

MOVE PACK

*A Guide to a Good Move for
Pastors and Families*

*East Ohio Conference
of the United Methodist Church*





Move Pack

A Guide to a Good Move for Pastors & Families

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First You Pray

Devotional Resources

Prayers

These prayers focus upon the presence of God in times of change.

Gracious God,
Today I am reminded of my ordination vows. I promised to go where appointed. Just as Abraham moved from Haran, just as Ruth and Naomi moved to Bethlehem, just as Jesus' disciples were called to move and follow him, so may I remain faithful to your call upon my life to serve your people. For you have promised to be with me at all times and in all places. "I will go...if you lead me." Amen.

d

All-knowing, All-seeing One,
In these days of uncertainty, be present in my heart and soul.
In these days of anticipation, be present in my mind and spirit.
In these days of change, be present in my time and space.
And grant me your deep peace.

d

God of Grace and God of Glory,
pour upon me and upon my loved ones your generous heart of love.
Grant that we may have gentle spirits when there is anxiety.
Grant that we might see hope for the future in our transition.
Grant that we might leave well and arrive well,
for we are surrounded by your Spirit
who knows and guides all things. Amen.

d

Gentle One,
Guard us in our sleep.
Guide us in our days.
Grant us your peace.
Give us your ways.
Gentle One,
go with us.

d

Merciful God,
In the midst of transition, transform me and keep calling me forth into the light. When there is worry, bring peace. When there is conflict, bring resolution. When there is anxiety, bring calm. When there is fear, bring hope. Walk with me and those who love me in this time of transition. Keep my heart open so I may be carried by your strength. Amen.

Searching the Scriptures

Searching the Scriptures for meaning is a practice called *lectio divina*—holy reading. Choose a passage, and read it slowly and silently. A second reading is to be read aloud and followed by another silent reading. Notice what words or phrases stand out (especially verbs). Either journal about what the word or phrase means for you or be in prayer with that word or phrase. Close by reading the passage again as the final prayer.

Scripture suggestions:

Psalms 4, 5, 103:1-5, 121, 130, 131, 139
Matthew 6:25-34, 13:31-33
Mark 1:16-20, 6:30-44
Luke 1:46-55, 9:1-6
John 15:1-11, 21:15-19
Romans 8:28-30
Colossians 3:12-17
1 Peter 2:9, 21
2 Peter 1:3-11

Reflections from Pastors

“All Things New” by Sally Dyck

As I was driving back to my office after taking my husband to the airport, I was a little worried because he was flying on an airline that had had a plane crash the day before. My concern prompted me to reflect on my life as I sped along. “I love my life!” I thought to myself.

I was driving my beloved 10-year-old car. I thought to myself, “I like my car!” I couldn’t imagine getting a new one. I thought about the house that my husband and I had owned for 13 years and after all the work we’d put into it, it was just the way we wanted it. “I like my house!” We had owned the house for the last 13 years because I had served the same church for that long, and, yes, “I love my church!” All of this was motivated by my original concern for my husband, so I concluded my litany by saying, “I love my husband of 21 years!” (You can tell from this litany that I’m not quick to change major components of my life!)

I dared to think out loud, “What a wonderful life! What could go wrong on a day like today?” I no sooner walked into my office than I was handed a message, requesting me to call the bishop. After reaching him, I discovered that everything in my life was about to change—except my husband.

Within weeks, the house was sold. I purchased a new car (my old sports car wasn’t going to do well out in the hills where I was to be the new district superintendent). I said goodbye to my wonderful church and all my friends, and I moved away from the city I had lived in for the last 20 years.

“I am making all things new,” it says in the scriptures (Revelation 21:5). I discovered that “all things new” can be a painful experience. Suddenly I had a new address and phone number (which I frequently forgot) and a new home (where I didn’t always know where things were). I had a new car with features that were a mystery to me at times (one night I couldn’t find the switch to turn on the bright headlights). I had a new job in a new office in a new town with a new set of people to work with and to develop into friends. Quite frankly, “all things new” brought a new experience of many tears and frustrations, loneliness and uncertainty.

Throughout the experience, the greatest discovery for me was how much we as a society, even the church, minimize the grief, sadness, and loss that all of us experience when we move—whether it’s a planned and accepted move or not. As a pastor, I know that people are forever dealing with their anger in one way or another. I learned that some anger is really redirected and unresolved sadness. It’s a lot easier to be mad than sad. Some people encouraged me to be mad because it’s not as scary as sad—but I’ve just felt sad.

None of the things on my list of “all things new” was life threatening, but all of them brought a sense of loss and a corresponding sense of grief. I cannot bring myself to say that everything is all right. It probably will be, but I am not there yet. Psalm 30:11 says that God will turn our sadness (mourning) into joy. I wait upon the Lord!¹

A Path Toward Beginning Spiritual Balance

Moving throws us off balance. No matter what the circumstances that triggered our change of appointment, there is no denying that moving “upsets the apple cart” of our family, our congregation, and ourselves. In the midst of the physical disorder of moving, we attempt to maintain order, and so get busy with sorting, packing, organizing, looking toward the new and leaving the old behind. But then, a second wave of assault on our state of equilibrium looms on the horizon, threatening to strip us of the patience, poise, peace, and grace that we have come to expect from a life lived in faith.

This second wave cannot be worked through as quickly or efficiently as the first, for it involves people rather than possessions, and feelings rather than facts. Like Thomas who cries out at the news of Jesus’ departure, we, too, cry out in confusion and fear. And in the lament, we, too, are reminded not to fear, for God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit will provide us with the means for turning what could be an awkward exit into a grace-filled goodbye. The following offers a prayerful approach to moving.

Share with God, family, friends and colleagues

- Offer your confusion, pain, fear, and budding anticipation to God.
- Invite God to be a part of this experience.
- Allow God to take your hand as you seek to regain your balance.
- Review your ministry with God, lifting the victories and disappointments.
- Listen for God’s forgiveness and blessing.

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The greatest discovery for me was how much we as a society, even the church, minimize the grief, sadness, and loss





Share with your congregation

- Offer your feelings of grief, anxiety, and anticipation with grace-filled honesty and love.
- Invite the congregation to join you in the journey of sorting through feelings and memories in preparation for parting.
- Allow yourselves to work hand-in-hand in this process.
- Review the victories and disappointments of your life together, and dream of the future.
- Listen for forgiveness and blessing.

Letter to God on Moving

Dear God,

It's moving time again. I know I should be thankful for a roof over my head and indoor plumbing, for a place to park my car and my books; but I'm just not ready for the upheaval—again.

*I'm leaving my
rose bushes,
lilac bushes,
tulips, and
bird houses*



Again, I'm going to find that some of my dishes don't fit in the dishwasher racks, and my stew pot doesn't fit in the cupboard, and my beds don't fit in the rooms, and furniture from a three-story house will go into the basement of a ranch. God, remind me to fix that nick in the plaster from moving the dining room furniture into the basement when we moved in.

Again, I'm leaving a garden that I've lovingly tended these last few years for new soil yet to be broken. I'm leaving my rose bushes, lilac bushes, tulips, and birdhouses. I'm leaving the harvest of my fall vegetables to another family.

Again, I have to get used to the taste of the water, and the water pressure, and get acquainted with another set of major appliances that are veterans of major conflicts passed. It seems I never get the chance for new appliances.

Thanks for helping me find the document the DS wanted for the charge conference two years ago. I never would have thought to look in the dictionary next to "surreptitiously." I'm still wondering what to do with my past, particularly those boxes of books and old sermons I didn't unpack the last time I moved.

And dear Lord, please don't let folks read this—not the congregation I'm leaving nor the congregation receiving me. They might not understand, and they might take it personally. I want to appear strong, and I want them to have confidence in me. And don't let the other clergy read this. I'm trying to keep a brave face on it and don't want anyone to know I'm in such turmoil—the sadness of leaving, the thrill of a new adventure, the fear of new places, the relief of so many confidences shared, the uneasiness of learning so many new names and faces, and the possibility of disappointing people when it doesn't happen all at once. And don't let my family read this. I'm trying to keep a confident face for them. I know I'm causing upheaval once again, for all of us, and I don't want them to see the fear I'm feeling about a new place, while, at the same time, they think their sacrifices for me are making me happy somehow.

I guess a large part of it is grieving. I've run out of time to mend those relationships that I've damaged. I won't be able to make it up to those I've hurt. I won't get to finish the little projects around the parsonage—like the bench near the garden for taking my morning coffee. All my lobbying for a church directory, and now it will have the next pastor's face in it. I never did get to try that little coffee shop next to the bookstore. There never seemed to be enough time.

Yes, I admit another part of it is fear. I remember how much confusion there was when I moved in here, and how long it took us to come up with a common language to talk about things, and how long it took them to trust me. What if the same irritating, attacking person from the last two appointments shows up here in this new place as well? Will I identify that relationship before I've given away too many confidences?

I get so embarrassed when I have to look up my new address or telephone number because I can't remember them. Please remind me to be patient with the new people I'm meeting and to remember they are grieving the loss of a pastor, just like I am grieving the loss of several relationships, the loss of familiar roads, and the loss of a familiar address and phone number.

Moving and Changing

It was my first horrible accident in ministry. Timmy, a 19-year-old boy, had been killed in a car accident. I was only 27, a few years into my ministry. Not that one ever grows used to the tragedy or immune to the impact, but perhaps the loss hit me harder because I had never experienced anything like that before. The whole little town mourned with the family. The day of the funeral came. I was prepared for tears but not for the reaction of Timmy's high school friends. Their sobbing was so loud that at times it was hard to talk over it, a real test of my concentration.

When the service was over, I went back to the office, ready to cry myself, and said something about the terrible loss to the funeral director, who was a good friend. His answer was a bucket of cold water thrown in my face: “It comes to all of us. We’re all just passing through. Now get in your car.”

I couldn’t believe how insensitive he seemed. Later, I realized he knew how close to tears I was. He was really saying, “You’ve got to get a grip on yourself. You have a graveside service to lead.” He also was stating a great truth: Life is full of cycles—beginnings and endings. We’re all just passing through. We’re all part of a line that keeps moving and changing.

And in time, there is healing through the moving and the changing.

A Message from the Commission on Pastoral Care & Counseling

(The following was taken from the presentation of the Ohio East Area Commission on Pastoral Care & Counseling Report to Annual Conference in June of 2000. It is the hope of the Commission that it will contribute to the healthy functioning in your church. This message is partially directed to the laity.)

