

THE POINT OF APPOINTMENTS

For the Sake of God's Mission in the World

**Peggy A. Johnson, Bishop
The New England Conference of
The United Methodist Church**

I. THE PURPOSE OF APPOINTMENTS

God's mission to love and save our world resulted in the most profound "missional appointment" in history. God sent Jesus Christ, not to take care of an institution, but to proclaim in his life, death and resurrection Good News for all people of the world. This remains the primary point and purpose of appointments!

In His risen power and with the promise that He would always be with us, Christ made the "missional appointment" of sending His followers to "go make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28: 18-20). This is still the primary mission of United Methodist laity and clergy, who our appointment system is meant to serve in a creative and dynamic way.

John Wesley's movement to make disciples of Jesus Christ in England and America in the eighteenth century recovered this highly effective itinerant, missional, sending strategy for the sake of the Gospel. He went out and sent out (appointed) others to all kinds of places where there were people who needed to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. As he moved around, he claimed, as we still do, "the world as our parish."

So the missional appointment system focuses primarily on sending out pastors to team up with congregations for the purpose of reaching out to the people in the "world" of that community with the Good News of Jesus Christ that invites them into discipleship.

This can be a joyful and fulfilling adventure of faith for the clergy who have chosen to be a part of the United Methodist itinerant, sending system, having vowed to "offer themselves without reserve to be appointed," and also for the congregation who, as the continuing witnesses for Christ in their community, benefit from the variety of gifts that a variety of pastors, over time, bring for strengthening that congregation for their mission of making disciples in that part of God's world.

II. THE PRINCIPLES OF APPOINTMENT

Along with the purpose of mission described above, the following major principles undergird the appointment making process:

1. **PRAYER:** This is God's process, not ours! Therefore, the whole process is filled with prayer through which we seek God's will together. Whatever part you play in this process, you are asked to be in prayer concerning the appointment.
2. **CONSULTATION:** Through prayer all of us stay in touch with God in this process. Through consultation the Cabinet stays in touch with the congregation (via the Pastor Parish Relations Committee) and the pastor. While our primary focus is on the mission of Christ in your community, there is also significant sensitivity to the unique needs of the church, the pastor and his or her family. All contacts throughout the year, including your reports, profiles and meetings with your District Superintendent contribute to this sensitivity and knowledge. There is also a more intensive consultation process involving the District Superintendent, the Pastor Parish Committee and the Pastor during a change of appointment.

3. **OPEN ITINERACY:** The focus is always on appointing the best possible pastor for the particular missional needs of the community and church. Therefore, guided by God's will, appointments are made without regard to race, ethnic origin, gender, color, marital status or age (except for mandatory retirement). Special resourcing concerning cross racial/cross cultural appointments will be provided to pastors and congregations by the Conference and Cabinet.
4. **THE LENGTH OF APPOINTMENTS:** In general, we continue to work toward longer tenures in appointments. However, it is possible that any pastor or any church, for missional reasons, may have a change in appointment in any given year. While salary or seniority levels are taken into consideration, they are not the determinative factors in making appointments.
5. **THE NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE STRATEGIC PLAN** adopted in 2017 is built on our vision that "transformed by the Holy Spirit, we will become united in trust as we boldly proclaim Christ to the world." Our mission is "Our mission as the New England Conference is to equip, connect, and support local, regional and global ministries to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." All appointments place major emphasis on the commitments and effectiveness of pastor and congregation as they team together in living out this vision and mission.
6. **THE DISCIPLINE OF 2016:** All appointments are made according to provisions of the Discipline of 2016. The United Methodist Church places pastors through an appointive, "sending" system, not a "call" system. The District Superintendents are an extension of the Bishop's superintending role, and, with the Bishop, compose the Cabinet. The Bishop, after prayer and consultation, makes all appointments for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ in our world.

III. THE PROCESS OF APPOINTMENT

A short definition of this appointment process is: "Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and in consultation with the pastor and congregation, to send the person who can do it, where it needs done." The definition of "it" is Christ's mission in that particular community.

1. Cabinet discusses and lists the missional needs of communities in our conference and missionally strategic appointments.
2. A change in appointment may be requested by a pastor (including a request to retire or move to or from extension ministry) and/or a Pastor Parish Relations Committee. Such a request is part of the consultation process but does not guarantee a move. A change may also be initiated by the Bishop and Cabinet without the request of either a pastor or congregation.
3. When a new appointment is being considered for a church, the missional needs of its community and the profile of the congregation are presented to the Bishop and Cabinet by the District Superintendent of that church. That presentation is based upon her or his experience and consultation (see Principles 2) with that church.
4. The Bishop and the Cabinet then enter into a time of prayer seeking God's guidance for the names of pastors who could bring gifts to the missional needs of that community and church.
5. After prayer, those names are offered and listed, and consideration is given to each pastor's profile and gifts for the mission that is needed. A consensus is sought in this process.
6. Following the discussion with the District Superintendents, the Bishop makes the final decision. Prayer is then offered for the mission of Christ in that community, the church, the pastor, and God's presence in the rest of the process.

7. A District Superintendent will contact the pastor to be appointed and share with her or him information about the community and church and the missional reasons we believe this appointment is God's will.
8. The pastor will be given a reasonable amount of time to pray and reflect on the appointment. Pastors are expected to keep this matter confidential outside of one or two confidants. If a pastor wishes to ask the Bishop and Cabinet to reconsider the appointment, she or he will do so in writing with a primary focus on the missional reasons. Other reasons such as family and personal concerns may also be shared for the requested reconsideration. The Bishop and Cabinet will receive the request for reconsideration and in prayer make the final decision as to whether or not the pastor will be appointed to that appointment.
9. The District Superintendent will then convene the Pastor Parish Relations Committee of the receiving church to introduce the pastor and provide information about the pastor and the missional reasons we believe this appointment is God's will. The Pastor Parish Relations Committee will have the opportunity for discussion and questions with the pastor. If the committee or pastor wishes to ask the Bishop and Cabinet to reconsider the appointment with a primary focus on the missional reasons, they must do so before the close of that meeting. This entire process is to be kept in confidence.
10. If there is a request for reconsideration at the above meeting, the request must be received by the District Superintendent in writing within 24 hours. The Bishop and Cabinet will receive any request from the Pastor Parish Relations Committee for reconsideration, and in prayer make the final decision as to whether or not the pastor will be appointed.
11. When the appointment is moving forward, the District Superintendent will convene the pastor's present Pastor Parish Relations Committee so that the pastor may share that he or she is being reappointed. At that same meeting the District Superintendent will review the church's profile with the Pastor Parish Relations Committee as the first step in preparing to appoint a new pastor to that church. The steps beginning at number 3 will then follow for that now "open" church.
12. The District Superintendent will indicate to the church receiving the new appointment the date on which the public announcement will be made. Within a few days of the announcement a letter will be sent to the congregation by the Pastor Parish Relations Committee introducing the new pastor.
13. At the Annual Conference session, the appointment will be read and celebrated in a service of commitment to our shared mission in Jesus Christ. The newly appointed pastor and a representative of the congregation will be invited to receive from the Bishop the "missional epistle" which describes the reasons this appointment has been made for the sake of God's mission in the world!

Thank you for your prayerful and faithful participation with God and your Bishop and Cabinet in the appointment making process.

If you have any questions, please contact your District Superintendent. If you do not know who he or she is, you may call the New England Conference Center at 978-682-7555 for that information.

“Best of all, God is with us.”
John Wesley