

# Appointment-Making in the Great Plains Conference



As Christians, God has given us a profound mission: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

To accomplish God's mission, the Great Plains cabinet identifies, stewards, and deploys resources. Our clergy and congregations do this by nurturing people to grow in God's grace by proclaiming Christ so that others may know him and make him known, by serving others (especially the poor), and by seeking social holiness and justice. In consultation with the clergy and lay leaders of our annual conference, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we strive to make the best possible appointments by knowing the gifts of the clergy, the gifts of congregations, and the missional opportunities in our communities. We will make assignments that seek to create the best matches, call forth our gifts, increase the number of vital congregations, and expand and enhance our Christian witness.

## Core Values

We follow these core values related to the making of clergy appointments in the Great Plains Conference:

- 1. Discernment — A Divine and Human Process:** Every appointment is made through deep prayer and discernment informed by the Great Plains vision for increasing the number of vital congregations for the sake of the local mission field and the world. As the bishop, and as a cabinet, we acknowledge that we have our ministry by the grace and mercy of God. We are human with limitations and flaws (2 Corinthians 4:7). Although we earnestly weigh and prayerfully consider all appointments, we will not attain appointment perfection. Not every appointment will serve everyone's interests or inclinations.
- 2. It's All about the Mission.** The primary factor in making an appointment is the mission field, which has two constituencies: those who are not yet part of the congregation because they do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the disciples already involved in the formative life offered by the congregation. Some guiding questions as we make mission-field appointments:
  - Can this pastor lead the local church to make disciples of its existing members and form new disciples of people who are not yet part of their local church?
  - Is a congregation in a growing population area growing in average worship attendance, small-group ministries, professions of faith, and baptisms? If so, can the pastor lead greater growth and dreams for the congregation and the community?
  - Is a congregation declining in a growing area? If so, what support does a pastor need to increase congregational vitality and growth?
  - Where there has been conflict or scandal, can the pastor be the instrument of healing and reconciliation?
  - In areas where missional networking leadership is utilized, does the pastor have the gifts, graces, and competencies to lead several other smaller congregations in their region?
  - Do we have the right pastor in place to start new faith communities?
- 3. The Itinerancy:** Clergy membership resides in the annual conference (¶ 336), not in a local church or an extension ministry. The itinerant system represents the missional or "sending" thrust of United Methodism — to extend the gospel and develop communities of Christian disciples who build the realm of God according to Jesus' teachings. For more than 200 years, clergy in the United Methodist tradition have agreed to offer themselves "without reserve to be appointed and to serve" wherever they are needed for the sake of the mission, believing this to be the work of the Holy Spirit. The cabinet realizes that pastors may have temporary itinerancy constraints that limit their appointability, such as family concerns, spouse's employment, and medical needs. The cabinet is sensitive to these needs but keeps the mission foremost in our decision-making. There are occasions when the conference has a compelling missional need to intervene and reappoint a fruitful and beloved pastor when a pastoral transition has not been requested, but

this is the exception. We recognize some appointments will be received enthusiastically, while others will be difficult to embrace.

4. **Pastoral Fruitfulness:** When discerning whom to send to an appointment, the cabinet pays attention to fruitfulness of a pastor's ministry in the context of the mission field. As clergy, we are sent by Jesus, who gives us the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) and the Great Commandment (Mark 12:29-31).

Fruitful pastors lead congregations to:

- **Grow** in worship attendance, in the number of baptisms, and in the number of professions of faith.
- **Engage** people in loving God, proclaiming Christ, serving others (especially the poor), and seeking justice.
- **Give** to support the church's mission and 100% support of mission shares

5. **Mutual Ministry between Clergy and Laity:** The lay people accomplish most of the church's nurture, outreach, and witness ministries. They are supportive of the church with their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service, and their witness. They believe in the mission of the church and the role of the church in society. Lay people are active advocates of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and they want to be useful for God's good purposes for the world. Effective clergy identify, seek out, nurture, enroll, equip, and collaborate with the laity to be heralds and witnesses of the mighty and transforming work of God in individual lives, in our communities, and in the world. Through inward and outward spiritual disciplines, God's will for each congregation is sought, and vision is discerned for the congregation and its missional future. The United Methodist Church can become a renewed movement as gifted lay people are equipped and released to live out their call through the use of their abilities to teach, minister, and reach out in ministries of service and witness that convey God's outreaching love.

6. **Compensation:** Salaries are necessary and important, but they are not the driving factor determining the next appointment. We each seek to avoid reductions in compensation. However, many churches are reducing clergy compensation at times of a pastoral transition, some are reducing full-time salaries to part-time, and some are closing associate clergy positions. We appeal to the congregations not to devalue the pastoral office unless it is a matter of required financial leadership. As clergy, our worth is not tied to financial compensation but to being a beloved child of God made in God's image. Our call is to serve the Lord, our congregations, and extension ministries in the four-fold ministry of Word, Sacrament, Order and Service, in witness of Christ's love and justice (§ 340).

In closing, we remain convinced that God has given us a profound mission: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Because Jesus Christ promised to be with us until the end of time as we seek to fulfill this mission, we believe we have a future with hope!

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*This document expresses the unanimous consensus of the appointive cabinet of the Great Plains Conference of the United Methodist Church, and is a revision of bishop Ken Carter's (Florida Conference) blog, "Appointment-Making in a Time of Mission: 2016."*