Staff/Ministry Leaders: wrap up work with the current pastor, prepare to introduce the new pastor to your ministry area.

With the pastor, do a walkthrough of the office with Trustees and office help; if applicable, arrange a walkthrough of the parsonage with the pastor, SPRC and Trustees representatives.

### Nurture Good Successor Relationships

Talk about the next pastor only in positive terms.

Avoid making comparisons between the current pastor and the next pastor.

Encourage the current pastor to schedule and spend time with the new pastor to begin sharing information.

### Keep Your Eyes on the Mission

Discourage conversation about the pastor's new appointment; there is no need to discuss the details, observations, plans, etc. of another church's ministry.

Help the pastor to settle as many open issues as possible, including (and especially) staff difficulties.

*"Great is the art of beginning, but greater is the art of ending."*

– Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

## Letting Go of This Pastor and Preparing for the Next

Adapted from an article by church consultant Susan Beaumont at <https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/letting-go-of-this-pastor-and-preparing-for-the-next/>

### Change and Transition

“People don’t resist change — they resist transition.” - William Bridges, *Managing Transitions*

Change is an external event. It is realized in a new outcome: the new pastor, a new worship experience, a new policy, etc. People negotiate such outcomes without much trauma.

Transition is the psychological process people go through when changing from one situation to another, coming to terms with the loss of the old and learning to embrace the new. Transition begins with ending and continues long after the actual change. This is where people struggle.

### Define what is ending and what is not

“When faced with a leadership loss, people often have one of two extreme responses: they pretend that nothing is changing, or they overly dramatize that everything is ending.”

Explore what is actually coming to an end and what is not.

Talk openly about losses and gains. Recognize that some will feel the loss more sharply than others.

### Communicate, communicate, communicate

In times of anxiety and disorientation, people need to be told again and again.

Don’t assume that since the leaders know, all other congregants know too.

Don’t confuse confidentiality with secret-keeping. Some aspects of the transition require confidentiality. Most parts of the process can be shared transparently – who is involved, what practices are being used, where you are in the process, etc.

### Mark the endings

“Don’t just talk about the endings; create actions to dramatize them.”

### Tell the story

A good ending narrative respects the past but does not get stuck there.

Be honest about both triumphs and failures.

Remember God’s faithfulness in past transitions and God’s presence in the new beginnings that followed.

## Healthy Boundaries in Transitions

### No Contact for at Least 1 Year

It is the **STRONG RECOMMENDATION** of the Cabinet that there be no contact between the pastor and the congregation where the appointment is ending for at least one year. As a congregation, you need time to establish relationship with your new pastor. As pastor, she/he needs time to establish relationship with her/his new congregation or new life situation. An explicit period of separation facilitates this change in relationship.

### Special Occasions

When the pastoral appointment ends, the pastoral duties for the congregants are handed to the new pastor.

If, after the 1-year separation, there is a request to co-officiate a wedding, funeral, baptism, or other special occasion, the request must come through the current pastor. If a previous pastor receives a request from a parishioner, she/he is to refer them back to the current pastor.

### Staying “Friends”/ Social Media

Set clear boundaries when communicating with former pastors after their time with you is ended:

- No church talk
- No counseling
- No discipling/mentoring

### Don’t Play the Blame Game

There are many factors that go into pastoral transitions in the United Methodist Church.

Do not place blame for the transition.

Do the important work of ending the current pastorate well and starting the new pastorate well so that the mission of the church continues.

## Communicating Well as the Pastorate Ends

### Communication with the Congregation

Communication with the congregation will take a variety of forms and will be through one-on-one conversations, congregational announcements, meeting agenda items, etc. As you communicate, keep the following in mind:

- Express gratitude for the pastor's ministry among you
- Stay positive
- Share ownership for the change (members of your leadership have worked with the Superintendent in this process)
- Do not blame others for the move
- Communicate what changes (the person in the pastoral role) and what doesn't (mission and ministry)
- Clarify, in spoken and written communication, the new relationship between the pastor and the congregation – be clear that the pastor will not be returning for pastoral roles
- Teach the congregation about closure and boundaries
- Affirm love and friendship while releasing persons from the pastoral relationship
- Be gracious to everyone, especially those who have experienced difficulty

### Communication with the Community

If appropriate, communicate the pastoral transition through community news channels.

*The art of communication is the language of leadership.* – James Humes

## Recognizing the “Lasts”

### The Last Worship

Plan for recognizing and celebrating your time together as pastor and congregation during the last worship service you will share.

