



Pastor

Spiritual Leadership for the Church
in Mission



G U I D E L I N E S

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Spiritual Leadership for the Church in Mission

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with thanks for authors
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Discipleship Ministries

PASTOR

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

ISBN 9781791013677

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Contents

- “A Wreath for Your Excellent Leadership”4**
- Called to Spiritual Leadership5**
- Intentional Discipleship Systems6**
- The Spiritual Life of a Pastor.....7**
- Pastoral Responsibilities9**
 - Spiritual Leader
 - Worship Leader, Preacher, and Teacher
 - Trainer of Laity
 - Administrative Leader and Steward of the Vision
 - Custodian of Institutional Integrity
 - Participant in the United Methodist Connection
 - Community Minister
- Final Thoughts26**
 - Conclusion
- Resources.....28**
 - General Church Print Resources
 - Resources Mentioned in the Text and Other Helpful Resources
 - Web Resources
 - UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

“A Wreath for Your Excellent Leadership”

Thank you for assuming the important and awesome work of providing spiritual leadership to your congregation. The work of church leadership is shared and synergistic. Pastoral and laity leadership combine to provide the widest possible set of gifts, knowledge, abilities, skills, experience, and passions to fulfill our United Methodist mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (*The Book of Discipline*, ¶120). What you do as a gifted, spiritual leader is of vital importance.

Spiritual leadership differs from other forms of leadership in the foundational ways it allows us to live out the vows and promises we make when joining the church: to uphold The United Methodist Church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness.

The first work of all church leaders is to pray for the ministry of the church: local, denominational, and global. Our work is always worshipful work. Our ministry of presence strengthens our church’s ministry and mission. By combining our gifts, knowledge, experience, and passion we can achieve wonderful things together through the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Together, we strengthen our congregation for service to those within the community of faith and beyond. Accepting the mantle of leadership provides a powerful witness to the world of what it means to be a faithful disciple.

Together, we fulfill our mission of making disciples and transforming the world by reaching out and receiving people in the name of Jesus the Christ, relating people to God in covenant community, nurturing and strengthening people in their faith, and equipping and supporting people to live their faith in the world.

The *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation* draw upon a wealth of experience and expertise to provide you with the basic resources you need to do effective, impactful ministry. Each Guideline focuses on a key area of ministry and church leadership, providing information and processes to help your working group—committee, council, board, or other configuration—excel and support all other working groups. See the accompanying Guide to the Guidelines for useful information on how the *Guidelines* and ministry areas work together.

We recommend that each group member read this Guideline and noted paragraphs from the *Discipline*. Take time at meetings to discuss ways to implement identified tasks and responsibilities, plan for the future, and assess and evaluate your work.

The apocryphal book of Sirach reminds leaders to be humble servant leaders, make sure the needs of others are cared for, and then receive “a wreath for your excellent leadership” (Sirach 32:2 NRSVue). We invite you to lead with humility, compassion, patience, and grace, that The United Methodist Church might be a witness to the light and love of Christ for all the world.

Called to Spiritual Leadership

What an exciting, energizing, and challenging time to serve as a pastor in The United Methodist Church! Opportunities exist today to proclaim the gospel and lead people into meaningful spiritual experiences that were not even imagined a few years ago. New methods are available for carrying the message of the gospel and need only to be used.

Pastors are in a unique position to shape and direct the spiritual searching so evident in our culture. People are hungry for what is available through the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is our challenge to make this gospel accessible to them in ways that are meaningful and relevant to their lives. This positive formation leads people to wholeness.

Pastoring is one of the most difficult vocations a person can do. This statement is not meant to be discouraging, but to call attention to a reality too often overlooked. The call to be an effective pastor of a local congregation in today's world offers many challenges and difficulties.

People are busy with work, civic and community responsibilities, children's activities, home duties, and more. Because people are so busy, the connection to God tends to be seen more and more as an optional involvement rather than an experience that is at the very heart of human life. And at the same time, a common quote today is, "I'm spiritual but not religious." Or we may hear, "I'm seeking God, but not a church." When people do become involved in a church today, they want to be in touch with God, to experience Christ's presence in their lives, and to experience a caring community. They bring with them a very high level of expectation about the quality of the experience they will find there.

How then does a pastor respond to this spiritual hunger in the church and in the world and to all its competing claims? How can a pastor become more faithful? What does a good pastor look like? This Guideline will look at your roles and responsibilities as a pastor. While aimed primarily at new pastors and those either on track for, or newly appointed as, elders in The United Methodist Church, this Guideline will also be a review for all who are appointed as pastor in charge.

Intentional Discipleship Systems

As we look out across our churches, the problem is not a lack of people, the problem is the church's inability to see and reach them. As leaders in the church our role is to find clarity in the who & what of discipleship, the how of discipleship formation, but most importantly, the why for being disciples and making disciples. This describes the work of intentional discipleship systems or pathways.

John Wesley said it best in *The Scripture Way of Salvation*: “There is a real, as well as relative, change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel ‘the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us’ producing love to all humankind.”

This love for all humankind is what drives discipleship. A basic desire to love God, love neighbor, love self, and repeat. To go deeper and deeper into the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, and to offer what we have found to those that we meet.

How do we get back to a movement of a deep love for people that drives everything we do? How do we get back to seeing all the people that God calls us to reach?

The world, now more than ever, needs disciples of Jesus, growing in faith, growing closer to Christ, with a clear vision of the world and people as God sees them. Disciples who seek to use their God-given gifts to transform their communities and the world.

Early Methodists started a movement that was focused on growing as disciples, inviting others into a life following Jesus, and helping those in their communities that were hurting the most. At Discipleship Ministries, we believe that we need to get back to these basic understandings of church and discipleship, and back to a concern for improving systems that work for all God's children, moving us toward what God intends for all.

We invite you to explore the SeeAllThePeople suite of resources (www.seeallthepeople.org) designed to equip you and your church for intentional discipleship and community engagement. Although the forms and strategies change, the main goal of the church remains: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. It will always be about discipleship!

The Spiritual Life of a Pastor

All Christian ministry is a response to the love and forgiveness of God manifested in our individual and collective lives. This is the basis for all that we do as Christians. It is crucial that all pastoral activity be deeply rooted in this understanding. The spiritual life of the pastor is the essential foundation that undergirds all the roles and responsibilities of a pastor. All the good ministry you do will flow from your own connection to God.

Second Peter 3:18 urges us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ,” and that is possible only if we remain connected to Christ by attending to our own spiritual lives. So, the first challenge, before helping others grow spiritually, is to attend to our own spiritual connections. The work of pastoral ministry can become such a cycle of busy work that it often seems as though there are not enough hours in the day to do everything. The burnout rate, or the rate at which active pastors have considered leaving or have left professional ministry, has accelerated in recent years. The inability to tend to one’s own spiritual needs and be reminded of the call that brought one into the role of a pastor is certainly a factor in that trend. You may wonder how to give your spiritual life the time it needs and deserves. One answer is to take the time, intentionally and consistently, and then to have a means of accountability.

Expand your devotional practice beyond prayer and Scripture study. While there are many ways you can encounter the presence of God, regular, intentional spiritual practices help us grow in our faith and help us be aware of God and God’s work in unexpected places and ways. A few examples of intentional practices would be worship, journaling, social activism, conversation with Christian friends, participation in a Covenant Discipleship group or other small-group experience, physical activity, and contemplation or meditation. Just be careful not to let visitation, worship preparation, and other aspects of ministry replace the attention you give to your own spiritual development. Bishop Rueben Job’s short book, *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living* has been helpful to many in this area.

