

Straight From The Pastor's Mouth

"How To Make Your New Pastor Feel Welcome"

By The Reverend Dr. Thomas L. Salsgiver



My wife, Joanne loves to say that there are two times when the members of a church are happy with their pastor — half are happy when their pastor comes, and half are happy when their pastor leaves.

Will you be experiencing a pastoral change this year? You may be at the point of weeping and gnashing your teeth because your pastor is leaving. Or, you may be jumping for joy because you thought this day would never come.

Here are some suggestions (I hope, helpful ones) as you live into and through the transition:

- ⇒ Whichever camp you are in, keep those feelings to yourself. It is not the new pastor's fault that he/she is coming to the new parish. It won't make the new pastor feel welcome to know how much the former pastor was loved!
- ⇒ If the new pastor is coming into a situation where you and/or others are happy the former pastor is gone, don't talk about how bad it was and what he/she did wrong. That really tells the new pastor more about you than about the situation.
- ⇒ No matter your feelings, welcome the pastor as though he/she is the best thing to happen to you and to your congregation.
- ⇒ Expect that the new working relationship will be different. That is not good or bad, but it will be different.
- ⇒ When a person comes into the office or if there is a phone call, try to give the pastor some helpful information about that person. Remember that he/she doesn't know them.
- ⇒ Continue to help the new pastor with names of parishioners. Remember: the congregation has just the pastor's name to learn. The new pastor has many.

Some helpful things to do prior to his/her arrival:

- ⇒ Make sure the office is clean, straightened, and inviting. That doesn't mean you have to do the cleaning, but make sure it is cleaned. (One place I moved into, the former pastor's dirty cup was still on the desk along with pencils that had bite marks on them.)
- ⇒ It would be very nice to have some flowers, a plant, or something on the desk that says "I'm so glad you are here."

- ⇒ Ask the new pastor how he/she prefers to be called, does he/she want the mail opened or not opened, as well as other office procedures. Simply, the way the former pastor liked things isn't a guarantee the new pastor will want them that way.
- ⇒ Prepare a notebook with helpful information regarding church information and scheduled meeting times for the next three months. Include in this the deadline for things such as newsletter, when different offering envelopes are ordered. Any information that he/she will find helpful in preparing his or her schedule will be so useful.
- ⇒ Prepare a notebook listing month by month worship information such as special services, traditional times for Lenten services, Advent services, Easter, Christmas. List also any worship services that have been unique to your congregation. Make sure that the new pastor knows that this is a guide for how we've done things — *not necessarily how things will be done in the future*. There is nothing worse than being a new pastor and not knowing what worship services there have been and any special expectations for those services.

Whether you do any of the above or not, follow the next piece of advice: please do not talk with other staff or parishioners about the shortcomings of the new pastor. And, don't compare him/her with the last one. You are the person everyone comes to. They will take their cue from you. Be positive, be open, and be encouraging and most of all, be supportive.

Editor's Note: The Reverend Dr. Thomas L. Salsgiver is the current Council Director for the Central PA Conference of the United Methodist Church. He previously served as senior pastor at churches in Harrisburg, Wellsboro, and Bloomsburg — all in Pennsylvania. In addition, he served as the Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry for the General Board of Discipleship in Nashville, Tennessee. Dr. Salsgiver is thanked for sharing with us in this issue.

"Straight From The Pastor's Mouth" is a column new to *The Vital Link*. It is hoped that this will become a regular feature. If you have a question you would like to have answered by a pastor, district superintendent or bishop, E-mail at et@wesleybloom.org.