“An Order of Farewell to a Pastor” (United Methodist Book of Worship #598) provides a suggested litany, a closing prayer and hymn suggestions. If “An Order for the Celebration of an Appointment” (UMBOW #595) will be used, elements of that can be incorporated in the liturgy of farewell.

In a non-traditional worship setting, the intent of the formal liturgy can be shared informally by the pastor and a lay leader.

### Farewell Reception

Plan an opportunity for the congregation to say “thank you” to the pastor and to send the pastor (and the pastor’s family) to their “next” with God’s blessing.

This can be simple and informal, or elaborate. Share your plans with your pastor so that he/she is not surprised during a time already full of emotions.

Plan the gathering prior to or on the last day of your pastor’s presence with you.

### Last Meetings

Consult with the pastor to plan for the last church council, committee meetings, ministry team meetings, small group meetings, and/or staff meetings.

Include a time of sharing stories; acknowledge both triumphs and struggles; affirm God’s presence and continued work in and through them.

Questions that can be used to prompt the sharing:

- How are we different today from how we were when the pastor came?
- What accomplishments in ministry are we most grateful for?
- What challenges have we overcome and what did we learn from those situations?
- What do we wish we might have done had time and resources allowed?

*God be with you till we meet again... (UMH #672, Jeremiah Rankin)*

## Welcoming Your New Pastor

For additional information, reference The Lewis Center for Church Leadership resource, [50 Ways to Welcome a New Pastor](https://www.churchleadership.com/50-ways/50-ways-to-welcome-a-new-pastor/), at <https://www.churchleadership.com/50-ways/50-ways-to-welcome-a-new-pastor/>.

### Prepare to Welcome Your New Pastor

Open your hearts and decide that you are going to love your new pastor.

Begin praying daily for the new pastor and the pastor's family, as you continue praying for your departing pastor and family.

Appoint a specific liaison to whom the pastor can go for help or information during the transition.

### Make Things Move-in Ready

Make sure the parsonage and pastor's office are clean and ready. Provide help or a cleaning service if needed.

Care for any repairs or painting as convenient for the outgoing and incoming pastor.

Consult the new pastor on any paint, design, or furnishing issues.

Clarify with the new pastor and church officials how moving expenses are paid and all matters related to compensation, benefits, and reimbursement policies.

### Welcome the New Pastor on the First Day

If moving into a parsonage, have a small group on hand to greet the family and help as needed; consult on dietary needs and stock the parsonage refrigerator and pantry with some staples.

On the first day in the office, make sure keys, passwords, and any needed equipment is ready and waiting for the pastor's arrival.

### Continuing the Welcome

Organize a welcome reception on the first Sunday (or another more appropriate time during the first month).

Invite the pastor to ministry and/or social events during the early months.

## As Your New Pastor Begins

### The Role of S/PPRC

Make things “move-in ready”

Welcome! Welcome! Welcome!

Help the new pastor become familiar with the congregation.

Help the new pastor connect with your community.

Meet monthly during the first year to establish communication, set expectations, and give and receive feedback.

### The Role of Staff (paid and unpaid)

Help the new pastor learn your role and responsibilities.

Help the new pastor learn the systems and processes associated with your ministry.

Orient the new pastor to information systems and the way records are kept.

### The Role of the Congregation

Pray for your new pastor.

Extend hospitality: send the pastor a welcome note or email.

Introduce yourself repeatedly. You have one (or a few) name to learn; your pastor has many.

Get to know the pastor: embrace his/her distinct personality, unique set of spiritual gifts and diverse set of experiences.

## Ending Well Resource Sheet

“50 Ways to Improve Pastoral Transitions” – Lewis Center for Church Leadership,  
<https://www.churchleadership.com/50-ways/50-ways-to-improve-pastoral-transitions-2/>

Articles on Pastoral Transitions, Lewis Center for Church Leadership,  
<https://www.churchleadership.com/tag/pastoral-transitions/>

“Letting Go of This Pastor and Preparing for the Next” – Lewis Center for Church Leadership,  
<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/letting-go-of-this-pastor-and-preparing-for-the-next/>

Making a Good Move: Opening the Door to a Successful Pastorate, Michael J. Coyner, Abingdon Press, 2000.

Saying Goodbye: A Time of Growth for Congregations and Pastors, Edward A. White, editor, Rowman & Littlefield, 1990.

Ten Commandments for Pastors Leaving a Congregation, Lawrence W. Farris, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006.