One pastor shared that he’d found that the way to become more patient was neither to force himself to be more patient nor to keep saying to himself, “be more patient, be more patient.” The way truly to become more patient was to practice the spiritual disciplines through which God continues to change him and mold him into a more patient person from the inside out.

The practices that you find most helpful will vary according to your gifts and personality. You may benefit from working with a person (friend or spiritual director) or group (sharing or covenant) who will hold you accountable for growing spiritually. To round out your spiritual life, practice at least one discipline that is not your natural tendency. For

instance, introverts may need time relating in a spiritual growth group; extroverts may need the discipline of meditating alone. (See the Resources section.)

John Wesley and the early Methodists emphasized using the means of grace as foundational spiritual practices. It is a wonderful list. You will find it in the *Discipline* (§104). Another helpful resource on the means of grace is *Opening Ourselves to Grace: Basic Christian Practices* (see the Resources section).

In addition to daily and weekly intentional spiritual practices, you will find that longer and more extensive times of personal growth are beneficial. *The Discipline* directs clergy to “engage in continuing education for ministry, professional development, and spiritual formation,” including a “carefully developed personal program” of leave “at least one week each year and at least one month during one year of every quadrennium” (§350.1, .2). These leaves are not to be considered vacation, but professional development, and should be “planned in consultation with their charges or other agencies to which [the pastor is] appointed as well as the bishop, district superintendent, and annual conference continuing education committee” (§350.2). This provision by the church for the pastor’s continuing spiritual formation is a testament to the value placed upon this underlying foundation for ministry.

To ensure that this concern is not overlooked, consider working with the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee to clarify the *Discipline*’s mandate for time for intentional spiritual practices. Plan both short- and long-range spiritual formation opportunities and make them a part of the rhythm of the church year and your life. Bishops and district superintendents affirm the importance of taking this time for spiritual growth and renewal.

Sometimes pastors stand in their own way. One district superintendent found, in talking to pastors, that they had overwhelmingly experienced no resistance from Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committees in seeking time for spiritual renewal. Many committees think that clergy already are taking such time or should be. You need to maintain your spiritual health in order to provide essential and effective spiritual leadership. There are numerous resources to help you do this. (See the Resources section for suggested materials.) The point is to secure the resources that best meet your needs, do the planning and consultation, and make sure that your spirit is nourished. The most difficult but essential part is for a pastor simply to claim the time!

The spiritual life of the pastor is the basis of her or his ministry, but it also provides a foundation for the whole congregation; it is your ministry. If you fail to nurture your own spiritual life, you not only shortchange yourself, but you may become ill-equipped to function well as the spiritual leader in the congregation. It can be a genuine challenge for a pastor to advocate for this need and at the same time find intentional practices where they, themselves, do not have to be an organizer or leader, especially in a group setting. Some spiritual needs may require intentionality outside of the congregation where a pastor is serving.

Pastoral Responsibilities

All pastors have the same general responsibilities that fall into four main categories, described as Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service. This fourfold ministry includes (but is not limited to) preaching; worship; studying and applying Scripture to daily life; celebrating the sacraments; developing congregational leaders; attending to the day-to-day business of the church; caring for the spiritual and temporal needs of the congregation and community; modeling for and leading the congregation in acts of compassion, mercy, and justice; and nurturing the congregation for mission and ministry in the transformation of the world as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ (see the *Discipline*, ¶331).

In addition, the *Discipline* lists at least 15 different responsibilities of the pastor (¶331), and that is only the beginning! In this Guideline, we will cluster those responsibilities into seven major areas:

1. Spiritual leader
2. Worship leader, preacher, and teacher
3. Trainer of laity
4. Administrative leader and steward of the vision
5. Custodian of institutional integrity
6. Participant in the United Methodist connection
7. Community minister

In settings where there are multiple pastors on staff, these responsibilities are often divided in ways that are appropriate to the setting and to the gifts of the various pastors. In a setting where there is a Licensed Local Pastor, a single pastor, or part-time elders, deacons, or lay leaders, these responsibilities may be organized in different ways. No matter the pastoral arrangement, the need for a healthy spiritual life for the leaders of a congregation remains critical.

Spiritual Leader

Christian spiritual leaders are committed to practicing the spiritual disciplines and nurturing their own growth as disciples of Jesus Christ. They participate in Christian community, seek to act in such a way that God's kingdom is evidenced on earth, and lead others into relationship with God through Jesus Christ. *The pastor is a primary spiritual leader in any congregation.* Your responsibility as the pastor is to help individuals, groups, and committees draw nearer to God, to stay focused on God in their lives, and to work together on Christ's mission in the world. Intelligence, skill, and ability are all important and useful in

the work of pastoral ministry, but the usefulness of these characteristics is greatly influenced by the depth of the spiritual life of the person who employs them.

Many people are familiar with the idea of helping people with their spiritual growth. Fewer people have given much thought to helping a group or whole congregation grow through intentional practices that are a part of all the events that happen in a church. All meetings and gatherings shape people. Christian spiritual practice, as a part of these meetings and gatherings, invites corporate openness to God.

John Wesley and the early Methodists always began and ended any time together with prayer and singing. The singing had a teaching function because the hymns they used often expressed major ideas and beliefs of the faith. Such disciplines can help us remember through the whole meeting that we are God's people gathered to do "administering."

Another corporate discipline that some groups have used at the beginning of a meeting or time of gathering is lighting a candle as a reminder that Christ, the Light of the world, is present. Several pastors have reported consecrating Communion elements at the beginning of Church Council or board meetings and then placing the elements at the center of the room during the meeting, again as a reminder of Christ's presence. The meeting ends with Communion being served. Other groups use three questions at the end: What has gone well? What could be improved? Where have we seen God? Or they adapt John Wesley's rules for the United Societies: Have we avoided harm in what we have done? Have we done all the good we could? Have we used the means of grace?

Help the congregation or group stay focused on God by inviting members to think about and adopt corporate spiritual disciplines that encourage them to stay connected to Christ and to remember who we are as the community of faith.

Worship Leader, Preacher, and Teacher

Perhaps there is no greater desire among the laity than that of having pastors who are effective leaders in worship, in preaching, and in teaching Christian doctrine. These qualities go straight to the heart of the work of the pastor and should receive a major portion of your time and effort if you are the sole pastor. They should be deeply grounded in your own spiritual life. For many people, their primary, perhaps only, contact with pastors is in worship, so your effectiveness in these areas is highly significant.

Leadership in Worship

Worship services are the primary time when faith communities come together to praise God. In worship, we remember again who we are: a community shaped by God's incredible love, grace, and forgiveness who is called into Christ's mission in the world. We rehearse what we believe as Christians through the stories of our faith. It is important that you order and conduct the worship service thoughtfully, with attention to the needs of the congregation and community. Several orders of worship are found in *The United Methodist Book of Worship* and elsewhere (see the Resources section). Be sure that bulletins and projected and oral instructions are clear to visitors and newcomers to the faith as well as to regular attendees.

Share worship preparation and planning with the worship chairperson, Worship Committee, and other professional or volunteer worship leaders. Provide them with a copy of *Guidelines 2025–2028: Worship* from the *Guidelines* series. That Guideline suggests numerous ways to involve other staff and laity in planning.