Don Houts, former Director of Pastoral Care and Counseling of the Illinois Area, in a new book, *Well-Being in Ministry*, calls pastors to take care of themselves. And to introduce his chapter, “Who Cares About the Clergy: Thoughts on Human Ecology,” he quotes from a newspaper article as he writes:

‘He grew up on a farm where you are only good if you work. It was his tradition to work too much. He had not taken a day off from his work in two years and he had no hobbies. He was a perfectionist, always driving himself. He was a hard-driving, ambitious kind of man.’

These comments give a cryptic description of the pastor who had committed suicide the day before. In less dramatic ways, clergy of all faiths and nations suffer when their personal needs are not adequately addressed. Philosophically we can describe these victims as a tragedy in human ecology. They represent not only great personal tragedy but also a failure of the faith communities, which call them into ministry.²

The Commission on Pastoral Care & Counseling and the staff of the Office of Pastoral Care work at “Encouraging Well-Being in the East Ohio Community of Faith.” We are about being attentive to and working to provide support to hurting people whose “personal needs are not adequately addressed”—those who do ministry everyday.

A note to lay delegates: You are a key leader in your church and in this Conference, and you have an awesome role and responsibility. The Conference Commission on Pastoral Care & Counseling invites and challenges you to work collectively with us to build up the health of the Body of Christ in the Annual Conference.

Here is a glimpse of what it may be like to be a pastor. The call to ministry is one that comes with great sacrifice and giving. It certainly provides joy, yet we sometimes forget the challenges of ministry and the demands on the person called to serve and represent God in ministry. Most clergy work long days filled with constant interruption. Few tasks, Bible study preparations, or even personal devotional time can be completed without interruption and usually by a need that requires attention. Being a pastor is a job in which one is always thought to be “on the job.”

You may not realize pastors may be exhausted because they are always on the job. They may not tell you they have worked more nights than they have had free ones. They may not tell you they have had to miss their children’s sports events or dinner out with friends. They may not tell you they work many more hours than most people do. They may not tell you they earn less than most folks with their level of education. They may not tell you how hard it is to live in a home they cannot call their own. They may not tell you they often have surrendered their day off to visit someone having surgery. Ministry is a privilege, but it is also an overwhelming responsibility.

Ministry is about caring. Most ministers enjoy being part of your lives, nurturing your spiritual growth, and being a part of your sacred family times of births, deaths, softball games, picnics, teen proms, confirmations, youth trips, church retreats, Advent and Lent, and so much more.

Pastors and their families are just like you and me. They are just as vulnerable to the stresses and strains that come from living in a world full of demands and challenges. They are just as at risk for depression and anxiety and family problems as each of you are.



The Commission on Pastoral Care & Counseling challenges you to stop and think about when and how you and your church can provide spiritual and emotional support to your pastor and their families. Think about how you might encourage your pastor and family to take care of themselves. Think about ways you and your church friends and leaders can say thank you. God has called pastors to fill a job for a giant, but with your help, support, and partnership, we can do the work of ministry together.

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Good Ideas for a Move

Good Ideas For A Move

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For many people, the thought of moving brings with it a sense of being overwhelmed regardless of whether you have six months or six days to prepare for the event. Moving means pulling up roots and then actively replanting yourself in a new home, a new community, and a new life.

As United Methodists, we have a heritage grounded in John Wesley's circuit riders who traveled to spread God's word wherever they were needed. Today, "intineration" is real to you as you find yourself preparing to move to serve a new church. Whether you are moving alone or with family or with pets, this is a time when life may be exciting and/or it may be excruciatingly difficult. At the times when our lives feel overloaded, we may have difficulty sorting out just what needs to be done to help us transition to the next stage.

In this section, you will find concrete ideas and suggestions to help facilitate a smooth move. The reality of how to get it all done and determining what needs to be done is one place to begin your journey.

Before the Move

Pastor—Prepare Ye the Way

- Prepare the way for your successor. Help provide him or her with information and introductions to key areas and persons in the life of the church and the community. Begin to prepare the congregation to welcome and receive a new pastor gladly.
- Meet with the new pastor when possible to give an overview of the church's ministry, goals, and vision. Utilize the time together to answer questions and share information that will contribute to the health of the church.
- Resist any desire to share information that may prevent the incoming pastor from being free to express his or her own vision for the church. Allow yourself to surrender any unfulfilled dreams you have for your ministry with this particular church so the incoming pastor can find a receptive environment to nurture his or her own dreams.
- Recognize that both of you are colleagues in ministry and both are experiencing a move. Consider how you might mutually support one another.

Who's Who

- Discuss with your successor what you can do to be helpful.
- Remember some new pastors appreciate background on congregational members either from you or from a trusted member of the congregation while others want to approach new people with no preconceptions.
- Do your best when you are discussing people to provide only necessary information in an unbiased way.
- Do not share information that will not contribute to the health of the church.
- Do not prejudice the incoming pastor by making specific comments about specific members.
- Provide a list of churches in the community. Include the pastors' names and phone numbers; highlight the names of those in charge of the ministerial association or those on-call when a pastor is out of town.

Administrative Checklist

The following items should be prepared for the incoming pastor to facilitate a smooth transition. Enroll the assistance of church leaders to spread out the administrative work and to ensure everything is current and in order for the incoming pastor.

Membership & Other Records

- Be sure the membership roll is current and up-to-date.
- Provide a list of all changes to the roll since the last charge conference.
- Make a list of homebound members, phone numbers, and directions to their homes.
- Provide a record of baptisms and marriages.
- Provide pertinent files: Charge Conference records, Annual Report forms, etc.

Pastoral Care

- Provide a list of those needing close pastoral care due to serious illness, recent deaths, etc.
- Provide a list of scheduled weddings requiring premarital counseling.
- Provide a list of area hospitals and nursing homes with their phone numbers and information about how to obtain clergy identification, if needed.
- Provide a list of members in college or in the military. Include addresses and any notes that may be helpful.



Personnel/Church Leadership/Volunteers

- Provide names and positions of persons employed by the church and terms of their employment.
- Provide a list of who is responsible for the bulletin, newsletter, etc.
- Provide a list of Administrative Board/Council members.
- Provide a list of Sunday school teachers, youth leaders/workers, etc.
- Provide a list of individuals available for pulpit supply.

Policies

- Leave a copy of all church policies—for child safety, building use, weddings, funerals, personnel, etc.
- Leave information in reference to any ongoing arrangements with individuals or groups—AA, Boy or Girl Scouts, etc.

Church Schedule

- Provide a meeting schedule for Board/Council, Committees, UMM, UMW, UMY, etc.
- Provide dates for events scheduled by the church. Include annual events such as Christmas Bazaar, Soup Kitchen, Mother-Daughter dinners, etc.
- Provide information pertaining to pending legal matters—wills, possible liability situations.
- Provide a list of continuing ecumenical experiences, such as a community Thanksgiving service with the local churches rotating the host church.

The Church Building

- Leave your set of keys, well-identified.
- Provide name(s) and phone numbers of those who open/close the building(s) on Sundays.
- Put together a file of any warranties, maintenance contracts, and manuals on all office equipment, heating/cooling systems, etc.
- Be sure the pastor's office is cleaned thoroughly and in good repair.
- Leave a list of any maintenance items requiring attention or a schedule of things on the docket.

Parsonage Administration

- Leave a set of keys, well-identified.
- Put together a file of all appliance manuals and warranties—refrigerator, dishwasher, washer, dryer, heating/air conditioning unit, etc.
- Identify switches or fuse box circuits.
- Leave your new address and phone number in the parsonage and church office in the event any mail needs to be forwarded to you.

Household Checklist

At Least One Month Before Moving Day

(or as soon as you know you are moving if it is less than a month)

- Begin to gather moving supplies, boxes, tape, and markers. Let the sorting and packing begin!
- Secure a moving company or make a truck rental reservation.
 - Review the conference policy for estimates from movers.
 - Choose reputable movers. Ask for suggestions from the church or current pastor regarding ones they have had good experiences with.
 - Consider getting estimates from movers where you now live and from your destination. Sometimes, significant savings can be found.
 - Be specific when you provide information to the movers for estimates. Watch for ambiguous information in an estimate. Be clear on whether or not the bid includes an assumption for a certain number of boxes; some movers tag additional costs beyond a set number of boxes.
 - Determine if you are selecting replacement value or a flat amount for damages, if you decide to secure insurance.
 - Make sure you have a written contract of your agreement.
- Obtain an IRS Change of Address form (Form 8822) by calling 1-800-829-1040 or by going to the IRS website, www.irs.gov and then clicking on “forms” to download a request form.
- Contact the Board of Elections in the county of your new residence to request a form to change your voter registration.
- Notify the post office of your change of address. From your local post office, you can pick up change of address packets, including change of address postcards.
- Change your address with any magazines or other periodicals you receive. Many have a toll-free number listed near the front of the publication under subscriptions or on their web site. Remember some require 60 to 90 days to activate a change.
- Email friends or businesses if your email address will be changing with your move.

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- Request medical, dental, and veterinarian records for all family members and pets. You will need to do so in writing to include a signature of release. Some doctors will release copies directly to you while others will require the records be sent directly to your new doctors.
- Schedule a parsonage review to allow a walk-through and list-making of repairs or improvements that need to be made. Prioritize the list for those things needing immediate attention and those that can be scheduled over time.

About Two Weeks Before Moving

- Be sure the phone and other utilities are in the church's name to avoid the need for security deposits and to ensure the current phone number will be continued. If the phone and utilities are in the current pastor's name, you will need to request they be listed in the church name or your name.
- Notify your insurance company of the changes to your household and/or car insurance policy addresses.
- Notify your Internet service and cable providers of termination of service date.
- Inform your long distance phone company of your move.
- Arrange to close or transfer your bank account.

The Day Before Moving

- Supplies:** Put together a box of any supplies you may need, including a few small packing boxes, scissors, tape, a marker, tools, etc.
- The Essentials:** Pack a special box of bed linens, pillows, towels, toilet paper, alarm clock, and phone for the first night in your new house. Include any tools you will need to put beds together. Mark the box well or keep it with you so you will be ready to put the beds together that first night without completely unpacking everything. If your new home needs shower curtains, make sure you pack the hanging rings with your curtains, or your first soothing shower could be days away.
- A Comfort Box:** Pick some things that will pamper you a bit—a favorite CD and your CD player, a comfort treat, phone numbers of friends (so you can call if you have a “dark night of the soul”), a favorite book, and a bottle of Tylenol for those aches and pains. If you are moving with a family, take time to create a family comfort box. Be sure everyone selects some items of personal comfort and fun.

