



Pastor-Parish Relations

Connect the Pastor, Staff, and Congregation



G U I D E L I N E S

Pastor-Parish Relations

Connect the Pastor, Staff, and Congregation

Chris Wilterdink

with thanks to original author Betsey Heavner

Discipleship Ministries

PASTOR-PARISH RELATIONS

Copyright 2024 by Cokesbury

All rights reserved.

United Methodist churches and other official United Methodist bodies may reproduce up to 500 words from this publication, provided the following notice appears with the excerpted material: "From *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation 2025–2028: Pastor-Parish Relations*. Copyright © 2024 by Cokesbury. Used by permission." Address requests for quotations exceeding 500 words to Permissions Office, Abingdon Press, 810 12th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37203 or permissions@umpublishing.org.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

ISBN 9781791011604

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the Common English Bible. Copyright 2011 by the Common English Bible. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.CommonEnglishBible.com

Scripture quotations marked NRSVue are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Unless noted otherwise, all quotations and references to *The Book of Discipline* (the *Discipline*, *BOD*) and *The Book of Resolutions* (*BOR*) are to the 2024 editions (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House). Used by permission.

All references marked *UMH* are taken from *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989).

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Contents

- “A Wreath for Your Excellent Leadership”5**
- Intentional Discipleship Systems6**
- The Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee.....7**
 - Administrative Responsibilities
 - Who Serves on the S/PPRC?
 - The First Responsibility of S/PPRC Members
 - The Ministry of the Committee Members
 - The Ministry of the Chairperson
 - An Overview of the Year
- First Quarter: January–March15**
 - Orientation for Committee Work
 - Establish Expectations with Staff
 - Establish Relationships with Congregational Leaders
 - Build Relationships with Deacons and Affiliated Clergy
 - Launch Staff Support
 - Build Intentional Communications Plans
 - Identify New Church Leaders
- Second Quarter: April–June.....22**
 - Monitor and Develop Strategies
 - Parsonage and Housing Issues
 - Legal Responsibilities
 - Church Policies
 - When the Pastor Changes
 - Recognize All the Staff
- Third Quarter: July–September.....27**
 - Review Job Descriptions and Strategies
 - Supervision of Staff

Fourth Quarter: October–December.....31
 Annual Staff Evaluations
 Charge Conference Preparation
 Annual Consultation with the District Superintendent
 A Closing Word
Resources.....35
 General
 Communication Tools
 Supervision
 Committee Ministry
 Website Resources for S/PPRC
 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.

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 who were hurting. 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 (www.seeallthepeople.org/) suite of resources 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 Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee

In every size congregation, the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee (S/PPRC) must focus on building strong relationships between the staff and the congregation and between the congregation and the district superintendent (DS). Finding a balance between building relationships and handling administrative tasks can be difficult, so the ministry of this committee is crucial for this aspect of a vital and effective congregation. In churches utilizing a *one-board model*, the role of the S/PPRC is still maintained as a 9–15-person team. This Guideline is written from the perspective of a church using a more traditional multiple team/committee model, but the information and suggestions offered may be easily adapted to One Board.

Your task is in the committee's name:
Build Relationships

A key for a vital, effective congregation is embracing the core process for carrying out our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The core process is stated in ¶122 of *The Book of Discipline*.

This Guideline will outline the specific tasks of the S/PPRC and describe the ministry of building relationships through communication and attention to caring for the staff and congregation. For a helpful glossary of terms related to the committee's work, see "Committee Glossary" (www.UMofficialresources.com/Guidelines).

These pages offer practical suggestions for managing your responsibilities by assigning tasks to a quarterly calendar. Adapt the suggestions for your community while always keeping the big picture of the mission of the church in mind.

United Methodist congregations give the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee the responsibility for administering the relationship between staff, congregation, and the district superintendent so that the mission of the church moves forward. This summary of specific tasks for the S/PPRC is listed in ¶258.2g in *The Book of Discipline* (with added suggestions from the Task Force on Clergy Health and the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women):

- encourage, strengthen, nurture, support, and respect the pastor and staff and their families, including advocating for a healthy work/life balance;
- promote unity in the churches;
- confer with the staff on the effectiveness of ministry and impediments to effectiveness, including conflict of interest and sexual misconduct;
- confer with the staff about the effective use of their gifts, skills, time, and priorities;

- conduct annual staff evaluations;
- teach the congregation about itineracy, steps into ordained ministry, the value of diversity in staffing, and the ministerial education fund;
- write job descriptions for staff;
- confer with staff about continuing education and spiritual formation;
- confer with the district superintendent about the clergy leadership for the congregation.
- recommend staff positions to the Church Council;
- create written personnel policies and sexual misconduct policies for the congregation;
- consult on matters of staff support, including housing, vacation, insurance, pension, and other matters outlined in the *Discipline*.

The administrative function of the S/PPRC includes both leadership and management. *Leadership* is the role of “keeping an eye on the big picture.” The S/PPRC members must remember they are part of the body of Christ with a mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Management is the role of tending to daily activities so that details are taken care of and strategies are implemented. Many churches rely on lay leadership for various leadership and management initiatives. Their role is critical. Larger churches may employ staff for day-to-day staff oversight. Management includes holding both staff and congregation accountable for carrying through with plans and promises.

Administrative Responsibilities

The S/PPRC has three primary responsibilities related to administration: pastoral and staff evaluations; maintaining a connection with the district superintendent (DS); and communication among pastor/staff, congregation, and DS. The responsibilities related to personal support, benefits, and policy will be considered in another section. Within a One Board model, these responsibilities remain consistent.

Annual Staff Evaluations

Your district superintendent will ask annually for your recommendation for the most appropriate appointed leader for your community. In most instances, you will be asked to complete an evaluation form. This Guideline recommends annual evaluation of all staff based on setting expectations at the beginning of the year and working with staff through the year to meet or modify the expectations. See the calendar suggestions for the first and the fourth quarters.

Connect with Your District Superintendent

The district superintendent relies on the S/PPRC for information about the ministry needs in the mission area where the church is located and the leadership gifts needed to carry out the ministry. The S/PPRC is the connection for the DS to understand both the

community surrounding the church and the vision of the congregation for reaching out in ministry to that community. The chairperson of the S/PPRC should initiate a relationship with the district superintendent. This Guideline has suggestions in the section for the chairperson's ministry responsibilities.

Relationships through Good Communication

Strong relationships help build clear communication channels, mutual caring, and deep trust among people so that the congregation lives out an inspiring, meaningful ministry that forms disciples who make a difference in the community and in the world. Good communication, like building relationships, always involves two parties. The S/PPRC is the link that facilitates the communication among staff, congregation, and district superintendent. The committee speaks clearly and plainly to the staff about the hopes and dreams of the congregation in concrete, practical ways so that the staff know how to spend their time. The committee also reminds the congregation of the hopes and dreams they have expressed and how the staff are working toward those goals.

Who Serves on the S/PPRC?

The Book of Discipline (§258.2) requires every congregation to have a committee on staff/pastor-parish relations (in a multipoint charge, each congregation shall have at least one member on the S/PPRC). The Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee members are proposed by the committee on nominations and elected by the charge or church conference. The *Discipline* provides for a rotation system to ensure continuity on the committee. It requires that at least five and not more than nine members be elected for terms of three years each, in three classes. One member must be a young adult, and all members must be professing or associate members of the church or charge. Members of the committee may succeed themselves for one three-year term.

The S/PPRC should be the most diverse group in the church. Each person should represent or relate to various constituencies in the church. This built-in diversity will generate deep conversation about leadership qualities, and committee members will develop their skills for communicating with diverse church members about leadership.