The pastor has a primary role in shaping the worship life of a congregation and the responsibility to see that the worship is inclusive and appropriate theologically, liturgically, visually, and culturally. You may need to help the congregation understand and adjust to changes, such as the use of projection in services or the introduction of new hymns and songs. However, this is too critical a part of ministry to be left only to the pastor.

Consider forming task groups of worship committee persons, staff who work with worship and music ministry, and other volunteer planners to work with you on particular parts of the church year. This provides an excellent opportunity for teaching and for giving many people within the congregation ownership of significant work in the life of the church. Involving laity in worship planning brings diversity and life to the weekly service that it may lack when only one person is doing it all. You surrender neither the authority nor the responsibility for prophetic ministry in the congregation, and you create a fertile place for helping laity develop their faith. This also helps you to model use of the different gifts that God has given to people in the congregation and to plan with a fuller awareness of people's needs.

It is also important to remember that beyond the worship service, worship is an attitude toward life. How will you model and teach this?

The worship service may include one or both sacraments of our faith—baptism and Communion. United Methodists believe that, in baptism and Communion, God is present in a unique way in the common elements: water, bread, and grape juice. These physical elements can reach people in ways that words never will.

Presiding over the sacraments in worship is an important function of a pastor. It is a high honor to enter into people's lives in this way, so it should be done with joy and dignity. We celebrate the great heavenly banquet in Communion and eating the bread of heaven. We receive a new member into the body of Christ in baptism. The 2020 General Conference, which took place in 2024, expanded who may preside over the sacraments, now including ordained elders, deacons, and Certified Lay Ministers who can be assigned (*Book of Discipline* ¶327). Prepare for and preside over baptisms and Communion in a way that enhances their meaning and sacredness for the congregation. A more seasoned clergy colleague could help if you need further assistance or learning in this area.

Involving others in these celebrations helps the congregation see the many images of ministry and service, a key ingredient in celebrating the diversity in the body of Christ. (See the Resources section for more guidance.)

Leadership in Preaching

Most worship services in our tradition include a time of preaching. Through the sermon, biblical truths and scripturally based observations about current situations in people's lives share the good news of Jesus Christ. Major elements in good preaching include studying the text, knowing the culture and how the text applies to the lives of people, and effective (practiced, if necessary) delivery. Excellent preaching always requires time. You must spend time in spiritual, theological, and biblical preparation, be in tune with the culture, and effectively deliver the message.

Many pastors use the Revised Common Lectionary as the basis for their preaching (*The Book of Worship*, 227–37). The lectionary provides Scripture passages for each Sunday in the church year, and there are ample commentaries and helps available for preparing sermons on these texts. One important advantage to using the lectionary is that it provides a system and order for Scripture that covers most of the Bible over a three-year cycle and thus leads away from the temptation to preach repeatedly on favorite texts and themes. Discipleship Ministries offers a coordinated approach to lectionary preaching, with themed worship series made up of components that include preaching notes, small group materials, prayers, and age-level resourcing for children and youth (www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning). Occasionally, themed series outside of the lectionary series may be available and appropriate as well.

Some pastors prefer to preach a sermon series relating life issues to a biblical perspective. Using a series allows a pastor to address a number of related issues in a way that lectionary preaching may not, such as prayer, social issues, or the phrases of the Lord's Prayer. Others mix the two methods.

One of the best ways to grow in your ability to preach is to find a few faithful friends, parishioners, or colleagues (perhaps other than your spouse) with good listening, speaking, and analyzing skills who are willing to lend a critical ear to your sermons. Recording and watching your worship leadership, perhaps with a clergy mentor or colleague, will also provide valuable insight to your skills and reveal areas that need improvement.

In preaching, as well as in other areas of ministry, always keep in mind the prophetic nature of the Christian faith. The mission of the prophets of the Old Testament was to point the people back to God and to God's justice and mercy, especially when the culture

Being Certain

Even though you feel quite certain of a particular position on an issue, how do you know it is really from God and not from some other source? On current, significant moral issues, the church is almost never united, and individuals with mature Christian faith often hold different positions on the same issue. When you take a stand in your preaching, it is helpful simply to acknowledge this truth. It is imperative when taking a specific stand that the pulpit never be used to advance a personal agenda, justify one's own behavior, align with a political party, or manipulate the congregation. In addition, any righteous anger expressed in such preaching must have its grounding biblically as God's righteous anger and not one's own.

was promoting values contrary to compassion for the least and lost of their community and world. You should follow the Pauline admonition to “speak the truth in love” (see Eph 4:15 NRSVue) as you include the prophetic element in your preaching.

A more recent development for preaching, and indeed worship and the whole life of a congregation is considerations for online and virtual interactions. Lockdowns and social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic era have forced church leaders to ask questions about the nature of gathering, the formation of community, and even the ability to celebrate the sacraments from a distance. One, the online dynamic isn’t going anywhere. If anything, the combination of virtual and in-person and virtual interactions will only continue to require pastors to navigate the need for hybrid offerings. Two, with these Guidelines being refreshed every four years, there is no way to keep up with the evolution of virtual platforms and norms in a print resource. Discipleship Ministries offers articles and resources for online worship and discipleship at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/annual-conference-virtual-presence/online-discipleship>. United Methodist Communications offers up-to-date resourcing as well.

Leadership in Teaching

Making disciples of Jesus Christ is in part a teaching activity, and the role of pastor as teacher must be neither underestimated nor ignored. Pastors who are effective teachers can be involved in the formal and informal teaching settings of the church, making education part of a discipleship system or pathway. Pastors will generally know more about the Bible and the journey of faith than many congregants. Recent research has shown the average adult understanding of theological concepts and biblical knowledge to be between the 7th and 9th grade levels. Sharing knowledge can help congregants grow, and ask healthy questions, if you teach in ways that enable them to learn. As with preaching, preparation for teaching takes time. (See the Resources section for teaching helps.)

Informal teaching moments occur in many ways—when you are meeting with parents about baptizing their child, when someone asks in a meeting about some aspect of United Methodist practice or tradition, when you counsel couples for marriage, when a person asks for help with how to pray, or when someone begins a hallway conversation saying, “Pastor, I’ve always wondered about.” Recognizing these moments means that you can make the most of them in your teaching role.

If you are on a staff with more than one pastor, your teaching role may be largely informal, but it is important that you both teach and support the various educational endeavors of the congregation. Teaching can be as much about content as it is to the approach and understanding that we are meant to be lifelong learners, on a journey toward Christian perfection.

If you are the sole pastor, it is crucial for you to assume a role in the teaching ministry of the church. The chairperson of the Committee on Education/Formation, teachers and small-group leaders, Christian education and formation staff, and others involved in the various teaching/learning and formation ministries are valuable partners in providing learning and formational experiences for the congregation. Encourage these people or committees

to develop a plan of education that includes all of the many possibilities that exist for learning and growth in the journey of faith—and support it with your participation—even if you serve a multiple-point charge where the Sunday school of each church is during the worship service of the other. The use of online opportunities for education between in-person meetings can be a valuable addition to any educational or faith formation plan. Take time to find out where, when, and how your congregation engages in virtual interactions, and explore opportunities to engage in those spaces from a perspective faithful to your theological training. Educational opportunities should not be limited to in-person gatherings on any particular day of the week.