After The Move

Unpacking

Take time to get unpacked before you throw yourself into the work of the church. You need to get settled, and if you moved with your family, all of you need to be a part of this process. Unpacking will only be harder if you wait, and it will become an energy drain.

- Try to get one space—perhaps the living room—in good shape as soon as possible so you will have one space where you can escape the clutter of boxes. Creating a sacred nook where you can enjoy your home and retreat and renew until the rest of the home comes together is a good thing!

Getting Oriented

- Get maps of the local area so you can begin to get oriented.
- Schedule some “drive around” time to see your new town. Stop in some local shops and businesses; tell the people you are new in town and ask what you should check out in the area. Most people are glad to share their knowledge.
- Plan a day of exploration after you have moved. Make it fun and adventurous. Journey with your family or, if you moved alone, invite someone to join you for the day.
- Subscribe to the local paper. Begin to watch for activities that might interest you and would allow you to become acquainted with your new town and perhaps meet some people.
- Be mindful, if you have children, that children depend on adults to help them figure out how to adapt to a new environment. Encourage their involvement in the activities and opportunities that include other children or teens.

Kids Get Oriented

If you are moving with school-aged children or teenagers, an opportunity to see the school and check out other kids from afar is very important. A change of schools is a major transition for all youth and requires extra planning and sensitivity. If at all possible, try to visit the school while it is in session and things are “real.” Allow some unstructured time to walk around the building, see the playground, look at the bathrooms, and visit the cafeteria. Some ideas for the structured part of the visit are listed below.



School Visit Checklist

- Request a school calendar so you will know the grading periods, beginning and ending dates, and days off.
- Request a school handbook.
- Request your child or teen's class schedule, or if they cannot register yet, ask for a copy of a typical schedule for their grade.
- Ask the hours of the school day.
- Inquire about bus transportation, or if your teen expects to drive, ask about the car policy.
- Inquire about special services you are interested in—such as tutoring or advanced program classes.
- Inquire about the school's college prep curriculum if you have a college bound teen. Also ask about the percentage of graduating students who go to college.
- Inquire about what vocational training is available if you have a teen interested in vocational training. Inquire about job placement assistance after graduating.
- Inquire about what sports and clubs are available. Find out if they meet/practice during the school day or at other times. Find out if your children will still be eligible to try out or be involved in activities their first year of the move. Some schools establish teams, etc., very early while others encourage newcomers.
- Inquire about your child or teen's teacher(s) and ask about his or her teaching style.
- Ask if your child could meet and connect with a peer in advance of your move.

Take Time for Your Life

*Stay connected
with your friends
and people
who will
support and
encourage you.*



- Stay connected with your spiritual disciplines. Although times of transition place extra demands on our time and energy, it is important to maintain our regular patterns of keeping faith with God.
- Recognize the importance of ritual and routine. Personal and family rituals should be maintained and perhaps some new ones should be established. Rituals and traditions remind us of who we are and what is important to us. Are some of your rituals and traditions having meals together as a family or meeting your friends every Friday night for a meal out? Or having a regular movie night or Saturday morning walk or hike? Consider establishing some new self-care routines and shaping your new home so it will have its own identity as “home.” Be intentional in honoring your rituals and traditions. Remember maintaining routine for children and teens is crucially important.
- Stay connected with your friends and people who will support and encourage you, especially during this year of transition. Utilize phone calls, letters, and email to nurture those connections and to care for yourself.
- Establish clear boundaries for your time off for Sabbath, fun, and renewal. You should designate and honor a day off for personal time as well as for time with those in your inner circle. Set reasonable expectations for work time. Although ministry often feels like a job 24 hours a day, it is important to adapt and take adequate time for meals and spiritual, physical, and emotional renewal. The old saying says it best: “You cannot pour water from an empty pitcher.”
- Take a vacation your first summer. Taking time to renew and replenish yourself will allow you to pastor the church better than if you were to work straight through the summer. If you have moved with your family, they will appreciate some family time being honored as well. A new year in a new place is always better with some time away.

Good Grief

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Grief Defined

Grief is a process inherent in transition or change. Any pastoral change and move will bring on feelings of grief and loss among the pastor and family, church congregation, and community. Understanding how grief may feel to us and how it may express itself in our lives may help us cope with the emotions we will experience. Grief is always more than sorrow. It is the raw feelings at the center of the whole process that engages the person in adjusting to changed circumstances. Feelings include the deep fears of the mourner, prospects for loneliness, and the obstacles a person must face as she or he finds a new way of living.

Types of Grief

Preparatory Grief: Sometimes also referred to as “anticipatory grief,” i.e., “in anticipation of an event which means loss/separation.” Preparatory grief references the possibility of an event—a move—that is likely to be known early in the process only by the pastor, pastor’s family, Staff Parish Relations Committee, District Superintendent, and Bishop. It is a time of “wondering” if it will happen and if so, what it will be like if and when it does happen.

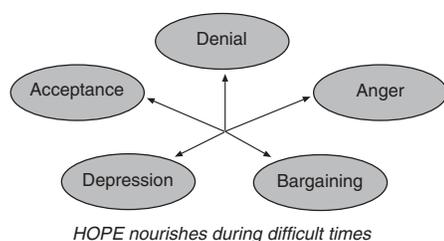
Intense Grief: An announcement of the event “expected to happen” has occurred. That means loss/separation begins to occur, and the pastor, pastor’s family, and parishioners’ behavior is affected by event. There may be open expression of thoughts and feelings, which may be positive or negative or of mixed emotions. There may be withdrawal and avoidance as one begins the “grief process” and feelings begin to intensify.

Acute Grief: Experienced during the short time before and after the event of loss/separation. Most all experiences are for a last or first time, i.e., the last council on ministries meeting, last baptism, last worship service, or the first worship service, first meetings. This time and experience is unique in that it overlaps the time before and after the move.

Subsequent Grief: The experience of “mourning” that follows the event of loss/separation. “Mourning” refers to a process of recovery and adjustment to the loss of significant relationships/experiences in one’s life. “Mourning” is a time of regaining control of and stability in emotions. This is an experience of “bringing to closure,” of letting go of what has been and welcoming what is to be.

Grief Work: The “work of grieving” any and all dynamics that inhibit or facilitate those experiences which make for grief resolution. Much has been written about the levels of grief, grief trajectories, stages of grief, grief states, and more; all of which could help explain grief related to moving. For purposes here, grief expert Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’ stages of grief are helpful to provide some understanding of how grief around a pastoral change/move may show up in your own life.¹

The Stages of Grief: Our Coping Mechanisms



Denial: Characterized by phrases such as, “It’s not true. There must be some mistake!” Even when the pastor has requested the move, some of the dynamic of denial prevails, i.e., “Is this really happening?” “Is this real or a dream (or nightmare!)?”

Anger: Characterized by phrases such as, “Why me?” “How could this be happening?” Even when a pastor requests a move, anger is often present in the form of: “How come it had to happen this way?” “Why couldn’t something be done to make it different or better?”

Bargaining: Characterized by phrases such as, “Yes, me, but...” This stage involves the attempt to postpone in our mind the inevitable and may include bargaining with God and with each other. There may be “wishful thinking,” i.e., “If only that (some experience of support) could have happened before, this wouldn’t be happening.” Or it might be expressed as, “If only I had...” “If only I had handled this differently or done that another way, we wouldn’t need to move now.”

Depression: Characterized by phrases such as, “Yes, me.” “It really is happening,” and strong feelings of sadness, despair, sense of helplessness, i.e., “It’s all going to happen no matter what I do.” This stage is likely to occur even when people are faced with a change that is positive and perhaps even exciting as well as with a change that is sad and brings clear feelings of loss.

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Acceptance: Characterized by words such as, “Yes, me. It’s a real part of life.” This is the time when we have come to terms with the reality of our situation—the reality of saying goodbye in order to say hello.

Although it is not one of the five stages of grief, Kubler-Ross also speaks to the power of

Hope: Characterized by the words “I hope...” and that hope changes as each of the above stages is experienced. At first it may be, “I hope there will not be too much fuss about it,” and, “I hope our last week together can be joyful and we can celebrate.” Hope is the ability to focus on the possibilities of what may be—either for the future or for the present. Hope is what nourishes us in times of stress or when we are unsettled because we do not know precisely what the future may hold for us.

Coping with Grief

Reminders about Good Grief:

- The experience is cyclical and goes back and forth, in and out of the various stages.
- It is not a step process in which the grief work is complete when one arrives at acceptance.
- It is worth remembering that family members, parishioners of all ages, and community persons will have similar experiences, and “where three or four are gathered together,” there may well be a mix of feelings, i.e., some people who are angry, others who are depressed, and others yet who are acceptant.
- When we face life-shaking losses, we are graced with the chance to recognize the One who truly is our strength. If we embrace our grief challenges with God’s guidance, God can stretch us to new heights. The ultimate, best, most desirable outcome of grief work is growth.
 - Grief or loss usually connects us to other times in our lives when we experienced loss, and therefore our emotions become intensified. Pay attention to old losses this move may have “kicked up” for you. The losses may be from different parts of your life—everything from disappointments you experienced to family milestones (children leaving for kindergarten, college, or independent living), or divorce and death of loved ones.
 - A significant loss, such as a pastoral move, can bring up feelings—good and bad—from one’s repertoire of previous losses. Think of a chain. Consider the individual links of the chain as representing one’s life losses. A chain of links representing losses that have been processed to healthy resolution can provide strength to the person with that chain of losses. A healthy chain can anchor the person who is grieving in a new storm in life. The chain links can be a reference point of wisdom, hope, and comfort. Conversely, a chain of losses with links of unresolved grief can act as a chain of bondage to past losses, hindering or even preventing healthy grief resolution and transition.
 - It is natural to question God. Doubt, fear, anger, and confusion are very present with loss. God can handle our questions and our emotions, including our anger. God invites our conversation: “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).
- How we experience grief can be compared to the waves of the ocean in that we cannot always anticipate how strong or how gentle each wave may be. During this ongoing process of letting go and moving forward, our emotions may be unpredictable to us.
- Remember the value of tears. H. Norman Wright writes in *Recovering from the Losses of Life*: “Tears are the vehicle with which God has equipped us to express the deepest feelings words cannot express. We summon tears when in our weakness we cannot find words to express the deep emotions that we feel. Tears can express everything from jubilation to devastation. When words fail us, tears step in to help.”²
- When family members don’t share our experience or understand our feelings—because of individual differences—stress in the grieving process can be greatly exacerbated. Appreciate and allow for individual styles and timing as members of our personal family and church family process their own grief. This will prevent additional stress and unnecessary pressure. Be careful not to shame anyone in your family system who may not work through the grief as quickly as others might.