In addition to elected committee members, the *Discipline* also requires that a lay member of the annual conference and the lay leader be members of the S/PPRC. These leaders are exempt from the three-year term limit. Neither employees of the church nor members of pastors' or staff members' immediate families may serve on the committee, nor may any affiliated ordained clergypersons.

Only one person from an immediate family residing in the same household may serve on the committee. S/PPRC members must be laypeople, other than the appointed staff. The S/PPRC of a charge where there is more than one church must have at least one representative from each church. The committees of charges in a cooperative parish meet together to consider professional leadership.

S/PPRC members should be Christian spiritual leaders who demonstrate regular worship attendance, small-group participation, Bible study, and regular generous giving. These

practices are essential for committee members to bring integrity to the leadership of this ministry.

The committee meets at least quarterly, preferably in-person, though online meetings have become simpler and more effective. If meeting online, it is recommended to record and store the meeting in a secure location. Additional committee meetings may be called by the bishop, the district superintendent, the pastor, any other person accountable to the committee, or the chairperson of the committee. It may not meet without the knowledge of the pastor or the district superintendent. In addition, the committee shall meet in a closed session, and all information shared in the committee shall be confidential. Read the definition of *confidentiality* in the glossary, noting the distinction between confidentiality and secrecy. When the appointment of a pastor or employment of any member of the staff is to be discussed, and that person is not present, that person must be informed prior to the meeting and immediately thereafter be brought into consultation by either the committee or the district superintendent.

The First Responsibility of S/PPRC Members

The *Discipline* uses five pages to list the responsibilities of the S/PPRC. However, this section addresses first the character and habits of committee members. “People serving on this committee must be engaged in and be attentive to their Christian spiritual development so as to give proper leadership in the responsibilities with which the committee is entrusted” (§258.2).

The apostle Paul wrote to church officials and officers in the congregation he started at Philippi, offering this instruction: “This is my prayer: that your love might become even more and more rich with knowledge and all kinds of insight” (Phil 1:9). May you offer this prayer for one another!

This first responsibility may be the hardest part of your leadership because you will constantly be pulled toward administrative tasks. Both the staff and congregation will turn to you frequently to resolve an issue, heal a misunderstanding, solve a problem, or create a new ministry position. You will also have requests from outside the church, such as visits and phone calls from the district superintendent or issues related to the staff involvement in the community where your church is located.

The Ministry of the Committee Members

An explanation of the work you will do on behalf of the church may be couched in “job description” language. You will certainly do a job; but more important, you have a ministry to strengthen the body of Christ.

- Prepare for your leadership by reading the appropriate paragraphs in the *Discipline* and by studying this Guideline (and *Guidelines 2025–2028: Pastor*). As you read, think about your own gifts and skills that will contribute to this committee.
- Prepare yourself for every meeting by reading materials you get before the meeting and asking any questions about the agenda.

- When the committee meeting schedule is set, place these dates in your personal calendar. When you cannot attend, notify the chairperson.
- Do all you can to promote positive relationships among staff and congregation, communicating with attentiveness to confidential issues.

The Ministry of the Chairperson

The S/PPRC chairperson is nominated by the committee on nominations and leadership development and elected by the charge conference. This officer works in partnership with other congregational lay and staff leaders on the Church Council to discern God's direction for the congregation. The work is more than a "job"; it is ministry. The chairperson brings knowledge of the gifts and skills of the staff to conversations with other leaders in the church. For example, when the chairperson attends the Church Council meeting, he or she represents the staff vision and dreams for church ministry and listens to the conversations for implications about staffing and refocusing job descriptions. When the chairperson meets with staff, he or she represents the ministry hopes and concerns of the congregation and other leaders. The chairperson's insights from the congregation helps the staff set priorities for their time and actions. These leadership conversations will shape the agendas that the chairperson sets for the meetings of the S/PPRC. In the One Board model, the role of this chairperson may receive another designation with a focus on S/PPRC, given that there is only one chair.

Equip Yourself for the Leadership Role of Chairperson

If you are elected as the S/PPRC chairperson, you have a number of ways to prepare yourself for this role.

- Begin with prayer. Ask God to be with you, to guide your thinking and actions, and to increase your understanding of the way your skills will be used on the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee.
- Read this Guideline and the current disciplinary sections to understand the responsibilities of the S/PPRC.
- Make an appointment with your pastor(s) and district superintendent to talk about expectations for the S/PPRC. Build a partnership for working together.
- Meet with the previous chairpersons to learn about ongoing business and practices.
- Encourage each member to review copies of policies, congregational job descriptions, and procedures that have guided the committee in the past.
- Develop a calendar of meetings in consultation with the pastor, other people who will attend, and the church calendar. As soon as meetings are set, inform other members of the S/PPRC.
- Research how and where minutes and documents from previous servants on this committee are stored. Ensure that you have access to needed documents, and that you have a plan for how to keep them secure.

Help for the Chairperson

People who can help are the district superintendent; annual conference program staff people; ordained and lay leaders in your church; and people in the community outside your church who are skilled in communication, mediation and peacemaking, law, benefit programs, and social needs. Other sources of help include the annual conference board of ordained ministry, Discipleship Ministries, the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA), and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM). Resources and contact information are listed at the end of this Guideline.

Questions to Ask the Pastor and District Superintendent

Most annual conferences have standard rules, expectations, and procedures established for issues relating to all clergy, staff, parsonages, benefits, and other issues. Conferences have different processes in place for practical details of clergy moves. Prepare yourself by asking these questions:

- What are conference parsonage standards?
- What are conference expectations for continuing education and spiritual formation?
- How does the S/PPRC in a congregation recruit, nurture, and support candidates for certification and ordained ministry? What resources might the district or conference have regarding vocation and discernment if we identify members sensing a call? When does this oversight of candidacy move to the district or conference board of ministry? What is the congregational responsibility when the boards of ordained ministry are directing the candidate?
- What are the conference policies related to sexual misconduct and building safer sanctuaries for all people?
- What are the conference policies for ministerial evaluation? Are there common forms and procedures?
- What conference policies apply to lay employees?
- What else do I need to be aware of as I work with the staff and congregation in my local church?

Model Christian leadership by resolving to hold fast to this first responsibility.

Training and Orientation for S/PPRC

First, members of the committee need to understand that they are leaders of ministry! Then work to help them understand the scope of their responsibilities and how the work contributes to the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This committee does not supervise staff, but helps the staff prioritize their work. They also support the staff so the staff can focus on the ministry of the church in your community.

Find out if training will be offered in your district or annual conference. Training modules are available for the S/PPRC on the Discipleship Ministries website (see the “Resources” section). Take time in a meeting to reflect on the training information and ask:

“What was helpful? What applies to our situation? What questions are there?” See the brief orientation outline for the committee below in this Guideline).

Conducting Meetings

Meetings of S/PPRC will have a huge impact on the congregation, committee, and staff. It is crucial that the meetings, while confidential, be conducted in an open, supportive, flexible, participative, and trustworthy manner. Again, these can be in-person or online.

Prepare. Notify/remind committee members and staff of the meeting date, time, and place at least a week in advance. On the meeting notice, include the names of everyone on the committee so that committee members will know with whom they are working. Plan the agenda, including worship relevant to the business of the meeting, and coordinate with others who will make presentations. It's usually helpful to mail or e-mail the agenda and minutes prior to the meeting.