From the smallest child to the oldest adult, learning contributes to faith formation and disciple-making. Courses on United Methodist history, doctrine, polity, and social issues (see the Social Creed in the *Discipline* and the *Book of Resolutions*) are usually popular in the local church, as are series on prayer and spiritual disciplines. There are many helpful resources provided by the church, and by exploring the websites of the United Methodist general agencies, you will discover a variety of online and print resources.

It is important to develop an intentional, lifelong, disciple-making process across the whole span of ages to be sure that all people, from those new to the Christian faith to the most spiritually mature, have appropriate settings where they can grow and develop and invite God to form them. We never get to the point where we can stop growing in our faith, but that growth seldom happens by accident. For help in designing or evaluating your church's disciple-making system, see *Charting a Course of Discipleship* by Teresa Gilbert, Patty Johansen, and Jay Regennitter (<https://upperroombooks.com/book/charting-a-course-of-discipleship/>). Every pastor should look for ways to enhance the teaching ministry in the local church. To do so honors the universal call to make disciples of Jesus Christ. See *All The People* (<http://seeallthepeople.org>) also offers resources and examples for intentional discipleship systems and pathways, of which educational opportunities are a part.

Trainer of Laity

All Christians—lay and clergy—are called to ministry in the world for its transformation. Your work as pastor is not to do ministry for laity, but to equip laypeople to hear, clarify, and act on how God wants them to carry God's love, hope, mercy, and justice into the world. Your special contribution is to offer the biblical and theological foundation that engages lay people in devotion and discipleship so that they feel secure enough to be effective in ministry. Bring up the idea—in preaching, meetings, and conversation—that God calls all of us to be in ministry and gives us gifts that equip and enable us for ministry. Many of us do not see the gifts and skills we possess, but others see them clearly. When we identify and claim gifts, we can begin to explore where our gifts, our God-given passion, and the needs of the world meet. Within this juncture, the focus of ministry emerges. Offer ample opportunities for laypeople to discover their gifts, including calling forth those gifts. The *Disciples in the Marketplace* series highlights just how amazing laity who bring their faith in the world can be (<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/disciples-in-the-marketplace>).

By *Discipline*, the pastor chairs the Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development. You will be looking specifically for laity who can serve in leadership positions for the ministry of the congregation. To understand fully the work of this committee, refer to *Guidelines 2025–2028: Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development*.

Provide a variety of resources, including groups for accountability and support, to help leaders hone their leadership skills. Some training will be “on the job.” Plan for and be aware of webinars, workshops, retreats, and classes where specific skills are taught; the skills learned there are usually readily transferable to work in the church and in the world. Check with your district and conference leaders for other educational opportunities for local church leaders. Mentor your leaders yourself, either formally or informally, and find ways to encourage and support those whose ministry is in the world.

Be aware of your annual conference’s plan for training related to Lay Servant Ministries. There may be those in your congregation already certified as Lay Servants. Others might be open to the call for increased leadership and the systematic and intensive training provided through Lay Servant Ministries.

Laity Leaders

In the structure of The United Methodist Church, there are particular leaders among the laity with whom you will work closely, depending on your role on the professional staff. Be sure to consult the *Guidelines* for each of these positions and to provide copies for these key leaders (and their committee members, if any). The wise pastor will recognize their own pattern of strengths and weaknesses, realizing that the laity can benefit from the strengths and can compensate for and teach in the areas of weakness. You will, of course, work with other leaders as well, but a healthy relationship with these key people will be instrumental in realizing the vision and mission of your church. All of them should be people of faith, held in high esteem by the congregation, and committed to spiritual growth and discipleship.

Lay Leader. Confer together regularly on ways of increasing the involvement of the laity in spiritual practices and in the ministry inside the church and outside in the world. Keep the focus on God’s mission and your church’s ministry and work together to identify gifts of church members that coincide with the vision.

Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee Chair. This person chairs the committee that has responsibility for maintaining open communication among the pastor and staff and the congregation. Ideally, the committee will include a person who has experience in personnel work or human relations. You will work together with the chair in matters of staffing needs if you have other staff. This is especially important at a time when any staff change is being anticipated. Normally this group will also help in evaluating your work. Failure of the pastor and staff/pastor-parish chair to communicate can result in devastating conflict in the church. (See the Resources section for assessment tools produced by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry for pastors, staff, and Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committees.)

Finance Committee Chair. You and the finance committee chair should work to attain a prayerful and good relationship that is focused on serving the ministry needs of the

congregation and community. Your role on the Finance Committee is very important. Read ¶339 in the *Discipline*, which outlines the *Responsibilities and Duties of Elders and Licensed Local Pastors*, and you will be surprised how many connect with your role and responsibilities related to church finances and stewardship. Remember that the purpose for a Finance Team is to fund mission and ministry.

Trustee Chair. The buildings and property of a local church certainly have an impact on its ministry. You and the chair of Trustees work together to ensure that facilities are maintained primarily for doing ministry, and not becoming the focus or end of the church's ministry.

Church Council Chair. In The United Methodist Church, many local churches use the single administrative structure of the Church Council, and many are exploring a more simplified, one-board model to free clergy, church staff and laity with more time and energy to be in ministry. Whatever structure your congregation uses, you will need to be in close contact with the chair of this administrative body that oversees the whole ministry of the church. You and the chair of the Church Council work together to keep the focus on Christ's work in the world.

Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development. According to ¶258.1.c) of the *Discipline*, the pastor serves as the chair of this committee. The lay leader also serves on the committee with up to nine professing members of the local church. The role of the committee is to assist the pastor in assessing the gifts for leadership and nominating those who will serve in key ministries for the church. You will want to consult *Guidelines 2025–2028: Nominations and Leadership Development* for a fuller description of the responsibilities and duties of this committee.

Some churches have adopted a one-board model, where many of these roles would be identified and meet together as opposed to separately in committees. The role of the pastor remains one of a facilitator for communication and collaboration in that model.

Administrative Leader and Steward of the Vision

The pastor has the primary responsibility to “administer the temporal affairs of the church” (the *Discipline*, ¶339.2.c)(2). This principally is a stewardship issue, which recognizes that everything we have and are comes from God. As the administrator and steward of the vision, the pastor both models and teaches “first fruits living” in his or her own lifestyle and leadership practices; that is, time, talents, gifts, service, and witness are offered first to God and God's people as an act of spiritual worship and thanksgiving. All the rest is administered from that initial faithfulness.

Administration

Administration is a spiritual activity. As such, it functions best when supported by personal and corporate spiritual practices. The administrative style of a pastor either supports the congregation's spirit or harms it. Administration is about people, not just “business,” and lives are affected, for good or for ill, by how the pastor handles administrative duties.

In working clearly and promptly with various committee chairpersons on the meeting content and agenda, for example, the pastor enables and empowers people in their lay

Divide and Filter

Some larger churches will divide administrative functions among more than one pastor or between pastor and lay staff. It is very important with shared leadership that the staff and leaders spend time becoming a cohesive group. As a unified team of leaders, you are better able to filter all you plan to do by asking, “How is this helping with Christ’s mission of making disciples for the transformation of the world?” If the plans do not advance the mission, rethink the wisdom of implementing them.

leadership. Handling such details poorly can create in those leaders a sense of frustration and devaluation.