During this ongoing process of letting go and moving forward, our emotions may be unpredictable to us.



Grief Resolution

Grief resolution is the entire experience of grief from the time the pastor, pastor’s family, Staff Parish Relations Committee, District Superintendent, and Bishop know of the possibility of a move until “settling in” and “peaceful acceptance” has been experienced in the new environment.

- Resolution will always occur when openness, honesty, and courage are present.
- Grieving a loss (mourning) is the expression of grief. It is a *process*. Grief work takes time and energy. Do not expect everyone around you to deal with grief as you might. We are all unique in this process.
- The *less* openness, honesty, and courage present, the greater the likelihood of “unresolved grief,” i.e., anger that did not get resolved, some experience that was neglected or ignored.

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- The *more* attention given to genuine expression of appropriate thought/feeling concerning the move, the healthier the grief process and the greater likelihood of “healthy closure.”
- The more intentional we are to “grieving well,” the more positive the transition will be for everyone involved, including the new pastor and congregation.
- We should consider a prayerful partnership. Be encouraged by and encourage the prayerful partnership of all involved in the move and the grieving process surrounding the change. Not only are the Bishop, District Superintendent, Staff Parish Relations Committee, congregation, and pastoral family involved in the move, but God is also central in the whole plan, purpose, and process. *“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope”* (Jeremiah 29:11).
- Even when we work to allow resolution, one hundred percent resolution or absolute closure is not likely to happen. We all are likely to have some “unfinished business” due to a circumstance or situation.
- In your grief, recognize your busyness is an attempt to avoid dealing with the loss you feel. Be mindful of your grief.
- Healing from a loss or significant change requires time and compassion. Try to be patient with yourself and those around you. Grief is a normal, appropriate response to loss. It is unique to the person experiencing it. There is no set timetable for its completion.
- No shortcuts exist for working through our feelings of loss. Trust the process of healing.

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- ¹Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death and Dying*. New York, NY, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1969.
²Wright, H. Norman. *Recovering from the Losses of Life*. Nashville, TN, Lifeway Press, 1998

Books to Consider

- Praying Our Goodbyes* by Joyce Rupp. Ivy Books, 1992.
On Death and Dying by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. Touchstone, 1997.
The Grief Recovery Handbook by John W. James and Russell Friedman. HarperCollins, 1998.

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Making the Change

Coping with Your Transition as Pastor

Many ways exist to cope with grief, some of which may work for one person but do not work for another person. Determining what works for you becomes critically important. Although similarities of expressions of joy or anger may be present among persons, each person's own expression of anger is individual and unique. It helps to identify your own "usual way" of expressing such feelings, and through that style, express the grief as fully as possible. You may want to attempt some new ways as a method for growing more in your understanding and skills.

"Sharing the grief" with others is most critical. Initially, it may be a close friend or your spouse or District Superintendent or one or two select Staff Parish Relations Committee persons. Sharing enables expression rather than suppression (and perhaps depression). When the move is announced, more open sharing is not only permitted but also encouraged! Special experiences—both positive and negative or joyful and painful—can be recalled and shared. Consider this story: A pastor had been at a church for a number of years, and it had been announced for a week that the pastor would be moving in June. A woman, a long-time member, approached the pastor and said, "A lot of good things have happened while you were here (and she named a couple). I am sad to see you leaving." The pastor responded, "Oh, I'll be around for a while yet," and then changed the subject. As a result, neither the parishioner nor the pastor had full expression of genuine feelings.

Support for the Journey

*Allow yourself
to be
overwhelmed
by grace.*



- **Keep a journal** and a commitment to make at least one entry a day that is at least one sentence long. If you wish to include a longer entry, do so. Journaling is especially helpful in the early days and weeks as there are limits to the number of persons with whom sad or uncertain feelings can be shared. Later, as the move date approaches, your focus may shift to some special happenings you want to be sure to remember and so note in your journal. At a new parish, it helps to record special experiences and to allow expression of special feelings when everyone is still "unknown" and trust is still developing.
- **Make a list and schedule of what you feel needs to be completed before leaving:** church records all in order, junk to be removed from parsonage, lunch dates you want to have with certain community persons, school records for children, etc. Be sure to allow time for spontaneous events and drop-in visits. Plan for visits to "favorite spots" for family and/or individual family members.
- **Develop a support group of people willing to focus on grief.**
- **Make a list of people in your support network you can call upon.** Think about the different friends and family you might call upon, depending on what you need. Some friends might be better with a tearful day while others might be more helpful with making a list of what you need to get done. Having a list of people and asking for the support of others before your moment of need helps to make it easier for you to pick up the phone and ask for support when you do need it.
- **Be aware of the pain you are *all* feeling** brought about by the change in appointment. When people share various experiences of life together, they develop what we call relationships. Generally, the more experiences shared, the deeper the relationships become. A longer duration of time may also deepen our relationships with one another. Pastors and parishioners share in some of the deepest experiences of life, such as birth, marriage, illness and death. A number of those experiences may be shared over a prolonged period of time, and thus, the relationships between pastors and parishioners become a matter of very deep and profound feelings. We cannot go through change in our relationships without pain. This is true for us all: pastors, the families of pastors, and congregations.
- **Plan for extra spiritual and emotional self-care at this time.**
- **Have family conferences** regularly and discuss what is happening and how everyone is feeling. If you have close friends who are like family include a time for sharing feelings. The time surrounding a move is tough and is a vulnerable time for everyone. Providing a built-in time for sharing will help prevent a build up of unexpressed emotion.
- **Have a "This is Your Life" party** for some friends. You can recall and share special events/experiences through pictures, poems, songs, clowning, or whatever you would like that reveals to those friends what you have appreciated and the memories you are taking with you.
- **Cooperate with and assist church leadership** as they prepare farewell events. Let them know your preferences (reasonable ones!). It is not fair to either of you to plan a time or an event that does not work for you. Let them know your feelings while also respecting theirs.

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- **Allow love to prevail.** The relationship we have with any person is unique. No two relationships are the same. In the past, our experiences with parents, grandparents, teachers, schoolmates, ministers, and friends have nurtured many deep relationships. The actual setting of those experiences may have been years ago, yet they are still a vital part of our lives, sustaining us by the memories of those wonderful relationships. And yet, we must be willing to develop new relationships in the ever-changing experiences of life. We need to bear all things within the framework of love.
- **Love bears all things.**
 - Believes all things.*
 - Hopes all things.*
 - Endures all things.*
 - Love never ends* (I Corinthians 13:7-8).
- **Write a hymn or song that expresses your feelings.**
- **Keep a time of meditation/reflection.**
- **Exercise additional prayer.** Any sudden change we encounter in life needs to be under-girded with extra prayer. Many people are unable to cope with change because they have not learned to put the matter into the care of a loving God.
- **Cry, scream, and laugh as “fitting.”**

Lessons to Remember

- Change is usually not easy to handle. We need to spend time processing the change and all its pros and cons, real, possible, and imagined.
- God is still in control of your life even in the midst of chaos, even if you cannot feel God’s presence.
- “Don’t borrow trouble from tomorrow.” Anticipated troubles often do not occur, waste precious energy, and fill one’s mind with negative thoughts.
- Live for today. Sometimes keeping your focus on what is immediately in front of you will nourish you and prevent overload. Dwelling on events planned for six, three, or even one month later can sometimes cause you to become overwhelmed and to lose your deep sense of peace. Keeping your focus does not mean you deny or do not deal with the future or what requires your attention. It does mean you do not get lost in the future and miss out on today.
- Allow yourself to be overwhelmed by grace. Recognize the vast love God has for you. God uses your friends, acquaintances, and church members as a portrayal of God’s love. Be open and gladly receive offers from friends. Allow yourself to be vulnerable. It takes too much energy to hide from your feelings and needs. Allow yourself to be lifted up by prayer.
- Allow friends to help you. Let them know what your needs are. It may take an attitude adjustment to “receive” gracefully. For some of us, the proverb, “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” is so ingrained that receiving gracefully is a difficult adjustment. Learning to receive from others also allows us to receive gracefully from God.

Books to Consider

Kitchen Table Wisdom, Stories that Heal by Rachel Naomi Remen, MD. Riverhead, 1997.

Gift of the Red Bird, A Spiritual Encounter by Paula D’Arcy. Crossroad, 1996.

Gold in Your Memories, Sacred Moment, Glimpses of God by Macrina Weiderkehr. Ave Maria, 1998.

Transition Strategies for Pastors

Provide opportunities to acknowledge the change. Some pastors say, “When I leave a congregation, I simply want to ‘fold up my tent and steal away into the night.’” That kind of “quick exit” does not permit feelings, such as grief and love, to be expressed.

Prepare the congregation for the transition. A pastor can utilize some of his or her remaining time to recall some of the high points of his or her tenure of ministry. But care must be exercised not to get into setting an agenda for the new pastor who will be coming on the scene in the near future.

Share in a positive way the need for good ministerial etiquette regarding your involvement in the lives of your church members after you leave their church appointment. Affirm the ways they have touched your life and you have touched theirs while being clear you will *not* be returning to the church for visits, weddings, funerals, or other events they might want and expect you to participate in. If you spend some time educating the congregation by publicly addressing this issue—including placing notes from you in the bulletin or newsletter—then all involved will be prepared to make a place in their hearts and their church for the new pastor.



Be constructive in answering the often-asked question: “Reverend, why are you leaving us?” As pastors in The United Methodist system, know we will be moving from one appointment to another. This is the rule and not the exception. We need to be *constructive*; not *destructive* in the ministerial experience we call “the pastoral move.”

During the transition, ask yourself a simple question: “What would you like an outgoing pastor to do for you before you move into that appointment?” The way an outgoing pastor leaves the church he or she has been serving can either set that church back years or provide for an ongoing setting for the new pastor and congregation. How you leave your church will remain a legacy to the church and its leadership forever. Seek to leave well.