Elect a vice-chairperson and a secretary; set ground rules. See suggestions of procedures in *Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences* by Gilbert R. Rendle. Stress the absolute necessity for confidentiality in the committee—not only the actions taken but also the discussions preceding the actions. It is important to discuss this when you are establishing how you will work together. It is difficult to introduce this concept when there is tension over an issue. Remember that your administrative task of working with personnel is not the same as the program ministries of other committees. It is helpful to reflect on the difference between *confidentiality* (private matters shared in trust) and *secrecy* (something hidden or concealed). See the glossary definition of *confidentiality*.

Start and end meetings on time. This is a sign of respect for everyone's time. If business takes longer than expected, negotiate extending the meeting or continue business to the next meeting. Begin every meeting with worship to focus attention toward God. Use Scripture, music, and other worship elements to help the committee consider how the congregation and the pastor/staff can work together. Ask God for guidance in planning and decision making.

Have a time of learning and education for the committee related to the task and agenda items. This might be a selected part of this Guideline or *The Book of Discipline*. You might have information to share from the district superintendent or a bishop's newsletter. Select a topic that will prepare the committee for work in this and future meetings.

Hear reports from liaisons to the pastor/staff. Any reports should be made after discussion with the staff members concerned. Staff members should have the opportunity to share (in person or through their liaison) recent joys or disappointments, plans that are progressing for the future, and the most pressing concerns.

Review the decisions and recommendations made during the meeting and clarify who is responsible for the actions. What needs attention? What needs to be communicated to the congregation and/or the staff? How will you communicate to the congregation, and who will be responsible for completing the communication?

Conclude with a brief evaluation of the meeting. How do the decisions we've made help our congregation fulfill the mission and vision of the church? What issues have been

raised for future agendas? How have committee members experienced God’s love and guidance in this meeting? Spend some time in prayer.

An Overview of the Year

The Book of Discipline says this committee must meet at least quarterly. The calendar below arranges the functions and responsibilities of the S/PPRC into quarters and suggests a flow for the committee work. Remember that your location, church size, traditions, culture, and history will influence the way your committee operates. You are free to manage and arrange these tasks in a way that works for your church and context. Churches of all sizes need to pay attention to those things that bring new vitality and growing faith to the congregation.

<p>January–March</p> <p>...Hold orientation for committee work</p> <p>...Set expectations as basis for evaluations in fourth quarter</p> <p>...Establish relationships with congregation, other leaders, staff, ordained deacons, affiliated clergy</p> <p>...Set pattern to identify ministry candidates</p> <p>...Establish or review plan for dealing with rumors and conflict</p>	<p>April–June</p> <p>...Monitor strategies to meet expectations, adjust as appropriate</p> <p>...Review parsonage, housing issues</p> <p>...Conduct legal review</p> <p>...Conduct policy review</p> <p>...Review plans and policies for pastoral changes</p>
<p>July–September</p> <p>...Review written job descriptions and staffing needs</p> <p>...Review salary and benefit packages</p> <p>...Establish or review continuing education plans</p> <p>...Monitor strategies to meet expectations, adjust as appropriate</p> <p>...Engage in leadership development</p>	<p>October–December</p> <p>...Conduct annual staff evaluations based on expectations set in the first quarter</p> <p>...Make reports to charge conference</p> <p>...Complete unfinished business</p> <p>...Hold annual consultation with district superintendent</p>

Sample forms, articles, and examples for this committee are available on the Discipleship Ministries website at <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/church-leaders> (click on the box that says Pastor/Staff-Parish Relations Committee).

First Quarter: January–March

Orientation for Committee Work

Provide training or review for all committee members using this Guideline and suggestions in the Resources section at the end. Use the “Committee Orientation” (www.UMofficialresources.com/Guidelines) or watch the one-hour orientation webinar that is archived on the Discipleship Ministries website.

At an early meeting, establish ground rules for your work together. It is tempting for the congregation (or the committee) to perceive S/PPRC as the “complaint department.” Your role is interpretation and support. You are encouraged to make decisions by consensus and discernment. Discuss the importance of confidentiality of sensitive information while communicating openly to help the congregation understand the efforts of staff toward discipleship goals. Review the glossary definition of *confidentiality* (“Committee Glossary,” www.UMofficialresources.com/Guidelines).

Set a calendar for meetings. Elect a vice-chair or co-chairperson and a secretary.

Establish Expectations with Staff

Establishing expectations with staff members in the first quarter of the year has several advantages. First, the expectations form a basis for evaluation at the end of the year in which you can evaluate the degree to which the expectations have been met. Another advantage is that the basis for evaluations moves beyond personalities and work style to focus on ministry. A congregation benefits from setting expectations because everyone will need to discuss and clarify the goals for your context. The process of naming expectations helps everyone be realistic about time requirements to achieve dreams and helps set priorities for time management. As the S/PPRC facilitates setting priorities, the committee helps the congregation recognize the gifts and skills of the staff and works with the Nominations and Leadership Development Committee to find volunteer leaders to serve in ministry with the staff.

Most districts now have evaluation forms to fill out at the end of the year for charge conference. Ask for those forms at the first of the year, recognizing that the specific details may be modified by the district or conference through the year. You may even have suggestions that will clarify or improve the charge conference forms! One district superintendent said in a telephone interview, “S/PPRC can fill out an annual assessment as a checklist, or they can seize the opportunity for a real conversation that focuses on the unique setting of the congregation.”

In smaller congregations, the S/PPRC probably works directly with a pastor and perhaps part-time staff to establish direction and goals and to talk about the way these goals can be met. Remind everyone that strategies are like experiments for meeting a goal—some will work and some will fail! Through the year, discuss with staff and with the congregation how the strategies are working. Change strategies as needed.

Some congregations will have the opportunity to be the first charge for a pastor. You can help the new pastor by setting two or three goals as priorities to help the pastor learn to allocate time. The S/PPRC needs to take the lead to check with the pastor on how well the goals are being met. Some congregations provide the first appointment for a series of pastors. These congregations may understand that their mission and ministry is to nurture effective pastors for a lifetime of service.

In larger congregations, the senior or lead pastor supervises staff and works on development of ministry goals and strategies with staff. In small or mid-sized congregations, the S/PPRC is the bridge between the congregation and the pastor. Communicate the goals and strategies to the congregation and be prepared to support the staff if members express concerns.

As a church grows or shrinks in membership, so do the hours and positions allocated to staffing. The S/PPRC can play a pivotal role in helping a congregation shift staff expectations as seasons change. They can also positively influence a culture of lay leadership to maintain healthy work-life balance for paid church staff. Helping a congregation have realistic expectations of staff can be a challenge.

One congregation involved everyone in setting expectations. Working closely with the Church Council leaders and pastor, the S/PPRC asked people to write the top three things for the pastor to do and asked the pastor to cite what he or she felt was most important. Using both the congregational and pastoral priorities, the S/PPRC worked with the pastor to develop a plan and set priorities for the year. The S/PPRC shared the plan with the congregation for transparency and a continuous loop of building relationships and defining ministry.

You can adapt this example for the ministry of your congregation. You might substitute another staff position for “pastor.” Or you might ask people to write the top three things a staff person should do to increase discipleship. Frame the request whatever way makes sense for your congregation.

An important part of building relationships is for the S/PPRC to report back to the Church Council and congregation what it has prioritized and the plan to work toward these goals. During the year, the S/PPRC can report progress on the work plan. The committee must also support the staff when individuals voice concern about what the staff is (or isn’t) doing. You must speak up to remind the congregation and individuals about the priorities that have been set and the strengths of the staff, then work to address concerns. Widely varying expectations from staff and the congregation open the way for the Church Council to have more conversations about the current direction of the congregation.