The mission to which God has called the church is its reason for being; administration is necessary to accomplish this mission. A simple definition of *church administration* is “directing and caring for the dealings and interactions of the church and helping things run smoothly.” As the pastor, you will embrace and model the mission of making disciples and continually hold it before the congregation in worship, in meetings, and in informal conversations. Even with frequent reference to the mission, how it is understood and how you plan for it are subject to huge differences in interpretation. The pastor(s) along with other church leaders will lead the congregation in visioning, focusing the vision, and exploring the gifts of the congregation in bringing the mission to fulfillment. Be careful that a personal need for success, feelings of anxiety, or desire for affirmation do not interfere with the congregation’s participation in this process. Spiritually mature pastors who are growing in their trust of God realize the crucial role of laity in God’s mission and don’t undermine positive and creative leadership from laity.

Often, administration is not covered extensively in a seminary education. Therefore, continuing education time and resources should be allocated to aid a pastor to be effective in this role, especially as churches of different sizes and contexts will require different administrative gifts and skills.

Visioning

Central to this visioning process is your corporate sense of God’s will for the congregation. In *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations*, Gil Rendle and Alice Mann suggest three critical questions for a local church visioning process:

- **“Who are we?”** invites the congregation to reflect on who its current members are and what gifts God has given them individually and corporately, the core values of the congregation, the current ministries, and so on.
- **“What has God called us to do or be?”** invites an opportunity for deep listening to God in whatever ways your congregation best does that. This discernment would include the material from the reflections on the other two questions. From this deep listening will come God’s vision for the church and ministries in which the congregation needs to be engaged. *The Way of Discernment* (Companions in Christ series) is a resource that can help your church leaders and members grow in their ability to listen to God more deeply.

- **“Who is our neighbor?”** invites consideration of the culture and makeup of the church’s community and of the world beyond.

These three questions require significant dialogue and struggle to probe for meaningful answers. Your challenge is to encourage the participants to be open to God’s leading, to remain focused on the task, and to keep moving deeper into the places where the questions might lead. You will also need to ensure that the atmosphere of the discussions allows for holy conversations, which include open and honest sharing, looking together at the situation, and helping the congregation through any conflict that might arise as the vision comes. The ultimate vision may differ from what appeared to be developing in the beginning. But with prayer, persistence, and faithfulness to the work, any church can discern direction from God to develop its vision for the future.

Every visioning process takes time and energy. The easiest part of the visioning process is coming up with the vision. The challenging part is reordering the life, structure, and resources of the church around that vision. In addition, some congregations lack experience in visioning and discernment and may need to be trained along the way. Some pastors also need a great deal of help in planning a visioning process. (See the Resources section for planning guides.)

You and your church leaders will want to remember to monitor progress by evaluating the directions and results of the plans to see if they are moving the congregation toward fulfilling its vision and mission. Some congregations have developed systems to remind them of this important function, such as holding a yearly retreat or designating a specific meeting of a church council where this monitoring function is carried out on a regular basis.

Even though you will come up with a vision and will plan and carry out ministries, remember that, given the rate at which change is occurring in our lives, your church’s vision will need to be reviewed again on a regular basis. God is always at work in our midst making “all things new”; and to pay attention, we need to continue the holy conversations about that to which God calls us.

Smart Goals

Many pastors have found using SMART goals a helpful way to keep focused on what they need to do in their own work. Some district superintendents are even requiring pastors to set SMART goals and submit them each year. SMART goals are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ccountable, **R**ealistic, and **T**imely. All well-written goals will have these characteristics. Knowing them will help you to write better goals for your own work as well as enable you to help congregational leaders set better goals for the church.

As a pastor, some of your SMART goals will grow out of goals set by your Church Council and will reflect what only the pastor can do to assist the church in achieving those goals. Other goals may come out of your regular pastoral duties (“have sermon prepared by noon on Friday”) or may be more personal (“take 30 minutes a day for daily devotion” or “exercise four times a week”). The following definitions are adapted from a worksheet

by the Rev. Chris Holmes, a former district superintendent in the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference, who has graciously allowed us to use them here.

Specific—A specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal. Here are six “W” questions to help you add specifics:

- Who? Who is involved?
- What? What do I want to accomplish?
- Where? Identify a location.
- When? Establish a timeframe.
- Which? Identify requirements and constraints.
- Why? Identify specific purposes or benefits of accomplishing the goal.

Measurable—A measurable goal sets concrete ways to measure how you are progressing toward each goal. Measuring progress enables you to stay on track and reach your target dates. To determine if your goal is measurable, ask “H” questions. How much? How many? How will I know when it is accomplished?

Accountable—Once you have set goals, share them with other people. You are more likely to accomplish goals if others know about them. You may want to invite those with whom you share the goals to ask you on a regular basis about progress in achieving the goals.

Realistic—To be realistic, a goal must represent an objective toward which you are willing and able to work. Your goal is probably realistic if you truly believe that it can be accomplished.

Timely—A goal needs to include the time frame in which it will be accomplished. You are less likely to put it off if it is a priority and scheduled.

Avoid “weasel words,” such as *try*, *attempt*, *may*, *could*, or *should*. SMART goals are geared toward commitment and use words that reflect commitment, such as *will* and *shall*.

Seeing the Church as a System

Another administrative function of the pastoral role is to see the whole picture of the church’s ministry. Every local United Methodist church is a system with definite responsibilities for mission and ministry within the community in which it is located. Each local church also has ministries, services, and outreach into the community that are unique to its particular place and time.

The organization of the church in response to these unique ministries constitutes a system—how you do what you do. The system in place in the church should be the result of shared communication and development, and it should emphasize the gifts of the people. It must be responsive to the callings and claims of God that the people feel upon their lives and responsive to the context of the church and the needs of the community. Leadership often determines how successful a system is at producing the results that the system was designed to create.

The pastor’s role is to provide leadership that enables the system to do its work effectively. The pastor must be able to look at the system as a whole to see what is working well,

what is working at less than full efficiency, and what is working poorly or not at all. The pastor can demonstrate and inspire intentionality in the system.

Remember that not everyone in the church is looking at the entire system all the time. Many people have interest in one particular part of the church (such as an excellent children's and youth ministry) and fewer interests in some other parts (such as its community advocacy efforts). The crucial challenge for the pastor, then, is to hear the longings of God, the congregation, and the community and to work with other leaders to provide a faithful, effective, efficient, and holistic ministry. Such a comprehensive approach makes the best possible use of facilities, resources, and the gifts of God's people to accomplish God's mission in the community and the world. And it recognizes the interrelatedness of all the various parts and ministries of the church.

Looking at the whole picture helps keep the focus on the mission. When we look only at each part separately, we run the risk of having our focus become either too narrow or too scattered. The means become the end, and God's mission gets lost amid the many things that, while good, may not be essential. God's mission is what is crucial—our reason for existence—and we must always stay focused on that to be faithful.

Attention to Detail

We don't usually notice whether the church is functioning smoothly—until it isn't! Of course, there is an ebb and flow in every facet of life, but attention to detail plays a crucial role in how smoothly the church functions. For many people, attention to details helps them know they are respected and cared for by the church and, therefore, by God. Consider how much easier it is to accomplish and fulfill your mission when:

- committees meet when necessary, begin and end on time, keep appropriate records, and members follow through on assignments;
- conflict is addressed early and faithfully, with careful training of church leaders in group dynamics and conflict resolution;
- the budget is realistic and balanced, bills are paid, reserves are adequate, and all the financial affairs are in compliance with the *Discipline*;
- an intentional disciple-making system is in place; Christian education and formation opportunities are supported with sufficient teaching, learning, and enrichment resources; and teachers and leaders are properly equipped for the task;
- details of hospitality are cared for consistently;
- conference obligations, such as apportionments, statistical reports, and charge conference forms are paid or filed on time.

