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Here I Stand

Getting off to a good start with a new pastor promotes positive ministry.

By Donald G. Sapp

It's that time of year when many United Methodist churches will soon be saying goodbye to pastors and welcoming new ones. Whether the pastor succeeds in that new situation depends in large measure upon the welcome he/she receives. Initial impressions are often lasting ones. Here are some suggestions for enabling the new minister to get off to a good start.

Before the Pastor Arrives

- Encourage the parishioners to write letters and notes welcoming him/her and the family. Include a family snapshot, identifying each person.
- Put the parsonage in order. Clean the carpets and draperies. Cut the grass. Trim the hedges. Weed the flower-beds. Make certain the house, garage, and yard are clean prior to the pastor's arrival.
- Put the Pastor's study/office in order. Are there adequate book shelves? Adequate lighting and power supplies?
- Mail to the new pastor helpful information about the church and community: Sunday bulletins, newsletters, pictorial directory, membership lists, church calendar, community map, newspaper, school information.
- The departing pastor should prepare a report informing the new pastor of pertinent information, details of forthcoming programs and events, names of the sick and shut-ins, lists of reliable merchants, physicians, dentists, veterinarians, auto mechanics, etc.

When the Pastor Arrives

- Have a committee on hand to assist the family in moving into its new home. Provide care for small children on moving day. (Check with the pastor first)
- Display a welcome banner on the front of the church.
- Place a bowl of fruit and/or a bowl of freshly cut flowers on the dining room table.
- Stock the parsonage refrigerator with food: a watermelon, salads, beverages, desserts.
- Extend an invitation for a welcoming meal.
- Wear name tags on moving day and at all church functions for the first three months.
- Plan a special welcome on the pastor's first Sunday.
- Plan a welcome reception party or dinner for the parsonage family within the first two months of their arrival. Schedule it at a time when you can invite community leaders as well as pastors and lay people from neighboring churches.
- Arrange to have parishioners accompany the new pastor in meeting community leaders: mayor, town council members; school, youth and social workers; newspapers, radio and television personnel; and other civic and business leaders.