Establish Relationships with Congregational Leaders

Church leaders share overlapping responsibilities and decision making. For example, the S/PPRC shares responsibility with trustees for any staff housing the church owns and with the Finance Committee for developing a budget that includes salary and benefit expenses. The S/PPRC works with the Nominations and Leadership Development Committee to identify leaders for ministries that the staff do not cover. In larger churches, staff responsibilities and expectations may be shared or delegated to a business administrator, a youth or children's council, a nursery school director, or music director.

The Church Council has responsibility for coordinating all of the ministry. The S/PPRC chair will attend Church Council meetings to report the work of the committee and to coordinate with other leaders. In a small church, leaders see one another frequently for fellowship and conversation about church issues. In a large church, the Church Council meeting may be the place that leaders connect with one another.

Build Relationships with Deacons and Affiliated Clergy

Deacons may have a primary appointment in your congregation and lead in equipping people for ministry through Christian education, music, parish nursing, community outreach, administration, and other ministries. Increasingly, bishops are appointing deacons to ministries outside the church, such as schools, social service providers, health care settings, or agencies where deacons carry the love, justice, and mercy of God by serving in the world. These settings become the primary appointment for a deacon, and the deacon relates to your congregation as a secondary appointment. The General Conference of 2020, which took place in 2024, also established that deacons have sacramental authority.

A deacon's primary appointment provides salary support, benefits, and assessment. However, each deacon is accountable to a charge conference and relates to the S/PPRC. The deacon will make an annual report to your charge conference. The S/PPRC helps the congregation know about and understand the ministry of the deacon. The S/PPRC assists the deacon to incorporate his or her skills and gifts in the ministry of the congregation, while recognizing the deacon's primary appointment and time commitment outside the congregation. Ordained deacons lead God's people to live daily as Christian disciples in the community. The ministry of deacons is described in Acts 6:1-7. When the church was thriving and growing, the disciples recognized the need for leaders to connect the body of Christ with the needs of the world. Read and reflect on this Scripture passage. Where does the community outside the church need to know the healing love of Jesus Christ? Who among us are living as deacons? What are similarities and differences between Christian service and civic clubs that do good works? Are there people in the congregation who should be encouraged to explore ordination as deacons?

You may also have ordained elders who relate to your congregation, but have their primary appointment outside the church. Initiate conversations with these deacons and elders to learn about their ministry and to help the congregation understand how the congregation's ministry is extended through their work in the world.

Launch Staff Support

According to the *Discipline*, the S/PPRC is responsible “to encourage, strengthen, nurture, support, and respect the pastor(s) and staff and their family(ies)” (§258.2g(1)). The chairperson of the S/PPRC may want to assign a committee member to each staff person to build one-on-one relationships. It’s usually best for the chairperson to build this relationship with the lead or senior pastor. S/PPRC support extends throughout the year, not just at called meetings or in crises.

Pastors and staff need friendly advisers: people to suggest how best to handle some of the joys, concerns, and issues of the parish. This function of counsel determines, in large measure, the degree to which the shared vision can be achieved. The S/PPRC members are chosen because they have the ability, by way of the Holy Spirit, to discern what the pastor and staff need, what the church needs, and how to bring these needs together for ministry. The information and feedback of the S/PPRC, along with the Church Council, is essential for developing the ministry direction of the congregation and pastor. The joys and concerns can be shared as appropriate during S/PPRC meetings. The committee may set particular times and events for staff appreciation.

An issue that is gaining national attention is the holistic well-being of the pastor, staff, and their families. Church work typically includes irregular hours, evening and weekend activities, seasons of exceptional busyness, and unpredictable crises and interruptions, which all take a toll on everyone concerned. Those who itinerate with their families can often battle loneliness, or “life in a fishbowl” experiences, so the support of a staff person’s family must also be attended to. Family can mean a spouse, children, aging parents, and more. The S/PPRC has a critical role in supporting the staff and their families in maintaining healthy self-care and balance. Talk with the staff about their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being and the importance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Communicate with the congregation to interpret the need and benefits of a healthy lifestyle and habits for the pastor and staff. The S/PPRC should encourage, if not require, the pastor and staff to take sabbath time each week, use their vacation days, pursue continuing education opportunities, and make sufficient time for their families. One added word: the church may have ministry going on 24/7, but no staff person can keep that schedule. If the S/PPRC is serious about ensuring time for self-care, then the strategies, calendar, priorities, and assignments to the pastor must also support that. The S/PPRC can also be part of helping a congregation provide a living wage, or better, for the staff positions they decide to maintain as a community.

Build Intentional Communication Plans

Communication is a critical skill for the members of the Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee. Listening and responding to the church and community is very important. People may approach committee members with sensitive information or deeply felt convictions. Some people need help to express what they really want to say, and the S/PPRC might gather opinions in interviews and surveys. The S/PPRC should use active listening

skills to make certain that all voices are clearly understood. (Remember, the S/PPRC is not just a complaint department.)

Body language is an important part of communicating. S/PPRC members should be aware of gender and cultural differences in styles of communicating. We often reveal more about what we are thinking by our actions than by our voices. Be alert to what people are saying with their posture, gestures, hands, eyes, heads, arms, and legs. This is especially important in cross-racial and cross-cultural communities. Resources for training and learning to improve communication may be available in the community through sponsors of crisis hot lines or a school's communication department. (See the "Resources" section for suggestions.)

Rumors begin when people hear or observe a few facts and then fabricate the rest of the story. When any rumors begin to circulate, it is essential to communicate facts quickly. The way to stop rumors is to communicate openly and honestly what you can. Rumors may develop over large and small issues. Develop a plan for dealing with rumors before you have larger incidents to deal with. Most issues will be handled within the scope of the communication plan you establish in your ground rules. Stick to the facts and remember your covenant of confidentiality.

Talk about how you will handle major incidents and rumors, especially if an incident brings media attention. Remember, the quicker the facts are made known, the quicker the rumors will die. The chairperson and committee members should all be clear about:

- who speaks on behalf of the congregation;
- when to involve the district superintendent, bishop, or conference staff;
- the annual conference plan for responding to the media;
- how you handle the media.

Your annual conference communications director can help you develop a plan for working with the media, writing appropriate messages, and managing interviews.

Conflict is another area where good communication is important. Remember that conflict is normal in communities and families. It is simply two different ideas in the same place at the same time. The important part of conflict management is bringing those conflicts into the open where they can be clarified.

Conflict, handled properly, can strengthen the church. People learn they can trust one another, be heard, and be vulnerable in ways often not possible outside the body of Christ. Know when to ask for outside mediation. Earlier is better! See suggestions in the "Resources" section.

There is a story in Acts 15 of a church in conflict over membership requirements. Read this story to open one of your meetings, asking people to listen for examples of the communication tips listed above.

Online and virtual connection opportunities will continue to increase, as will the diversity of applications, platforms, and devices used to engage. As a leader, build up your skills and willingness to engage online. Some members of your congregation may be more willing to provide honest feedback online, and communicating this way provides a record as well as time for more introverted members to accurately convey what they think and

feel. Attend trainings and use services from Discipleship Ministries or United Methodist Communications to improve your church's online capabilities. Complement virtual communication with in-person interactions when possible.