Examples of intentional discipleship systems can be found at <http://seeallthepeople.org> and in the *See All the People* family of resourcing from Discipleship Ministries.

Building Up the Community of Faith

In Ephesians, Paul admonished the community of faith to guard against what diminishes the quality of life of the Christian community. He urged the Ephesians to guard against

the negative practices of letting the sun go down on one's anger, evil talk, bitterness, wrath, wrangling, slander, and malice. Instead, he says, "Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to each other, in the same way God forgave you in Christ" (Eph 4:32). Building up the community means practicing and teaching life-enhancing behaviors as well as rooting out the negatives in our own lives and in the community's life.

We build up the community of faith through shared experiences, such as retreats, working together on a work day or work camp, shared spiritual disciplines, caring for folks who are hurting, learning how as a congregation to manage conflict, teaching forgiveness, supporting one another in our work in the world, talking about characteristics of the kind of faith community that the congregation wants, and yes, in online platforms and chat groups as well. Choirs, women's and men's groups, youth and children's groups, mission groups, Sunday school classes, Bible studies, and other small groups are also places of faith formation and community building when their leaders are equipped to be spiritual leaders, with attention to detail as well. (See *Cultivating Christian Community* by Thomas R. Hawkins.)

Custodian of Institutional Integrity

Integrity is a crucial issue in the life of every Christian and every church because integrity has to do with living out, individually and corporately, the values we espouse, doing what we say we will do, and being who we say we are. It is grounded theologically in God's own integrity of keeping covenant and of being trustworthy. Because we represent Christ to one another and to the world, our integrity is vital. To the extent a pastor or congregation does not live with integrity in all things, the witness will be diminished.

Institutional integrity is represented by those qualities that present the congregation to the community as a place of hospitality, honesty, safety, hope, and reconciliation. Institutional integrity is also about being faithful to the traditions, polity, and beliefs of The United Methodist Church and to its ethical standards. When the church misses the mark in any of these ways, serious harm can result for the witness of the Christian faith. Conversely, if people know you and the church members are trustworthy, they have a better chance of experiencing God as trustworthy.

Therefore, it is hardly possible to overstate the importance of the role of the pastor in maintaining the institutional integrity of the congregation. Four areas of institutional integrity deserve special mention: handling money; safety; upholding the traditions, polity, and beliefs of The United Methodist Church; and living up to the moral and ethical standards of the Christian faith and the denomination.

Handling money, regardless of whether it is your direct responsibility, **must always be done with the highest regard for honesty and clarity** so that people will feel confident that their expressions of Christian stewardship in the church are treated with respect. *The Book of Discipline* contains clear guidelines for how to handle offerings, from the time of collection until their deposit in a bank. You are responsible for guiding the Committee on Finance in establishing proper structure and procedures so that the guidelines are followed,

records are kept, and funds are used as intended by the giver (see *2025–2028 Guidelines: Finance*).

Safety in the church is a major concern. You and other church leaders (especially the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee and the Trustees) should work together to see that risk management procedures are in place. These should ensure that everyone at the church is safe from any kind of physical or emotional harm from all members of the church staff and congregation. Sadly, the abuse of vulnerable children, youth, and adults is a growing concern among churches all around the world.

Part of the reason this tragic activity is becoming such a problem is that many churches have no policies in place to prevent abuse or to deal with it once it has occurred. If your church has no policy or procedures, seek input from the people or councils who work with children, youth, and older adults; your education chairperson or committee; your district superintendent; your annual conference; and other pertinent groups or people to establish policies to reduce the risk of any kind of harm or abuse of anyone who is in the care of the church. Updated Safer Sanctuaries® resources for children, youth, older adults, pastors, and cyber safety, published in 2023 (see the Resources section), provide excellent and practical guidance for addressing this problem and taking steps to prevent abuse from occurring. Note that this is not optional, and vigilance is mandatory. Every church must have a Safer Sanctuaries® policy as well as procedures for those who handle money.

In addition to ensuring physical safety, the church can be an agent of hope and reconciliation for people who suffer spiritual and emotional wounds. Many forces in our culture work to overwhelm and condemn us, and the church offers a safe sanctuary for internal healing as well. As a custodian of institutional integrity, you have a significant role to play in the redemptive and restorative ministry of the church (<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/safe-sanctuaries>).

Another important part of institutional integrity is faithfully following traditions, polity, and beliefs of United Methodism. You are aware of the basic traditions of The United Methodist Church, such as open Communion and an inclusive understanding of who is welcome in our churches. (See Part II—Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task in the *Discipline*.) You are called to practice them faithfully, to the best of your ability, and to encourage and teach the congregation to do likewise. Our polity involves such things as episcopal appointment, itineracy for elders, annual conference, and charge conference. A pastor should understand the purpose and gift behind the parts of our polity and teach them to the congregation, both formally and informally. On those occasions when members get disgruntled about some aspect of polity, tradition, or belief, the pastor's job is to interpret the positive aspects of why we do what we do as well as to teach processes through which change can be made. Even when we personally disagree with a particular item or aspect, we can disagree respectfully and work through the processes provided for change. The *Belong* series from Discipleship Ministries may be useful in these conversations, as they explore baptism, communion, and the membership vows of the UMC for pastors and small group study.

Our doctrine and theology set the stage for living up to the moral and ethical standards of the Christian faith and of the church. Certainly, no pastor should be involved in criminal activity, immoral behavior, or anything else that would undermine the mission of Christ. We have all read stories in the newspaper or online of clergy who have done unethical or immoral things, and we know how it harms the church. Pastors must be ever watchful and sensitive to actions that uphold the highest standards of behavior of the Christian faith.

Paul pushed it further by inviting us to act so we would never “be a problem for those who are weak” (1 Cor 8:9). If you find yourself being strongly tempted, get help immediately. This especially includes any addictive behaviors with alcohol, drugs, sex, work, gambling, shopping, and so on. We are more likely to give in to temptation and to use addictive substances or behave inappropriately when we fail to take care of ourselves. When we are too tired, too stressed, or too scared, we are more likely to make unwise decisions and do things we will later regret. This is another reason why attention to our own spiritual practices and renewal is so important.

Participant in the United Methodist Connection

The United Methodist connection creates a large team for ministry because every United Methodist church is connected to every other one in important and powerful ways. This connection is at the heart of who we are as United Methodists. A thorough understanding of it is vital to the total mission of the church in the world. Every pastor and layperson in The United Methodist Church is a part of an incredible network of ministry that is being done by our churches down the street and around the world. No one person can fully comprehend the entire breadth of United Methodist ministries; a United Methodist pastor is a part of something great! This connection is driven by four particular aspects, and the time is as important as ever to be part of this shared system of mutual support.