Consider preparing a written or taped overview of the church for the new pastor who follows you. That is, provide some constructive observations about the church. Here again, be careful about setting an agenda for the new pastor. Do not attempt to editorialize about people in the congregation. Allow the new pastor to develop his or her own relationships without your biases. This overview might contain suggestions such as: “We had a stewardship campaign several years ago that we have considered doing again.” It should be a sharing of information that may be helpful but is not trying to sell the vision you had for the church.

Remember the pastor who is coming to replace you in your private prayers.

Create a Positive Focus

Do your best to focus on the positive attributes and contributions of the pastor who preceded you and acknowledge the feelings of the congregation for their former pastor. Usually, listening is the best response.

Avoid the temptation to compare the new congregation to your old one. Like people, each congregation has its own personality and history. Each congregation needs to feel they have your full attention and are seen and heard for who they actually are and not seen in comparison to another congregation.

Graciously affirm yourself as a pastor. This does not mean you say to the congregation: “I am my own person,” as if to indicate you go about doing everything your own way. Rather, affirming yourself as a pastor means you are: visible, available, sociable, positive.

Affirm your new congregation. Do not neglect to express your gratitude to them for their kindnesses to you. Build joy and love into your relationship together. Remember we all want to be loved and liked, and so, even when you may be missing and longing for the familiar congregation you had or your new folks may be longing for their old pastor, you both want and need to be loved for who you are.

Listen. In this process, you can discover who this new congregation is and what their needs are. What is it they want to tell you?

Remember your new congregation in your private prayers.

Books to Consider

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church. The United Methodist Publishing House.
Saying Goodbye, A Time of Growth for Congregations and Pastors by Edward A. White. Alban Institute, 1995.
Ending Well, Starting Strong: Your Personal Pastorate Start-Up Workshop by Roy M. Oswald.
Alban Institute, 1995. (Six Audiocassettes.)

Are We There Yet?

Are We There Yet?

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Moving Alone

Whether you are single and never married, divorced, or widowed, some special considerations in coping with a move and the inevitable grief that will accompany a change may be present. You may be the first single pastor to your new church or perhaps you may be one of several single pastors to serve that church. If you are the first, you may find assumptions have been made that a “parsonage family” is to accompany the pastor to his or her new charge. Realize thoughtfulness and planning are necessary in every situation, but a single person may have needs that differ from those of a pastor with a spouse or children. Recognize the congregation may need time to adjust to not having things “the way they were before,” and you may need to educate your parishioners graciously.

You face grief: the emotional state of sadness and longing provoked by loss. Leaving a place you love can be as painful as getting a divorce or mourning the death of a close friend. It is important to acknowledge your grief as legitimate and allow yourself time and space to work through the process. It will mean facing all the feelings of saying goodbye to friends, colleagues, church members, the church/es, your home, the walking track with familiar faces and surroundings, the bakery on the corner, that special tree outside your kitchen window, the birds that visit your back yard. And all are irreplaceable. Acknowledging losses is most important when grieving, even specific losses that may seem insignificant. Be careful not to bury your losses in the details of cleaning, organizing, packing, etc. Pay attention to your feelings. Remember, too, that people grieve in different ways, i.e., by crying, talking to others, journaling, praying and meditating, doing physical activity, etc. Also, remember previous losses can be triggered by the current ones concerning this move and may compound your experience of grief. Goodbye rituals can help you feel and acknowledge the sadness.

First Time Moving Alone?

In some cases, this move will be the first time the pastor has been alone. Has there been a death, divorce, separation? What special circumstances exist to give the church unique opportunities to care? Will children be with the pastor part of the time? Will a spouse, who has stayed behind for employment reasons, be in the new home part of the time? Will those circumstances require adjustments in the workweek? Sharing your unique circumstances with the congregation and leadership will allow them the opportunity to be supportive and encourage you in this transition. The more you bond with the congregation, the more you will develop a satisfying relationship.

The pastor must realize the congregation expects his or her job will be done, regardless of his or her life circumstances. While the church has a unique opportunity to care in these situations, the pastor also has a unique chance to demonstrate the strength that God can offer. Be sure to stay connected with colleagues or friends who may be able to covenant with you and be supportive at this time.

The Moving Truck Is Gone

The boxes are everywhere. The lists for what is needed from the grocery, the hardware store, etc., have been started. But, there is no one in the house to share the plans with, to help locate the grocery store or arrange the cupboards. There is also a new job to be done at the church, people to meet, committee meetings to attend, hospital visits to make, and sermons to plan. Everything is happening at once, and no one can help with those tasks because you have moved alone.

Sometimes being alone is a gift, and you love being able to enjoy your life just as it is. However, when you are tired and overwhelmed with grief, fatigue, and a to-do list longer than your arm, you long for someone to share the chores—even to run to the grocery or pick up Chinese food. Loneliness can creep in at those times, and isolation is not the best solution.

Staying Connected

- Invite individuals to help you get settled, if you want help. It is okay, on the other hand, to say you would rather set things up yourself so you will know where to find things later.
- Realize the church is anxious to have you assume the role of “their pastor” just as soon as possible. The sooner you begin to know people and even the church building, the sooner you will begin to feel comfortable in the new place.
- Invite people, when you are ready, to visit you at your home or even meet you for coffee at a restaurant. It is in the quiet talks that mutual relationships are begun.

*Realize tears
acknowledge the
permanence of the
change occurring.*



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- Listen if you hear comments about the last pastor's spouse or family and their role(s) in the church. Just listen and hear the stories as an expression of the storyteller's grief and the loss of what has been. You do not need to feel you must do something to keep everyone happy. You bring your own strengths and gifts. People will learn to appreciate your unique gifts regardless of whether you have moved alone or with a spouse.
- Create good boundaries for your life, but not fences without gates. Ministry is a people business, so enjoy, serve, and appreciate people to the fullest, but save a piece of life for yourself. Remember you need to nurture and care for yourself in a way that brings you joy and replenishes you.
- Educate your parishioners, if necessary, on the fact that not every single person is looking for a date or person to spend the rest of his or her life with. Help your parishioners realize privacy and a personal life are vital parts of each individual's life. It is your own right to assess what you want for your future and not have that future decided by well-meaning members of a congregation. The gracious act is to be clear about what is and is not help.
- Expect care and respect from the congregation to the same degree they expect your care and respect for them. Just as your moving as a single individual may need some unique thoughtfulness, that thoughtfulness will allow you to be free to offer the wholeness of who you are in return.

Gracefully Grieving

- Realize tears acknowledge the permanence of the change occurring.
- Ask/invite friends, family, or church members to help you with the work of packing and cleaning if the load is too much. Do not hesitate to ask for help from outside nor hesitate to say yes to offers of help.
- Do not hastily discard items with symbolic importance. Items that embody special memories should be moved, and then, when you are more emotionally settled, you can make better—more rational, healthy—decisions on what to keep and what to toss. The box of cards and notes you have saved may seem like junk when packing and like a treasure a few months later.
- Acquaint yourself with the new area prior to the move through the local newspaper, phone book, library, or a web site, and/or talk with the present pastor.
- Make visits to the community with specific questions in mind as to what would be helpful for your making a good adjustment there. Where is the nearest shopping center, gym, bookstore, large city? Be especially attentive to finding those places you consider to be fun and might enjoy in your free time. If your dream is a good coffee shop or great bookstore with big comfortable chairs, seek them.
- Say goodbye to service providers: mail carrier, doctor, veterinarian, hairstylist, grocery clerk, banker, etc.
- Keep a journal to aid in processing and healing your emotions and in giving you direction for the future. Be open to all your feelings.
- Plan for an increase in long distance phone bills for calls to family and friends for support following the move. If you have a computer, make plans to “get online” and connect with friends through regular email contact.
- Establish regular times of checking in with friends to share how things are going with your grief.
- Plant flowers, bulbs, seeds, and trees to remind you of your need to put down roots.
- Use coping affirmations: “I can do this,” “Let go and let God,” “I can cope with whatever,” “I can face the future with confidence,” “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”
- Seek comfort as sadness wells up from whatever makes you feel safe, calm, and relaxed: prayer, music, repeating a mantra, reading, calling an old friend, taking a walk, a hot bath, cup of tea, massage, etc.
- Consider seeking support through the help of a counselor or spiritual director.

Ways to help with the grief of the congregation you are leaving:

- Realize everyone is grieving for you and the congregation. Be open with the congregation regarding your own grief. Try to be specific in your sharing to allow them to be a part of your world.
- Be open to the feelings of the congregation: to their grief, anger, resentment, abandonment, fear, gratitude, excitement, etc. Allow time and openness for members of the congregation to express their feelings. This will help them to heal and be ready to receive your successor.
- Participate in closure rituals: luncheons, dinners, parting gifts, last services, etc. This is not only helpful for their grieving but will also provide opportunities to acknowledge your own grief, too.

After you have arrived at your new church:

- Be mindful that members of the new congregation have also experienced a loss and have yet to grieve fully. It may be helpful to acknowledge the place the former pastor holds in their hearts and to ask for only a little corner so the seed of a new relationship can take root and grow.
- Ritualize the new beginning of ministry together in some symbolic manner: plant a tree, plan and have a special liturgy, etc.

You cannot go wrong by gently and compassionately opening your heart to your own grieving process and to that of others.

Moving as a Couple

You two have made the decision to move. The two of you may have similar or different feelings about moving. This may be the first time you have moved without children. The accompanying spouse may be leaving a job of his or her own. Whatever the case, significant change is ahead for you. And loss of what has been is now being recognized in your life and world.

You face grief: the emotional state of sadness and longing provoked by loss. Leaving a place you love can be as painful as getting a divorce or mourning the death of a close friend. It is important to acknowledge your grief as legitimate and allow yourself time and space to work through the process. It will mean facing all the feelings of saying goodbye to friends, colleagues, church members, the church/es, your home, the walking track with familiar faces and surroundings, the bakery on the corner, that special tree outside your kitchen window, the birds that visit your back yard. And all are irreplaceable. Acknowledging losses is most important when grieving, even specific losses that may seem insignificant. Be careful not to bury your losses in the details of cleaning, organizing, packing, etc. Pay attention to your feelings. Remember, too, that people grieve in different ways, i.e., by crying, talking to others, journaling, praying and meditating, doing physical activity, etc. So respect each other's method for paying attention to feelings and encourage each other. Also, remember previous losses can be triggered by the current ones concerning this move and may compound your experience of grief. Goodbye rituals can help you feel and acknowledge the sadness.