Identify New Church Leaders

The Book of Discipline says the S/PPRC is “to enlist, interview, evaluate, review, and recommend annually to the charge conference persons willing to answer their call to Lay Servant Ministry and persons for candidacy for licensed and ordained ministry . . . and [candidates] for missionary service” (§258.2g(9)). Many pastors can tell a story of having a person in their home congregation suggest to them that God might be calling them to church work. Though this is suggested in first-quarter activities, the S/PPRC is charged *throughout* the year to notice people whom God may be calling into professional ministry. A framework from the Great Plains Annual Conference has proven helpful in these conversations. (See <https://www.vibrantfaithprojects.org/5-cups-of-coffee.html>.) The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry's suite of resources is also helpful. (See <https://www.explorecalling.org/>.) The United Methodist Church recognizes several forms of ministry by ordaining, consecrating, certifying, licensing, and commissioning individuals. These are deacons, elders, local pastors, deaconesses, missionaries, and certified personnel. All these people have committed themselves to specialized training for ministry. They, along with the lay servants, certified lay ministers, and other laity in the local congregation, make up the ministry of the church. You may not have all these forms of ministry present in your congregation, but it is the responsibility of the S/PPRC, along with the committee on nominations and leadership development, to teach the congregation about leadership possibilities and processes.

The S/PPRC interviews and recommends ministerial candidates to the charge conference. Recommending a person for candidacy is holy business and should not be done lightly. When individuals come to the committee because they sense a call from God to professional ministry, the committee helps them discern a vocational call. John Wesley's questions for examiners are listed in §310 of the *Discipline*, and the S/PPRC responsibilities during steps into candidacy are also listed there. Reflect on your observation of and experience with the person you are interviewing. Pray before the interview, pray with the candidate, and support the person who is determining God's direction for his or her life. You can choose to recommend, not recommend, or wait until you see evidence of a more faithful or fruitful life. You may encourage any potential candidates to develop their skills and faith for strong Christian leadership in a secular vocation.

The pastor, district superintendent, and district and conference boards of ordained ministry have resources to help with the process of recommending candidates. The S/PPRC's job is to identify people God might be calling to full-time church ministry and to nurture and support their vocational search.

When candidates are approved by the charge conference, the S/PPRC leads the congregation in supporting and encouraging these candidates through the years of training and

formation for leadership. Set up a system for enlisting and supporting people who feel a call to full-time church work.

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (see “Resources” for contact information) provides materials to help you teach your congregation.

Many of these first-quarter responsibilities will continue throughout the year. As you attend to your own journey of faith, God will help you pay attention to and discern the next right step of ministry.

Second Quarter: April–June

The suggestions for the first quarter involve orientation for the S/PPRC committee and relationship building on several levels. For the second quarter, turn attention to the business of doing business.

Monitor and Develop Strategies

Effective assessment at the end of the year begins with a clear understanding among the S/PPRC, congregation, and the staff members about the expectations of the staff. In this quarter, help the staff establish their disciple-making strategies and the committee's participation in those strategies. It is the role of S/PPRC to support each staff person with the agreed-upon priorities regarding time, finances, and energy. The S/PPRC will meet with staff occasionally to ask which strategies are working and, if necessary, to adjust the strategies.

Example: A pastor has a goal of improving preaching, and the S/PPRC agrees with the pastor's decision to set aside one day a week for sermon preparation. Several strategies must be implemented to support that goal: the pastor does not take calls that day and turns off the phone; someone else covers emergencies; the pastor works at a place protected from interruptions; and he or she spends time that day with a preaching coach or mentor.

It is important for S/PPRC to interpret to the congregation what impact the plan has on congregational life and the specific support needed. In the example shown, the S/PPRC must let people know who will cover the telephone, what alternate number to call, and whom to contact in an emergency.

Parsonage and Housing Issues

The *Discipline* calls for an annual review of church-owned parsonages by the pastor, chair of S/PPRC, and chair of trustees. Your annual conference may have checklists and policies for parsonage standards, especially as related to inventory, maintenance, and repairs. Arrange a mutually agreeable time for the parsonage tour. While trustees are responsible for care of the property, the S/PPRC is responsible for the care and support of the parsonage family. Encourage the parsonage family to notify you of smaller issues before they become major problems.

Increasingly, churches are providing a housing allowance for clergy. Whether you have a parsonage or provide a housing allowance, research if the housing support provides accommodations similar to other professionals in the church family and the community.

Legal Responsibilities

Legal responsibilities with employed and appointed staff include church, state, and federal laws for lay and clergy staff. Make sure you are in compliance with federal wage and hiring laws, laws related to workers' compensation, and taxes. The legal department of the General Council on Finance and Administration has helpful information on the council's website. (See the Resources section. Also see *Guidelines 2025–2028: Finance and Guidelines 2025–2028: Trustees*.) This has become increasingly complex with new definitions to contract staff, employees, and what constitutes as overtime for nonexempt staff positions.

Church Policies

The *Discipline* (§258.2g(12)) says that the S/PPRC shall recommend to the Church Council a written statement of policy and procedures regarding the process for hiring, contracting, evaluating, promoting, retiring, and dismissing staff personnel who are not subject to appointment by the bishop. Review policies and assumptions that are already in place so you can update what you have or create a written policy. A sample policy for adult ministries staff is available on the Discipleship Ministries website. (See <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/recommendations-for-hiring-adult-ministries-staff>.)

Consider these issues in developing a church personnel policy:

- **Hiring Issues.** Introductory or probationary period, hiring of relatives, evaluation.
- **Compensation.** When/how often is payday; timekeeping.
- **Benefits.** Insurances, vacation, overtime, retirement.
- **Supervision.** Work rules, appearance on the job, harassment and misconduct, safety (especially when/if alone in the building), dealing with problems.
- **Rules and Regulations.** Meal and break times, smoking, use of phone and computers, office hours/work hours, receiving gifts from church members and others.

While congregations often have unwritten rules—insiders know “the way we do it”—it is a form of hospitality to have written policies. Coordinate with other leaders for clarity about who develops which policies. Sometimes, groups may operate at cross purposes or duplicate efforts. For example, many annual conferences require that congregations have written Safer Sanctuary® policies related to risk management with children, youth, and vulnerable adults; age-level councils may develop these policies. General Conference has directed every congregation to have a policy for preventing sexual misconduct. Policies related to safe use of the church's Internet in the office and in classrooms often need to be updated as technology evolves. Trustees may have policies for safe use of property and the management of assets. There may be unwritten policies related to the use of church equipment and property. You may have or need to develop procedures for the safe use of new equipment or technology. Even though the issue is essentially the same—safety—different groups have policies and practices that relate to their specific needs.

The Church Council may assign one group to bring together all your church policies. Keep this as simple as possible, easy to read and understand. It is a good idea to have policies

reviewed by a lawyer who is familiar with local laws. There are several sample policies and help for developing policies on agency websites (see the “Resources” section).

When the Pastor Changes

Clergy appointments are made annually in The United Methodist Church, so you may have a new pastor or a returning pastor. About one-fourth of United Methodist churches experience a pastoral change each year. *The Book of Discipline* (§258.2g(6)) requires the S/PPRC to teach the congregation about itineracy and the value of diversity in staffing. The United Methodist system of moving pastors from church to church is unlike most other denominations in which congregations *call* a pastor. Our practice is called *itineracy*.

Our system of annual appointments of pastoral leaders connects all United Methodist congregations with a pool of ordained and commissioned individuals who have a wide variety of gifts and graces for leadership. Ideally, this itinerant system allows both pastors and congregations to thrive in the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

This cooperative system allows United Methodists to retain qualified pastoral leaders for local churches on a continual basis. The S/PPRC is responsible for modeling and ensuring fairness, justice, and appreciation for those who facilitate God’s work in the name of the church. The S/PPRC plays a vital role, along with district superintendents, bishops, and pastors in this appointive process. The S/PPRC represents the voice of the congregation as it consults with the district superintendent.

When a Change Is Announced

When the bishop announces an appointment change, plan opportunities to celebrate the ministry of the current pastor and congregation during your life together. The S/PPRC can model for the congregation healthy acceptance and a process for grieving the loss of a pastor (and his or her family). Work through feelings of anger, hurt, loss, and fear of failure. Do not burden the new pastor with previous feelings and frustrations; let her or him begin with a clean slate.