A United Methodist pastor is in a covenantal relationship with all other United Methodist pastors in her or his own annual conference. This relationship is most specifically manifest in the Order of Deacons, the Order of Elders, and the Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members. Pastors in the same conference bind themselves together by their commitment to live out their calls to ministry through participation in their particular annual conference. Paragraph 306 of the *Discipline* states,

An order is a covenant community within the church to mutually support, care for, and hold accountable its members for the sake of the life and mission of the church. These orders, separately or together, seek to respond to the spiritual hunger among clergy for a fulfilling sense of vocation, for support among peers during this stressful time of change in the Church, and for a deepening relationship with God.

Ideally, this relationship is one of both support and accountability. To this end, many clergy join together in small covenant groups, sharing groups, or study groups. Do pastors ever let one another down or speak ill of another pastor? Of course, because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (see Rom 3:23 NRSVue). But the invitation in these

relationships is to care for, support, and watch over one another as sister and brother clergy in Christ, always striving to do better and speaking the truth in love.

A specific example of this covenant is that the *Discipline* (§340.4) prohibits pastors from conducting any kind of religious service (including funerals and weddings) in a pastoral charge, other than the one to which he or she is appointed, without the consent of the pastor of the charge or the district superintendent. Keeping covenant means pastors go back to former parishes only when invited to do so by the current pastor of the charge. Should you be invited by a former parishioner to return for some service, be clear that the parishioner must first discuss the request with the current pastor. It is the prerogative of the incumbent pastor to invite you to participate or not.

Another example of our responsibility in this covenant is reporting ministries of the congregation on the charge conference and year-end statistical reports. In addition, you may be asked for church or clergy profiles or other reports to assist the district superintendent in the appointment process. All reports should be completed accurately, honestly, and on time.

The pastor is part of the connectional system through the district, annual conference, and entire denomination (which extends around the world). Help, support, and a wealth of resources are available through all these entities, so ask—persistently, if necessary—for whatever help you need. District and conference staff people often focus in specialized areas of ministry and can offer assistance, workshops, seminars, and resource suggestions. In addition, they understand the local, district, and conference processes for how things get done. On the national (and international) level, the General Conference organizes general boards and agencies to serve the church as well (see the Resources section).

One pastoral responsibility and privilege of being a part of the connection is encouraging the congregation's participation in this wider ministry through prayer, interpreting, and paying apportionments fully, and second-mile giving (for example, to missions, disaster relief, Advance Specials, or other offerings). Pray for missionaries and church workers here and in other countries. Invite missionaries who are home on leave to speak. Keep informed about both the uses of apportionments and specific stories of how apportioned funds have helped people in this country and around the globe. This information is available through the district office or newsletter, the conference office, United Methodist Communications, the General Board of Global Ministries, and on the websites of those groups.

You may be asked to “participate in denominational and conference programs and training opportunities” and to “seek out opportunities for cooperative ministries with other United Methodist pastors and churches” (the *Discipline*, §340.2.c)(3)). Serving on a district, conference, or general church committee is both an honor and a responsibility, and it benefits the local church as well because of the added information, experience, and awareness it provides of the resources and ministries of the denomination beyond the local church.

Each pastor is connected to other institutions that are affiliated with or run by the denomination, such as hospitals, schools, social service institutions, and homes for

children and youth or older adults. Many of these institutions were founded by United Methodists or by the denomination and maintain relationships through annual conferences. Some United Methodist clergy are appointed to these United Methodist institutions or to other institutions, such as chaplains in the military. Each pastor is bonded to other pastors through the connection of the United Methodist system. Every pastor serving an appointment outside the local church is required to have a charge conference affiliation. If a pastor on extension ministry or a retired pastor is affiliated with your church, you will want to get acquainted, to involve her or him as appropriate, and to celebrate his or her ministry.

Community Minister

United Methodist pastors are in ministry beyond the congregation(s) to which they are appointed. John Wesley spoke of the whole world as his parish. Along with members of the congregation, the pastor is involved in the life of the community in ways that carry forth the mission of Christ in the world. Pastors are often called on to conduct weddings or funerals of nonmembers, to pray at public events, or to be on boards of worthy organizations. These can be seen as opportunities to bear witness to our faith, to our Christian lifestyle, and to our Lord in appropriate ways. Such opportunities also help you know the people and needs of the community and may lead to opportunities for ministry.

You need not wait for requests for service or participation; actively lead the community in being more compassionate, inclusive, and Christlike. Be sure to call forth and support the gifts in your lay members who are engaged in community ministry. If we as Christians take seriously the mandate “to go into all the world” (see Acts 1:8), most of our ministry will occur outside the walls of the church. Christian laity witness to their faith every day by what they do or don’t do. And some social justice issues are so great that religious, civic, and community organizations must work together.

The United Methodist Church has always supported Christian unity and ecumenism and encourages cooperation with other denominations in fellowship, worship, and ministry so that Christ’s church may live out of an integral sense of oneness. In addition, you may also have a chance to be a part of interreligious groups for worship, fellowship, and service to the community. Such groups and ministries will stretch your faith formation and offer new perspectives on culture and vocation.

Final Thoughts

In every local church there are certain unique personalities and structural realities with which you must work. These realities may be different from those in your previous appointment or the churches with which you are acquainted. Remain focused on the mission of the church you serve and on the whole system of ministry there. In addition, try not to get bogged down in structure. Structural changes may be appropriate, but they are usually best made after thoroughly understanding the existing system and then in collaboration with the church leadership. Arbitrary changes will most likely not be welcome and probably will be actively resisted.

No pastor, including you, is called to be a “super Christian” and certainly not a “plastic saint” with a thin veneer of piety. This kind of posturing will quickly wear out in the midst of congregational life. Pastors are called to live with strength and determination as real human beings, engaged in the real struggles of life with a commitment to live as authentic and faithful people. This kind of commitment should manifest in an effort to grow spiritually, live with integrity, and deal justly with all people. It will also mean that at times you will have to admit to mistakes, to tasks that are beyond your expertise, or to particular weaknesses and vulnerability.

Show Christian strength and maturity by listening to the wisdom and counsel of others. No person is perfect. None of us has all the answers. Being willing to allow others to see your own vulnerability will help reduce their tendency to place you on a pedestal or to have unreasonably high expectations. Modeling the Christian life as a fellow journeyer striving to live out of a faith commitment is a crucial part of pastoral leadership.

Taking care of yourself emotionally, physically, intellectually, and spiritually is critical in being the most faithful and effective pastor you can be. As part of a self-care regimen, you will want to take all of your vacation (even when you really love what you do), set appropriate boundaries on your work, develop skills for confronting people in a loving manner, develop healthy nutrition and regular exercise habits, develop a system of accountability for spiritual growth, and take your days off. Studies on clergy health point to the importance of self-care. These studies can be found at the website of Wespeth (the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits). Your family also needs your attention and time. Disruptions in your family relationships will take their toll on you and on your family. Take advantage of the resources for clergy families found at the website of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women. You are not required to, nor should you be expected to, sacrifice either giving or receiving the love and support of your family.

Conclusion

It is hardly possible to state with sufficient clarity the importance of the leadership role of the pastor in The United Methodist Church. If the congregation is to fulfill its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ, then your role is pivotal. The pastor is one of the few people in the church called to look at the whole of the church organization and be sure that there is an overall vision that moves it toward fulfillment of its mission. When this work is done with consultation and collaboration and with sensitivity to the views and needs of others, your work as pastor will be faithful and effective, allowing you to help advance the mission of Christ.