In addition to sadness, the accompanying spouse may feel this move is imposed on him or her and may experience anger, resentment, rage, envy, abandonment, fear, etc. In response, the pastor may feel guilt and increased pressure to give more energy to his or her spouse while starting a new ministry. These are stressful times for relationships. The intensity of pain can hinder both partners from compassionately attending to one another. Reactive, defensive thoughts are likely to be very close to the surface, so you may feel discounted, misunderstood, and unloved. Therefore, be careful to pay attention to your feelings and share them with each other while also honoring the feelings of the other.

If you are moving without children for the first time, you may find some changes since your last move/s. Your adult children may not be around to give a hand with cleaning, packing, and unpacking, nor with having their friends in to help as they were for your previous move. It may be more difficult to connect with the new community without children in school or other activities. The emotional support and distraction of children at home is no longer present.

Gracefully Grieving

- Realize tears acknowledge the permanence of the change occurring.
- Open your hearts to each other and offer loving support in the journey ahead.
- Recognize the needs for closure by the non-clergy spouse with his or her connections, work, and friends. As a partner, be supportive by sharing in those goodbyes.
- Be sensitive, as the spouse whose job initiated the move, to the effects the move has and will have on the spouse's life. Understand what the relocation will mean to his or her career and social circle. Acknowledge and appreciate your spouse's sacrifice. Assist with the spouse's future plans—finding another position or choosing not to work outside the home in order to pursue other interests.
- Negotiate and justly divide the work of packing, cleaning, and saying goodbye. Do not hesitate to ask for help from outside.
- Be aware of symbolic importance for certain household items in your pre-moving pruning. Items that embody special memories but must be left behind could be given to family or friends to lessen the sense of loss.
- Acquaint yourselves to the new area prior to the move through the local newspaper, phone book, library, or a web site, and/or talk with the present pastor (and spouse if married).
- Make visits to the community with specific questions in mind as to what would be helpful for your making a good adjustment there. Where is the nearest shopping, gym, bookstore, large city? Get the lay of the land by driving and become oriented to streets and roads. They will not seem so strange after the move if you have some feel for them beforehand. It may be helpful if you both drive some.
- Say goodbye to service providers: mail carrier, doctor, veterinarian, hairstylist, grocery clerk, banker, etc.
- Keep a journal to help in processing and healing your emotions, and in giving you direction for the future. Be open to all your feelings. After the move, writing letters or emails can further help you clarify your feelings.
- Plan for an increase in long distance phone bills for calls to family and friends for support following the move.
- Establish regular times for checking in with each other to share how things are going with your grief. If a date night each week is not already part of your life together, you may want to establish one and communicate that routine to the congregation.
- Plant flowers, bulbs, seeds, and trees to remind you of your need to put down roots.
- Use coping affirmations: "I can do this," "Let go and let God," "I can cope with whatever," "I can face the future with confidence," "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."
- Seek comfort, as sadness wells up, from whatever makes each of you feel safe, calm, and relaxed: prayer, music, repeating a mantra, reading, calling an old friend, taking a walk together, a hot bath, cup of tea, massage, etc.
- Consider seeking support through the help of a counselor or spiritual director.

Are We There Yet?

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These are stressful times for relationships.





Ways to help with the grief of the congregation you are leaving:

- Realize everyone is grieving for you and the congregation. Be open with the congregation regarding the struggle you have had with the decision to move and how painful it is to be leaving.
- Be open to the feelings of the congregation: to their grief, anger, resentment, abandonment, fear, gratitude, excitement, etc. Allow time and openness for members of the congregation to express their feelings. This will help them to heal and be ready to receive your successor.
- Participate in closure rituals: luncheons, dinners, parting gifts, last services, etc. This is not only helpful for their grieving but will also give each of you the opportunity to acknowledge your own.

After you have arrived at your new church:

- Be mindful that members of the new congregation have also experienced a loss and have yet to grieve fully. It may be helpful to acknowledge the place the former pastor holds in their hearts and to ask for only a little corner so the seed of a new relationship can take root and grow.
- Have small group gatherings in the parsonage or in homes around the parish. The best format would be light and conversational. Introduce yourselves. Including the spouse at these events will be emotionally helpful for him or her to arrive more fully in the new place and make connections. It will also be helpful for the congregation to be introduced to the significant person in their pastor's life. Ask the church members to share events of their own lives and those of the congregation.
- Share the significance of what marriage and family mean to you—the pastor. Solicit the church's support and encouragement for you to take care of those and other areas of your personal life.
- Interpret to the church in a loving, gentle way that your spouse is his or her own person with a life and career separate from yours, and he or she will decide what part he or she will play in the life of the church.
- Ritualize the new beginning of ministry together with the congregation in some symbolic manner: plant a tree, plan and have a special liturgy, etc.

You cannot go wrong by gently and compassionately opening your heart to your own grieving process and that of others.

Moving with Children

“Remember when we moved to this church?” can be said with the warmest affections or great pain. Moving to a new town and church is a pivotal event in the life of any family, especially for a pastoral family with children. No matter how much the move was desired or anticipated, family members can experience a variety of feelings often associated with grief. Learning to deal with grief and loss can be a painful process with a full range of emotions. The key is to remember it is a process and can be worked through in healthy and helpful ways. Not all family members will grieve and make a healthy transition to the new setting in the same way. In fact, some may be eager and excited while others may be very sad. The following suggestions may be helpful to you and your family in the moving process.

Supportive Suggestions in the Move Process

- Have family meetings on a regular basis to talk through your move, allowing each person to express him- or herself. Children may feel they have little say in the matter and need the opportunity to express their feelings.
- Keep a journal of the move, especially noting feelings, hopes, dreams, and celebrations.
- If the children are in school, talk with the teachers and counselors about the upcoming move as soon as the move is “public information.” This will allow them to work with you in watching for any changes in your child's behavior. They might also provide age appropriate resources for your child.
- Pay attention to your child's play-acting. Children routinely use play to sort out things they are feeling worried or anxious about in real life. This is often how our children share or “talk” with adults about what is going on in their lives.
- Be aware that grief and depression in children are manifested in ways different from the ways adults manifest them. Children may display disruptive behavior or anger.
- Be aware that children who are experiencing a flood of emotion are unlikely able to sort out what they feel; as a result, they misbehave or act out in a way beyond what the actual situation warrants. They may be overly sensitive to things ordinarily overlooked. Try to be particularly patient, and realize their actions are their way of telling you their world is out of balance.
- Create opportunities to talk, play, draw, or act out their feelings so they will not allow their emotions to be bottled up nor snap at someone who has done nothing to deserve their rage. The time to help children sort out their feelings is not when they are actively acting out their anger. Wait for a calm time to have a conversation or try to help children explore their thoughts and feelings. Take the opportunity to interact with them.
- Visit the new school as soon as possible and meet with the principal and some of the teachers and staff. Allow your children to become familiar with the building and to ask any questions they may have while at the school. Make a list of their concerns or interests before you visit the school.
- Allow children the opportunity to help pack, especially any personal items and the possessions from their own bedrooms.

- Allow for a small box of personal items to be packed in the car—instead of in the moving van.
- Celebrate the gift of memories. Walk through the house and talk about special memories in various rooms of your home. Visit special places in town before moving.
- Buy two rolls of film or two disposable cameras so your child may take pictures of the old home on one and the new home on the other. Pictures can be sent to old friends or shared with new ones.
- Help your children when they are going through that awkward phase of getting to know new friends by asking questions like: “Where’s the best place for pizza (or ice cream)?” Teach them that such questions can be a great way to make new friends.
- Encourage children to become involved in clubs, sports teams, etc., outside church as well as within the church. Developing new friends and connections is important for children as well as for adults.
- Remember all families and persons grieve in individual ways. It is important to allow each person to grieve in his or her own way. If difficulties arise that warrant additional help, seek counseling or other resources.
- Do not assume that because one family member seems to be adjusting well everyone is doing well.
- Visit your local library for resources about moving. Reading books together about moving can help various family members identify feelings and can also initiate helpful family discussions.
- Keep focused on the future—at the core of our faith is an act of letting go and having faith in a brighter future.
- Remember Paul’s advice: “...the one thing I do is to...press on toward the goal for the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14).

Books to Consider

For parents:

Moving with Children: A Parent’s Guide to Moving with Children by Thomas T. Olkowski and Lynn Parker. Gylantic, 1993.

For preschool children:

The Berenstain Bears’ Moving Day by Stan & Jan Berenstain. Random House, 1981.

Why Did We Have to Move Here? by Sally J.K. Davies. Lerner, 1997.

Who’s Not (Do you hear me? I mean it!) Going to Move by Judith Viorst. Adladdin, 1998.

Goodbye, House by Robin Ballard. Greenwillow, 1994.

For older elementary/youth:

Hurricane Harry by Judith Caseley. Beechtree, 1994.

The Year My Parents Ruined My Life by Martha Freeman. Yearling, 1999.

Would My Fortune Cookie Lie? by Stella Pevsner. Clarion, 1996.

Moving with Teenagers

Life is about change. Moving from one place to another is stressful! It affects not only the pastor who is moving but also the entire family. How we say goodbye is work. We call it grief work. Grief is the normal, appropriate response to loss. Minister, counselor, and author Doug Manning says, “Grief is as natural as crying when you hurt, sleeping when you are tired, eating when you are hungry, or sneezing when your nose itches. It is nature’s way of healing a broken heart.”¹ What we experience when moving and leaving old friends may not be as intense as the grief we feel from the physical death of a loved one, but it can still be painful.

The pastoral family also has the challenge of finding healthy ways to express their grief. As a parent, remember it is difficult to help your family or your parishioners if you are not doing your own grief work. If we attend to our grief, we will be able to transition through our goodbyes and be able to embrace the new growth and changes that await. We model for our children many things, including how to grieve and experience loss.