You should not be surprised if your new pastor is a different gender from your current pastor or a member of an ethnic group different from the majority of the congregation. Diversity in leadership is a strength. Welcome this new servant leader to the congregation and community. See the “Resources” section for resources on welcoming cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments. The S/PPRC members need to be the leaders who call the congregation to hospitality and support of the new pastor. The S/PPRC is charged with setting the tone of acceptance, cooperation, and support: whatever the race, ethnicity, gender, or age of the new pastor. Affirm the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to all God’s people and celebrate our oneness in God.

When the pastor changes, the first step is announcing the change to the congregation. The S/PPRC must maintain confidentiality and respect local and conference traditions in making an announcement. In most instances, the departing pastor or the S/PPRC chair

makes the announcement to the congregation at an appropriate time. Sometimes, the announcement is made first by the bishop or district superintendent.

Everyone will have feelings about a change, and those feelings will be expressed in a variety of ways. In the best of situations, the departing pastor provides pastoral care by connecting past ministry to future possibilities. The pastor or chair of S/PPRC needs to tell people the reasons for the change in a way that both keeps confidences and also expresses discernment of God's call and direction for the pastor and congregation. In the transition, take care to affirm the ways in which the congregation is making healthy personal adjustments to the change. Assure the congregation that God is guiding them into the future. As social media and technology have become more widely used, a pastor's transition away from a congregation has come to require more intentional boundary setting. It is important for the S/PPRC to help set healthy frameworks to help the congregation understand what a pastoral relationship looks like, and how it is different from friendship. The S/PPRC members also lead the congregation away from blaming. Congregations can get stuck, making comments like "they took our pastor," or "everything was going so well." If the pastor leaves under difficult circumstances, blaming comments may center on damage done or losses incurred. Offer possible responses if you overhear such comments. Ideally, the committee will consider strategies for healing and restoration before an announcement is made.

When a family adds or loses a member, the family is not the same, and so it is with the congregation when the pastor changes. However, some things endure: commitments to one another, commitments to ministry, and values about what is important. Celebrate that you already have a structure in place. At the same time, be prepared for new leaders and new ideas to emerge. A new pastor provides an opportunity for both pastors and people to pause for reflection and evaluation of the ministry in your location.

Inviting a Former Pastor to Return

Your professional pastoral relationship is with the newly appointed leader. It is a matter of clergy ethics and boundaries that former pastors do not encroach or interfere, either in person or by way of media. (Remind everyone—pastors and congregation—that contact through the Internet or other electronic means is always public.) Ask your district superintendent about the conference policy related to pastors returning to do weddings, funerals, or visitations. As a rule, these life passages should be shared between the congregation and the new pastor. The currently appointed pastor is the proper person to invite a former clergy or staff person to return for pastoral functions. If there is any difficulty or confusion, appeal to the DS for help.

Handling the Transition

The S/PPRC can provide opportunities for congregational members to write letters and make other expressions of appreciation to the exiting pastor. *The United Methodist Book of Worship* has services of farewell and for welcome of a pastor.

The S/PPRC is involved in the physical move from one appointment to another, although the details vary in different locations. Ask your district superintendent if you are not sure how this will take place and how costs are covered. You are responsible, along with trustees, for preparing space for the new person. Usually this involves cleaning, painting, and sometimes updating housing and office space.

The S/PPRC should consult with the incoming pastor for the first Sunday's worship. Reach out to the new pastor so that the pastor meets congregational and community leaders during the first few weeks. Take the lead in discussing congregational support for balancing personal and professional activities. Discuss plans for continuing education, for sabbath and family time, and expectations for healthy habits, along with ministry expectations.

Recognize All the Staff

The S/PPRC is the cheerleading squad for the staff of your church throughout the year. The first Sunday of the new appointment year is a good time to celebrate appointed staff and recognize all the staff in worship, where you can acknowledge and affirm the gifts they share in leading the congregation. Other opportunities to celebrate the staff may be on birthdays or anniversaries, or at Christmas. You might also want to recognize specific accomplishments or community achievements.

Pay attention to creating a pleasant work environment for the staff and provide the necessary tools and equipment for the job. The S/PPRC leads the congregation in celebrating the work of the staff. Acknowledge specific examples of ways the staff contribute to the mission and vision of the church. Look for opportunities to provide additional support in busy or stressful ministry seasons.

Third Quarter: July–September

The third quarter suggestions relate to professional ministry: job descriptions, supervision, compensation, continuing education, and spiritual renewal.

Review Job Descriptions and Strategies

The Book of Discipline provides an exhaustive list of responsibilities and duties for the appointed pastor that is performed “within the context of their appointment” (§339.2). This means that not every item receives equal weight; the context of the appointment helps the pastor prioritize. The S/PPRC worked with the pastor during the first quarter to set expectations in light of congregational needs and pastoral strengths. During this quarter, review the list to stay on track with expectations; it may stimulate new and creative ministry in your setting. If the pastor is new, this will be his or her “first quarter.”

The S/PPRC is charged by the *Discipline* to develop written job descriptions for staff in cooperation with the senior pastor (§258.2g(7)). Start with a statement of the results expected from the position and ministry. Then follow with the ministry responsibilities. The staff person and supervisor will develop specific strategies as they set priorities and goals. You can look at examples of job descriptions on the Discipleship Ministries website.

Even if the position or staff person has been in place, it’s a good idea to review the description each year and update as necessary. As the congregation grows or changes, position descriptions need to keep pace. Make recommendations for new staff positions to the Church Council.

While developing ministry descriptions is the task of S/PPRC, be sure to invite input from people who work in, who participate in, or who are affected by the specialized area, such as music, youth ministry, or an age level. Generally, staff should be hired to do ministry *with* rather than *for* an age level or group of people. Helping staff realize that they have advocates on the S/PPRC can also benefit staff retention rates in the long run as staff feel cared for, recognized, and listened to.

Developing job descriptions will help you clarify goals and maintain positions for missional reasons rather than momentary convenience. For example, hiring a summer youth director when you can’t find a volunteer covers that ministry until September; then you are faced with the same unresolved staffing issue. Be clear about the way the creation or ending of a position will contribute to your congregation’s mission of intentionally making disciples.

Continue to Monitor Strategies

You identified expectations in the first quarter, then set goals and strategies more firmly during the second quarter. Near the end of this third quarter, meet with staff to evaluate how the ministry plan is progressing. Here are some questions to consider for each of the goals and strategies:

- Did the strategy contribute to meeting the goal?
- What successes do we need to build on?
- What has been learned for developing future strategies to meet this goal?
- What examples of growing discipleship have we seen? Are there implications for future ministry?
- What strategies need follow-up?
- How does this goal or strategy relate to the priority for the year?

Leadership Development

As you work with people in the congregation and discuss ongoing or new ministries with staff, be alert to people who are growing in faith and showing leadership skill. You may have recommendations for the Nominations and Leadership Development Committee of people whose skills and gifts can complement the staff. (Review information about leadership development under first-quarter responsibilities and read *Guidelines 2025–2028: Nominations and Leadership Development*.)

Supervision of Staff

As the number of staff people increases, be clear about who reports to whom. The senior pastor provides day-to-day supervision of staff. In a larger church, the senior pastor may delegate supervision to the head of a department. The S/PPRC can assign a liaison for each staff person or staff group to support and encourage the work and to increase communication with the congregation.