Most important, you are entrusted with the spiritual lives of the people within the congregation. It is a daunting and noble task that requires the best of your time, energy, devotion, and prayers. You will see the rewards in the transformation of people and the growth of the reign of God. May God bless you and all pastors as you pursue the call of God upon your lives.

Resources

**Indicates our top picks

General Church Print Resources

***The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2020/2024*. (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House).

***Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 2024). A set of twenty-six booklets providing guidance for those people responsible for the various ministries of the local church. Also available online at <https://www.umofficialresources.com/Guidelines>.

Job Descriptions and Leadership Training in The United Methodist Church, 2017–2020 (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2016). Provides basic information for developing church leadership skills in laity as well as one-page job descriptions for congregational leadership positions.

Program Calendar (United Methodist Communications). Annual calendar with liturgical seasons and United Methodist Special Sundays highlighted. Also includes lectionary readings.

***The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), ISBN: 9780687035724.

Resources Mentioned in the Text and Other Helpful Resources

Accountable Discipleship: Living in God's Household by Stephen W. Manskar (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2000), ISBN: 9780881773392. Describes pastoral leadership as the ministry of caring for the household of God.

Assessment tools from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, which are found in the “Board of Ordained Ministry Library” of their website, www.gbhem.org, and at Cokesbury.

***By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry* by Gayle Carlton Felton (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1997), ISBN: 9780881772012. Describes the United Methodist understanding of baptism and helps connect it to discipleship in daily life.

Celebrating the Offering by Melvin Amerson and James Amerson (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007), ISBN: 9780881775266. Find effective ways to incorporate the offering into worship services and revitalize a congregation's spirit of generosity.

*****Charting a Course of Discipleship: A Workbook on Christian Discipleship* by Teresa Gilbert, Patty Johansen, Jay Regennitter, revised by Delia Halverson (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2012), ISBN: 9780881776089. This workbook will help a congregation look at and improve its own discipleship system.**

Church Finances for Missional Leaders by Bonnie Ives Marden (Nashville: Wesley's Foundry Books, 2019), ISBN: 9781945935428.

*****Companions in Christ: The Way of Discernment* by Stephen V. Doughty and Marjorie J. Thompson (Nashville: Upper Room, 2008), ISBN: 9780835899581. This book for small groups will help participants both understand and practice discernment together.**

*****Cultivating Christian Community* by Thomas R. Hawkins (Nashville, Discipleship Resources, 2004), ISBN: 0881773271. Six qualities of Christian community identified with helps for small-group leaders on how to incorporate these qualities as they lead groups.**

Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations by Junius B. Dotson (Discipleship Ministries). <https://store.umcdiscipleship.org/product/developing-an-intentional-discipleship-system/>.

Discover Your Spiritual Type by Corinne Ware (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1995), ISBN: 9781566991490. Explanation and exercises for individuals and groups to identify and plan for spiritual types.

Engaging Your Community: A Guide to Seeing All the People by Junius B. Dotson (Discipleship Ministries) <https://store.umcdiscipleship.org/product/engaging-your-community-a-guide-to-seeing-all-the-people-2/>.

*****Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2003), ISBN: 9781566992862. Theologically based handbook for planning that is attentive to the Holy Spirit and the congregation's unique calling and context.**

Ministry and Money by Janet & Philip Jamieson (Louisville, John Knox Press, 2009), ISBN: 9780664231989.

*****Opening Ourselves to Grace: Basic Christian Practices* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007), ISBN: 9780881775082. A DVD containing four segments presenting a clear and contemporary understanding of Wesleyan spiritual practices.**

Our Membership Vows in The United Methodist Church by Mark W. Stamm (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2015), ISBN: 9780881777680. Provides helpful explanation of the vows of membership for use with those who are new to The United Methodist Church.

Sabbath Time by Tilden Edwards (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2003), ISBN: 9780835898621. Looks at the roots of Sabbath and how we can practice Sabbath better.

- **Safer Sanctuaries: Nurturing Trust within Faith Communities**, Multiple Authors. Discipleship Resources, (2023), ISBN: 978-0-88177-962-2.
- **This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion** by Gayle Carlton Felton (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005), ISBN: 9780881774573. The history, practice, and principles of Holy Communion in United Methodist congregations, including the implications of this sacrament for mission and ministry.
- The Spirit and Art of Conflict Management: Creating a Culture of JustPeace* by Thomas Porter (Nashville: Upper Room, 2010), ISBN: 9780835810265. Resource for leaders to transform conflict as a positive rather than negative force, grounded in biblical principles.
- The Unofficial United Methodist Handbook for Pastors*, edited by F. Belton Joyner Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), ISBN: 9780687641956. Quick references to basic questions covering a wide range of beliefs and issues of The United Methodist Church.
- **Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living** by Rueben P. Job (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), ISBN: 9780687649662. Takes the General Rules of John Wesley and formulates them into three simple rules for holy living.
- Transforming Evangelism: The Wesleyan Way of Sharing Faith* by Henry H. Knight III and F. Douglas Powe Jr. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006), ISBN: 9780881774856. Understanding John Wesley's view of evangelism.
- United Methodist worship resources at www.umcdiscipleship.org. This site includes weekly worship planning information as well as links to ecumenical and other resources.
- Worshipping with United Methodists Revised Edition: A Guide for Pastors and Church Leaders* by Hoyt L. Hickman (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007), ISBN: 9780687335268. Basic understanding of worship.

Web Resources

- The Academy of Homiletics (free and subscription) <http://www.homiletics.org>. Website for the Academy of Homiletics.
- The African American Pulpit Magazine (free and subscription) <https://issuu.com/theafricanamericanpulpit/docs/theafricanamericanpulpit>.
- Day 1 <http://day1.org>. Sermon videos, preaching, and Christian community.
- Discipleship Ministries Worship <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship>. Links to lectionary helps and other worship sites.
- The Festival of Homiletics (annual ecumenical preaching event) <https://www.festivalofhomiletics.com>.
- Resources for Clergy Families <https://www.gcsrw.org/Resources/ClergyResources.aspx>.

UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

The United Methodist Church, www.umc.org

General Commission on Archives and History, www.gcuh.org, Madison, NJ,
973-408-3189

General Board of Church and Society, www.umcjustice.org, Washington, DC,
202-488-5600

United Methodist Communications, www.resourceumc.org/communications,
www.umns.org, Nashville, TN, 615-742-5400; InfoServ 1-800-251-8140

General Board of Discipleship, www.umcdiscipleship.org, Nashville, TN, 877-899-2780;
Discipleship Resources, <http://bookstore.upperroom.org>; The Upper Room,
<http://www.upperroom.org>.

General Board of Finance and Administration, www.gcfa.org, Nashville, TN

General Board of Global Ministries, www.umcmmission.org, Atlanta, GA, 800-862-4246

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, www.gbhem.org, Nashville, TN,
615-340-7413

General Commission on Religion and Race, www.gcorr.org, Washington, DC,
202-495-2949

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, www.gcsrw.org, Chicago, IL,
1-800-523-8390

General Commission on United Methodist Men, www.gcumm.org, Nashville, TN,
615-340-7145

The United Methodist Publishing House, www.umph.org, www.abingdonpress.com,
www.cokesbury.com, www.ministrymatters, Nashville, TN, 615-749-6000

United Women in Faith, www.uwfaith.org, New York, NY, 212-682-3633

Wespath (retirement/benefits), www.wespath.org, Glenview, IL, 800-851-2201

For additional resources, contact your annual conference office.