Supportive Suggestions in the Move Process

- Teens also experience loss when moving and sometimes may be very vocal about their feelings about the move. Listen to their complaints without trying to fix things. They need you to hear their story and respond reflecting that you understand and care.
- Moving during middle school or high school years brings with it challenges unique to being an adolescent. Teens have to say goodbye to friends and reestablish themselves in a new school and activities. It is alarming to think all the work of establishing themselves with certain kids and earning a place in specific clubs, teams, or activities was all for nothing since they now will have to begin again. Research shows the most difficult time for children to move is during their high school years. Try to recognize the stress a move will have on your teenager.
- The goals teens have set may need to be revised. The teens may have difficulty concentrating and making decisions. Adults can help teens learn appropriate responses by being open and available, and through their own example. Even the youngest child can sense the changes and disrupted routines that a move brings about, and when you are a teenager struggling to find your way, a move may feel like your life is over.



- As a parent, you, too, are experiencing your own crisis as you need to pack, say goodbye, and think about the changes in your life. In all truth, you will likely grow weary of your teen's drama long before he or she is ready to stop talking about it with you. Try to be patient and know that if you can stay calm and keep the lines of communication open, things will settle out even though it may require several months or even years of listening to anger, disappointments, joys, and trials (or of putting you on trial!).
- Losses and major upheavals can make teens feel more child-like and dependent. This can be particularly threatening as they struggle to forge their independent identities. Expect some limit testing, rebellion, and increased moodiness. Be prepared to set reasonable boundaries.

Communication is one key strategy to coping and growing as a family through any grief process. Here are some suggestions to help with family grief:

- Try to be sensitive to each other's feelings. Feelings are often difficult to verbalize. Listen to what is said as well as what is meant.
- Set some family rules on how to be respectful of one another and how to stay connected during this stressful time. The entire family can brainstorm ideas; it might include things like:
 - No put-downs.
 - Each person allows the other to finish before responding (no talking at the same time).
 - Anyone can ask for a family meeting if he or she has a need to discuss something.
- Plan a family event each week just to spend time together. It might be for pizza out or a Sunday dessert night or a Saturday afternoon for watching family videos.
- Respect each person's unique way of handling grief. Some may grieve privately, others openly, and still others with a combination of those styles. If you find yourself about to say to your teen, "Just get over it, would you?" go for a walk, get some space, and give him or her some space.
- Hold regular family meetings during which each family member can talk and express grief in his or her own way. Be a good listener.
- Make a family diary or scrapbook and have each member contribute a writing or drawing. Make a collage together. Make a memory book of favorite places or things you want to remember about the home and church and town you are leaving.
- Do not give each other the silent treatment. When we deliberately shut others out, it is an act of violence and hurtful for everyone involved.
- Recognize this is likely to be a difficult move for a teenager and you may need to provide ways to help maintain his or her self-esteem. Try to remember what it was like to be a teen and what a move would have been like for you at that age. Certainly, the world is different today, but trying to connect with those we love is always a positive practice.
- Respect the life stages of family members. Understand that an adolescent may gravitate more toward peers and be reluctant to share thoughts or feelings with you.
- Help create some fun and intentional ways for your teenager to say goodbye to friends in special ways. Also, be intentional about helping him or her design a plan for staying in touch by email, phone, or perhaps by having a best friend schedule a visit during the summer of the move.
- Look for ways to help your teens make the new home and their bedroom their own. Consider redecorating their room or helping them paint their furniture, or finding other ways to make the move special.
- Seek professional counseling or other help if depression, withdrawal, or family problems begin to feel unmanageable.
- Remember it is difficult to help your family or your parishioners with grief if you are not handling things well. Working on your own grief will enable you to help your family cope better.
- Pray and make use of rituals. If your teen is resistant to "religious" language, be tolerant and try to introduce the spiritual dimension in ways he or she can hear and relate.
- Share your grief as a family so you can all help maintain an emotionally solid family system. Being authentic nurtures connections with all those we care about.

Works Cited

¹Manning, Doug. *Don't Take My Grief Away From Me: How to Walk Through Grief and Learn to Live*. Hereford, TX. Insight Books, Inc., 1979

Books to Consider

For Parents:

Get Out of My Life but First Could You Drive Me and Cheryl to the Mall?: A Parent's Guide to the New Teenager by Anthony E. Wolf. Noonday, 1992.

For Teens:

Don't Sweat The Small Stuff for Teens by Richard Carlson. Hyperion, 2000.

Teens Can Make It Happen: Nine Steps for Success by Stedman Graham. Simon and Schuster, 2000.

Worship Resources

Liturgies

Leaving:

The congregation/worship committee may wish to write its own litany of farewell and have a representative come forward with a gift for the minister. Hymns from *The United Methodist Hymnal* may include #673, 672, 670, 666, 664, 582, 557, 436, 396, 382. Instrumentalists may wish to respond to the blessing with #665. *The United Methodist Book of Worship* also has suggestions for liturgy and hymns on pages 598-599.

Included here are several litany choices which may be used by a lay leader or SPRC chair at the end of the service. These may be accompanied by a gift-giving moment afterward, if appropriate.

Leader: We gather together as one community,

PEOPLE: A PART OF ONE UNIVERSAL CHURCH.

Leader: We gather together this day of farewell,

PEOPLE: A PART OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST JESUS.

Leader: We gather to call forth God's love,

PEOPLE: FOR EACH ONE HERE AND FOR ONE WHO MOVES ONWARD.

Leader: Thanks be to God for our leader,

PEOPLE: AND ALL THE GIFTS S/HE HAS SHARED.

Leader: Our love goes with <Name>,

PEOPLE: AS WE ALL LOOK FORWARD TO A NEW FUTURE.

Leader: Go in peace to love and serve our God.

Minister: I shall serve our God faithfully while remembering you always.

Prayer of blessing for minister by leader. Gift, if appropriate. Closing hymn.

d

Leader: The wind of the Spirit blows in this place.

PEOPLE: MAY THE FIRE OF THE SPIRIT CLEANSE US:

Leader: from regret, from fear, from pain,

PEOPLE: FROM SORROW, FROM ANGER, FROM RESISTANCE.

Leader: May the healing of the Spirit be upon us.

PEOPLE: MAY THE STRENGTH OF THE SPIRIT GO WITH US,

Leader: and with <Name> who leaves us.

PEOPLE: GO WITH OUR BLESSING:

WE SHALL LIFT YOU IN PRAYER.

WE SHALL REMEMBER YOU.

WE SHALL CALL FOR GOD'S BLESSING UPON YOU,

THIS DAY AND FOREVERMORE.

ALL: AMEN AND AMEN.

Prayer of blessing for minister by leader. Gift, if appropriate. Closing hymn.

d

Leader: We remember.

PEOPLE: WE REMEMBER.

Leader: We remember our time together,

PEOPLE: OUR JOYS AND SORROWS,

Leader: our laughter and anger.

PEOPLE: WE REMEMBER.

Leader: We remember:

PEOPLE: THE WEDDINGS AND BAPTISMS,

Leader: the illnesses and funerals,

PEOPLE: AND WE ARE GRATEFUL TO BE CALLED CHRIST'S COMMUNITY.

Leader: And we are grateful for the gifts <Name> has brought to us.

ALL: THANKS BE TO GOD FOR THE TIME OF BLESSING WE SHARED, AND THE TIME OF BLESSING TO COME.

Prayer of blessing for minister by leader. Gift, if appropriate. Closing hymn.

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Welcoming:

The church may wish to use the liturgy available in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, pages 595-598. Hymns from *The United Methodist Hymnal* may include #334, 383, 399, 413, 557, 578, 733. Listed in the *Book of Worship* are the symbols of welcome—Bible, water, bread and cup, hymnal, *The Discipline*, globe and stole, if appropriate. Any of these symbols or a particular symbol of the local church may be used with a litany of welcome.

Included here are several litany choices which may be used by a lay leader or SPRC chair at the beginning of the service. These may be accompanied by a symbol-giving moment, if appropriate.

Leader: This is a day of thanksgiving!

PEOPLE: THANKS BE TO GOD!

Leader: We are renewed in this place of worship.

PEOPLE: WE CALL FORTH GOD'S SPIRIT.

Leader: We welcome a new leader in our midst.

PEOPLE: WELCOME, <Name>!

Leader: This is a day of new beginnings.

PEOPLE: WE REJOICE AND ARE GLAD IN IT.

Leader: We are glad to have you among us:

to speak and to listen,
to serve and to baptize,
to help and hold,
to lead and guide.

Minister: I am here, filled with hope,

to know you,
to share with you,
to find our way together on the journey.

ALL: THANKS BE TO GOD!

The liturgy of symbols may be used here—page 597, BOW. Prayer led by lay leader or SPR chair. Hymn. Continue with order of service.

d

Leader: God welcomes us in this sanctuary!

PEOPLE: WE GATHER TO WORSHIP GOD IN THIS HOLY SPACE!

Leader: Today, we celebrate a new <one/family> amongst us!

PEOPLE: WELCOME, IN THE NAME OF CHRIST!

Leader: Welcome, as our leader and spiritual guide.

PEOPLE: WELCOME, AS OUR COMFORTER AND SHEPHERD.

Leader: Welcome, as our prophet and preacher.

PEOPLE: WELCOME, AS ONE OF US IN THIS COMMUNITY OF CHRIST.

Leader: <Name>, we are grateful for your presence here,

PEOPLE: AND WE FEEL BLESSED TO BE WITH YOU.

Leader: Let us celebrate God's name!

PEOPLE: THANKS BE TO GOD!

The liturgy of symbols may be used here—page 597, BOW. Prayer led by lay leader or SPR chair. Hymn. Continue with order of service.

d

Leader: In the name of Christ,

PEOPLE: WE GIVE OUR THANKS AND PRAISE.

Leader: We call on God to bless this community,

PEOPLE: AND ALL WHO LEAD IT.

Leader: Instill in our new leader all the gifts and graces for ministry in this place.

PEOPLE: INSTILL IN US THE DESIRE TO BE IN MINISTRY TOGETHER.

Leader: God has done a marvelous thing,

PEOPLE: AND WE ARE BLESSED IN IT!

ALL: THANKS BE TO THE HOLY ONE, NOW AND FOREVER! AMEN.

The liturgy of symbols may be used here—page 597, BOW. Prayer led by lay leader or SPR chair. Hymn. Continue with order of service.

Transitions/Change

UMH Hymns may include #131, 374, 377, 380, 398, 405, 430, 451, 454, 580. An instrumentalist may introduce the service with dissonant music or simple noise. This sound may be followed by the liturgist calling people to worship in a time of transition/change. After an opening hymn, sung together, the rest of the service proceeds, and at the end, the instrumentalist makes the same dissonant sound and leads to either a quiet or melodious conclusion, signifying that all will be well.