The S/PPRC may need to work with staff on issues of work style, personality, or generational differences. Issues may be resolved through the relationships that have been developed among S/PPRC, staff, and congregation and may include some outside interventions such as training, a speaker, or mediation. Generally, staff management and business practices are not covered in seminary, so providing these as continuing education opportunities to a pastoral leadership may be of benefit.

Salary and Benefits Review

Each year, the S/PPRC recommends salary, benefits, insurances, vacation, housing, and continuing education for all appointed and non-appointed staff. After consultation with the Finance Committee, the recommendations go to the Church Council. The Church Council presents the financial recommendations to the charge conference, which votes to approve or amend. In a One Board model, each of these actions is taken within that board.

Show your care of the pastor and staff by working with them to develop a salary and

benefit package that meets their unique needs within the ability of the church or charge to pay. There are several things to consider.

- The chair of the S/PPRC should consult with the Finance Committee chair about the overall budget for salaries and benefits and give advance notice of any recommended changes.
- Every annual conference session sets the minimum salary for pastors in various categories. The lay member of annual conference on the committee will have the information or know where to find it.
- The district superintendent is generally the presiding officer at charge conference, and he or she may need to be consulted about salaries for the appointed staff, particularly if there is a change of pastor.
- If the S/PPRC is developing a compensation package for a new position, it should gather information about salary and benefits for a comparable position from other churches in the annual conference and in the community. Review wage and employment laws. Consider the level of responsibility you expect from the person in this position. Pay particular attention to overtime rules as well as vacation days or time off.

Other aspects of support for all employees may not need annual approval at charge conference but should be reviewed by the committee. These include:

- working conditions, including work space, office helpers (volunteers), equipment, and hours;
- business expenses, such as cell phones, Internet connection, and mileage and travel expenses when on church business;
- annual conference session attendance allowance, continuing education for both clergy and employed staff, moving expenses;
- Social Security, Workers' Compensation, insurance, pension and retirement programs, and vacation allowances. Some conferences have vacation policies for clergy (see *Guidelines 2025–2028: Finance* for more detailed information).

Review the benefits for all staff to make sure they comply with your stated policies and with the United Methodist Social Principles (see Part V of the *Discipline*). Full- and part-time employees must be treated fairly and justly; and full-time employees, at least, should receive benefits appropriate to their position and responsibility. Make recommendations to the Finance Committee for adjustments.

The *Discipline* requires provision of adequate housing for pastors, either by a parsonage or a housing allowance. Housing is not considered part of gross income (although there are federal tax implications for the pastor).

Continuing Education and Spiritual Formation

If the staff, ordained and lay, are to be effective in their ministry, they must have opportunities for continuing education to expand their knowledge and skills, and for spiritual formation to foster a growing relationship with God.

Ordained elders and deacons are required to report at charge conference on their continuing education and spiritual formation of the past year and plans for the new year. Many churches provide continuing education funds in addition to salary. Many annual conferences have standards, requirements, and guidelines for continuing education. Your pastor, conference staff, and district superintendent will have details. Talk with the clergy staff to develop a plan for meeting, or exceeding, these standards and guidelines.

If your pastor's plan calls for financial aid beyond your congregation, it may be possible to obtain it from the Ministerial Education Fund (MEF). One-fourth of this fund is retained in each annual conference and administered by the conference board of ordained ministry for theological education, enlistment, and continuing education. The MEF is an apportioned fund (part of your congregation's connectional giving to the denomination). Your committee should tell the congregation about this fund and support 100 percent remittance to the MEF, as part of efforts to meet 100 percent apportionment giving.

Talk with other staff people about their own continuing education. Building maintenance staff can benefit by taking advantage of seminars offered in the community or nearby. Many annual conferences provide workshops for secretaries, Christian educators, youth ministers, directors of music, choir directors, and organists. Professional organizations for United Methodists provide resources and workshops for musicians, educators, youth ministers, church secretaries, and church administrators. More and more skills not traditionally associated with ministry are becoming critical for congregational leadership. The S/PPRC can provide guidance and suggestions for skills to be built as well as a variety of non-church learning opportunities to grow those skills.

All ordained leaders are allowed one week each year and one month during one year of each quadrennium (the four years between General Conferences) for continuing education and spiritual formation. This is not a vacation, but a time of learning that will enhance the ministry of the pastor and the congregation. Furthermore, a pastor who has held a full-time appointment for at least six years is permitted to request an educational leave of up to six months while continuing to hold an appointment. The pastor will need to have a careful discussion with the committee and the district superintendent if he or she is seeking such a plan. One part of such a plan is determining alternative pastoral leadership while the leave is in effect and the financial obligations that may go along with that leadership.

Fourth Quarter: October–December

Your charge conference will be scheduled during the final quarter. At that time, you will “review and evaluate the total mission and ministry of the church, receive reports, and adopt objectives and goals recommended by the church council that are in keeping with the objectives of The United Methodist Church” (§247.3).

Annual Staff Evaluations

The Book of Discipline requires the S/PPRC to provide at least annual evaluation for the pastor and staff in an ongoing journey toward effective ministry and to identify continuing education needs and plans. The United Methodist Church focuses specific attention on evaluation and assessment. Bishops and district superintendents continually develop processes to make more effective appointments for the mission of Christ in your community. If your congregation and pastoral leadership utilizes Disciple Dashboard from Discipleship Ministries to set goals, evaluate metrics, and track success, consider tying the data accumulated there into the evaluation processes.

The goal of assessment and accountability is to evaluate and improve ministry under the guidance of God and to build positive relationships and strong communication skills. Agree on the steps for improving ministry. Decide who else, if anyone, will receive information from individual assessments and how your committee will interpret the assessment. Assessment can be assigned to subcommittees who work with the pastor and staff members to complete the evaluations of their area of ministry.

One evaluation tool is the pastor’s report to the charge conference, which asks for specific membership and baptism statistics. Suggestions for lay evaluations will also be helpful for the ordained staff.

Members of the Church Council or other working groups may provide feedback, particularly as staff have carried out their responsibilities in a ministry area; but the evaluation process is the work of S/PPRC. In any case, make sure that the evaluation is not driven by dissatisfaction or conflict; these issues are best addressed in other ways. Focus the conversation on mission and ministry, not personalities or feelings (“I like [or don’t like] this person.”). A good baseline is to focus on the objective, not the subjective. All evaluation processes should include these elements:

- ongoing self-assessment,
- group assessment,
- feedback,

- recommendations for growth,
- plans for implementing those recommendations.

To do an assessment, you will have to be clear about the goals and strategies that have been established and about the measures that indicate if and how well those strategies have been accomplished. In other words, how can you tell if the ministry goals have been achieved, beyond the superficial signs, such as attendance? If the ultimate goal of any ministry endeavor is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, how will you recognize *disciples* and *transformation*? These questions may get you started:

- How did we do with the goals set at the first of the year?
- Is our congregation in the same place we were then? What signs indicate a difference?
- Are new issues emerging in our congregation or community?
- What new ministry areas have staff or the congregation identified?
- What continuing education have you completed and how does that relate to your work?
- What new training will help you in the next year?
- Do we have an intentional Discipleship System (or pathway)? Does that system seem to be producing what we want it to produce in terms of experiences and opportunities? What changes might be beneficial?

There are additional suggestions for evaluation processes in the book *Watching Over One Another in Love* and on the Discipleship Ministries website.

One district superintendent offers this list of evaluation “Dos and Don’ts.”

DO remember that every individual is of great worth in God’s sight.	DON’T belittle or demean any person’s character or worth in any way.
DO assume the best about a person’s motives and intentions.	DON’T believe the worst interpretation of things until you have all the facts.
DO keep clearly in mind that the purpose of evaluation is improvement.	DON’T get sidetracked in a nonproductive complaint session.
DO express your feelings and perceptions honestly, without trying to soften them.	DON’T ignore the feelings of others by sharing yours abusively.
DO affirm everything you can affirm about a person without lying or equivocating.	DON’T forget that pastors often have fragile egos that need tender care.
DO be honest and share negative feedback when necessary.	DON’T hide your true feelings in an effort to protect the pastor’s ego.
DO speak directly to the person you are sharing feedback about.	DON’T say anything behind a person’s back that you would not say to his or her face.
DO laugh occasionally during the process—especially at yourself.	DON’T take the task so seriously that it becomes a burden and a chore.
DO use the evaluation process as a springboard for growth in all areas.	DON’T treat it as another paperwork requirement to be disposed of quickly.

The S/PPRC is responsible for the assessment of lay staff and appointed clergy. Here is a model that one church follows for lay staff evaluations:

- Start by asking staff members for a report of their accomplishments and celebrate them.
- Review the ministry goals set earlier in the year, including those set by the charge or church conference, considering the nature and function of a congregation (as stated in the *Discipline*).
- Review the strategies you have previously set to reach these goals. Has the staff person done the strategies he or she agreed to do? Have the strategies been effective in reaching the ministry goals? How do you know? Do the strategies for this staff person need to be continued or changed?
- Review the position description, help the staff person assess time management for the position, review the church resources available for the ministry (financial, volunteers involved, other supplies). This will help you develop a realistic work plan for the future and allow you to advocate for more effective ministry.
- Assess the staff person's need for continuing education. Encourage each person to ask for help, as necessary, to accomplish the strategies set for the coming year. For instance, the church office staff may need special training to be able to use new equipment to its full potential. The S/PPRC should be prepared to help them obtain this training as continuing education. Christian education staff hired from within the congregation may need more formal training in Bible and theology or educational theory and application. Solicit the needs of the staff and the pastor and find ways to fill those needs. (Look for self-guided study materials, including webinars and downloads, at www.umcdiscipleship.org.)
- Review with the staff the plan for division of responsibilities for the various areas of ministry. If a change is needed, the S/PPRC must determine who will carry the added responsibilities. Remember that both paid and volunteer staff can carry out strategies for reaching the ministry goals of the congregation.
- Conclude the assessment by restating the past accomplishments, the future strategy details, changes in position description, the measures or standards that describe success, and the steps you have agreed on. Pray for the staff person and the mission of your congregation.

Follow up staff evaluations with a committee discussion of the staffing for the ministry of the congregation. Ideally, staffing is developed within the context of missional need and is not financially driven. The S/PPRC must be wise stewards of the congregation's resources while providing staffing for the congregation's ministry goals.

Charge Conference Preparation

The S/PPRC is not required by the *Discipline* to report at charge conference, but it does have responsibility for first submitting recommendations to the Church Council on matters related to staffing needs and deployment, salaries and benefits, and so on, as has been described. These recommendations should be worked out and agreed to by the

Finance Committee and the Church Council *before* charge conference rather than negotiating salary and benefits during charge conference. The chair may be called upon at charge conference to report briefly. Be prepared with a list of tasks accomplished, the highlights of projects you are working on for next year's committee, your reflections on the work of the committee, and if necessary, rationale for decisions related to salary, benefits, and staff changes. Be prepared to answer questions that may arise during charge conference, while showing respect for individual staff members. Ask the pastor and staff for input. Consider ideas to improve the work of building relationships between staff and congregation and accomplishing your responsibilities.

Annual Consultation with the District Superintendent

The district superintendent uses knowledge of the local church's vision and mission to represent the church in the appointive process. Annually, the S/PPRC will be asked to convey the local church's leadership needs and ministry context to the district superintendent. Clarity in consultation leads to the best possible match for clergy leadership. The consultation process between the S/PPRC and district superintendent is confidential. Talk with the DS about the appropriate time to request a change, if one is needed. Remember that the bishop makes the final appointment.

Sometimes the district superintendent is able to visit each church only once a year. Put the DS on the mailing list for the parish newsletter, letters that go out to the membership, and even the Sunday bulletins. You may want to invite him or her to come to a meeting with the committee to share times of rejoicing at meeting goals or celebrating events such as anniversaries. Open lines of communication are the key, particularly as district superintendents and other staff of the Episcopal Area cover large geographies and quantities of churches.

A Closing Word

An effective, faithful, and thoughtful S/PPRC can make a huge difference in the professional life of the pastor and other staff. As you work together in love and honesty, you are in the perfect position to offer appropriate support and accountability to the spiritual leaders of the congregation so that they can support and guide the congregation. May God bless you in this crucial ministry.

Resources

** Indicates our top picks

General

Holy Bible (there are many translations and versions).

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

The United Methodist Book of Worship (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), ISBN9780687035724. See especially Section VII, “Occasional Services,” and Section IX, “Services Relating to Congregations and Buildings.”

Communication Tools

Healthy Disclosure: Solving Communication Quandaries in Congregations by Kibbie Simmons Ruth and Karen A. McClintock. Originally published by the Alban Institute, this book is now available through Rowman and Littlefield Publishers (<https://rowman.com>).

Speaking Faith: The Essential Handbook for Religious Communicators, 7th edition. Religious Communicators Council Handbook. Also available are various communication guidelines and tips from professionals. Available through the RCC website: www.religioncommunicators.org.

Supervision

Preventing Sexual Abuse in Congregations: A Resource for Leaders by Karen A. McClintock. Originally published by the Alban Institute, this book is now available through Rowman and Littlefield Publishers (<https://rowman.com>).

***Safer Sanctuaries: Nurturing Trust within Faith Communities*, Multiple Authors. (Discipleship Resources, 2023), ISBN: 978-0-88177-962-2.

***Watching over One Another in Love: A Wesleyan Model for Ministry Assessment* by Gwen Purushotham (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, revised 2010), ISBN 9780938162728.

Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook New Edition by Jane Leach and Michael Paterson (Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd., 2015), ISBN: 978-0334053446.

Committee Ministry

Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences by Gilbert R. Rendle (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, <https://rowman.com>).

****Leading Meetings: What Every Leader Needs to Know** by Betsey Heavner (<https://bookstore.upperroom.org>. Revised 2010; available as pdf).

Website Resources for S/PPRC

Discipleship Ministries has a training module for S/PPRC, sample church policy, devotional materials for church committees, and practical tools for changing pastors (www.umcdiscipleship.org). Click on church leaders, and then choose the pastor/staff-parish topic. For resources related to this Guideline, go to www.MinistryGuidelines.org.

Explore Calling (www.explorecalling.org) includes curriculum for children and for youth to explore how God is calling them to ministry. There are worship resources as well as materials for individuals to explore as they discern God's call.

Faith and Leadership has resources for church management and leadership. Resources of the former Alban Institute are incorporated in this site developed by the Leadership Institute at Duke Divinity School. Explore the "topics" tab: <https://faithandleadership.com/>.

General Board of Finance and Administration Legal Manual includes policies and information about compensation, sexual misconduct, and numerous other legal and personnel issues. Download the pdf manual from <http://www.gcfa.org/>.

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women has a parsonage handbook, curriculum, resources for clergy families, and resources to educate about sexual ethics (<http://www.gcsrw.org>).

The Lewis Center for Church Leadership offers free and low-cost resources for clergy and churches, including a series of tip sheets such as "Fifty Ways to Welcome a New Pastor" (<http://www.churchleadership.com>).

UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

The United Methodist Church, www.umc.org

General Commission on Archives and History, www.gcqh.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.