Included here are several litany choices which may be used by a lay leader, liturgist or SPRC chair at the beginning of the service.

Leader: 'Tis a day of transition.

PEOPLE: WE GATHER NONETHELESS.

Leader: We gather to praise God,

PEOPLE: AND ALL GOD'S SERVANTS.

Leader: We wait upon the Great One.

PEOPLE: WE RENEW OUR FAITH.

Leader: Even in times of wilderness wandering,

PEOPLE: WE SHALL BE STRONG.

WE SHALL NOT STRAY.

WE SHALL AWAIT A NEW DAY.

Leader: God bless the journey!

PEOPLE: WE FOLLOW GOD FAITHFULLY!

d

Leader: How is it with your soul?

PEOPLE: OUR SOULS ARE TROUBLED,

Leader: for we are in a time of change,

PEOPLE: AND CHANGE DOES NOT COME EASILY.

Leader: We call upon God to bring us peace.

PEOPLE: MAY GOD'S PEACE BE WITH US ALL.

Leader: For in change, lies opportunity,

PEOPLE: AND IN OPPORTUNITY LIES HOPE.

Leader: Fill our souls with hope, O God,

PEOPLE: AND CALL FORTH THE BEST THAT IS WITHIN US.

Leader: Bring to us the One who bears your will,

PEOPLE: AND GRANT US YOUR CONSTANT LOVE.

ALL: AMEN.

d

Leader: Our God is magnificent!

PEOPLE: GOD PROVIDES ALL THINGS!

Leader: From manna in the wilderness,

PEOPLE: TO BREAD AND GRAPE FOR THE THIRSTING.

Leader: As a shepherd, God leads us.

PEOPLE: AS A MOTHER HEN, GOD PROTECTS US.

Leader: God will stand by us all,

PEOPLE: AND WE WILL KNOW GOD'S LOVE!

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Yoke Of Christ Liturgy

A Service Of Sending Forth

Let the pastor and lay leaders meet at the altar.

Pastor: This stole is a symbol of the yoke of Christ. I have worn it for the past [number of years served at the church]. It represents our covenant as pastor and people together. Sometimes it has been heavy, but God's all sufficient grace has lightened the burdens and brought peace. Today, I lay aside this yoke of Christ's service at [name of church the pastor is leaving] to take up the task of ministry among God's people at [name of the church pastor will be going to].

Lay Leaders: We receive this stole as a symbol of your ministry among us. Placing it upon the altar, we send you forth to serve Christ in your new calling.

Pastor: May the Lord watch between us while we are absent from one another. And the blessings of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with us all.

PEOPLE: AMEN!

UMH Hymn #557 Blest Be The Tie That Binds

A Service Of Reception

This provides the opportunity for the participation of laypersons.

Layperson: The stole on the altar today is a symbol of the yoke of Christ. For the past [number of years served at previous church], you wore it in Christ's service at [name of church pastor has left]. Last week it was placed on the altar and consecrated for ministry here at [name of church pastor is beginning a ministry].

Associate Pastor or Layperson: This stole represents our covenant to serve Christ together. Today we covenant to work side by side, sharing the burdens of this congregation.

Layperson: We place this stole upon your shoulders as a symbol of our ministry together as pastor and people in the service of Christ.

Pastor: I accept this stole and will wear it as a symbol of our covenant to serve Christ together. Sometimes the burdens will be heavy and the forward strides seem small. We will not always meet each other's expectations. But, we are bound together with Christ. His yoke is easy. His burden is light. I ask for your prayers, and I promise my love and faithfulness.

PEOPLE: WE WILL SHARE THE YOKE OF CHRIST WITH YOU. AS WE VENTURE FORTH IN CHRIST'S SERVICE, WE PLEDGE YOU OUR LOVE AND SPIRITUAL SUPPORT.

ALL: AMEN!

UMH Hymn #557 Blest Be The Tie That Binds

Sermon Starters

Leaving

Title: "Standing on the Promises"

Text: I Corinthians 3:5-11

Synopsis: Paul refers to leaders who each built on the other's work; no one's work was complete in and of itself. "So I have been among you as a builder building on a foundation laid by others. My work is far from complete, but I trust in the line of leadership of which I have been part, and I trust in the One who undergirds that line: God, the giver of growth, Christ the sure foundation."

"In the midst of all that is unfinished, we have hope in the promises of God. (*Use examples of human promises that help, sustain, and bring hope in the midst of transition: baptismal vows, confirmation vows, marriage vows.*) If such joy, comfort, and hope is true of human promises, how much more so of God's promises." (*Cite favorite scripture promises. Give an example of being sustained in a difficult life passage by a promise of God.*) So today, as we look ahead, may we decide to stand on the promises of God, to put our hand in God's, and walk boldly into the unknown, confident in the foundation we have in Christ."

Title: "Peace Be Unto You"

Text: Mark 4:35-41

Synopsis: Retell the Gospel story. First, Jesus is tired and takes a "power nap" to restore his physical and spiritual energy. Relate experiences of how the ministries of the church have restored your energy. Go on to

tell of the furious squall that develops on the Sea of Galilee. Relate this to some of the squalls/conflicts the church and you have successfully faced together during your pastorate. Conclude with the teaching that Jesus calls us to live boldly as he promises to be with us in the storm. “Jesus doesn’t call us to live only within our comfort zone, but to push our limits, to live on the edge! It’s scary sometimes! But Jesus didn’t promise us a peaceful voyage; he promised to be with us in the storm. Peace be unto you.”

Title: “Never Hidden, Never Alone”

Text: Psalm 139:1-18

Synopsis: This is an intimate psalm that gives perspective for the sweep of life, in both its travels and travails. God is present in change and knows completely what is in the mind and heart of each person present on the day of leave-taking. Despite loss, the community is bound together for all time with the knowledge that God is always present even as leadership comes and goes.

Title: “Christ Is With Us”

Text: Mark 4:35-40

Synopsis: Leave-taking can seem like a stormy time—either from conflict or simply grief. Jesus left behind the crowds and rested while a storm brewed around him and the disciples. He rebuked them, yet they, like us, still had to learn faith is stronger than fear or loss. Two kinds of loss are present in this story—leaving the crowd behind (*one can put oneself in the crowd*), and potential loss of life (*one can locate oneself in the boat*). Yet in each, there is the constant of Christ’s word, both to the crowd and to the threatening wind. Staying with the Word makes one capable of bearing loss, fear, discomfort about the future. (*This idea also can be used for transition times.*)

Final Four Weeks In The Parish

First Sunday

Title: “Learning To Let Go”

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, Matthew 16:21-23

Synopsis: When we recognize graduating seniors, the general idea is that sometimes, love means letting go. We could relate that to a child learning to ride a bicycle, graduates leaving home for college or the service, getting married, saying goodbye to a loved one at the time of death, and moving. The biblical theme of letting go is seen when Jesus explains to his disciples that his mission would involve his own suffering and death. Peter’s response is, “God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” Jesus rebukes Peter because Peter is reluctant to let go. There are times in life when all of us must learn to let go.

Second Sunday

Title: “Happy Birthday!”

Text: Acts 2:1-21

Synopsis: At Pentecost, we talk about the idea that birthdays are a time for reflection and taking stock of where we are in life. We can use that theme (and the reading from Acts) to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the congregation. What needs to be contemplated, examined, admitted, and then done to grow and mature “in Christ”—with the knowledge that the Holy Spirit is ever-present to guide and uplift us?

Third Sunday

Title: “Expect The Best!”

Text: Luke 19:1-10; 6:12-16

Synopsis: Our expectations have a way of becoming self-fulfilling prophecies. Jesus always looked for the best in a person. In Zacchaeus, Mary Magdalene, Peter, James, and John, Jesus saw not only who they were but who they might become by the grace of God. With that theme in mind, challenge the congregation to expect the best from their new pastor, affirming that person’s strengths. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Great things are achieved by those from whom great things are expected.”

Forth Sunday

Title: “Love Never Ends”

Text: Romans 8 (Selected Verses); I Corinthians 13

Synopsis: Although the present pastoral relationship is coming to a conclusion, the love of God shared together will never end. The Communion text has a phrase to remind us of the fact that every time we take the elements, we are joining with all those who have faithfully lived and died in worshipping and glorifying God. Each communion recalls before God all the other times when this Sacrament has been celebrated—from the Upper Room right down to the present hour. Conclude the service with the celebration of Holy Communion to symbolize the bond that unites us all.

Welcoming

Title: “The Door Opens”

Text: Matthew 7:7-11

Synopsis: A new door is opening. The community and new leader must come together to determine what they wish to ask. God welcomes those who ask for God’s gifts. What might the community ask for, together? What calls the community to knock? What new thing would they find behind the door?

Illustration: Christmas morning packages, surprises, or the preacher’s perspective on what s/he is looking for in ministry together.

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Title: “Wisdom and Revelation”

Text: Ephesians 1:15-23

Synopsis: God gives us the insight to know our faith, deeply and powerfully. God puts this powerful insight to work in community, like the community at Ephesus (*a crossroads for a variety of world cultures*). Welcoming the revelation of God’s wisdom/word is a significant call for the church—which, in turn, draws the church to welcome the stranger, who comes with a different background, different ideas. (*The preacher may wish to tell about him- or herself at this point.*) The greatest welcome of all is the welcome God gives every day to each person in the community, new or seasoned with long membership. Thank you for welcoming the Word and also welcoming the stranger.

Transitions/Change

Title: “Bearing Fruit”

Text: John 15:1-11

Synopsis: There is a seasonal cycle for harvesting plants, and each season has its own transition-time. The constant is the nourishment in the cycle—Christ’s presence as we abide in him. Even as our own seasons of life move forward and we face transitions in personal, work, family, and community life, we stay connected with the constant—the abiding in Christ. Staying rooted helps us bear all other transitions. (*This sermon idea will work for “change” also.*)

Title: “Like No Other Change”

Text: Acts 2:1-4

Synopsis: The disciples’ Pentecost experience forever changed the nature of Judaism for many people in Jerusalem and surrounding environs. The disciples went forth to preach and begin the early Judeo-Christian house-churches, explaining the faith, baptizing, and turning the Jewish and Gentile world on its head. They never stayed long in one place, hoping to empower the local people for ministry and evangelism. Illustration: any of Paul’s letters telling a particular church to keep its focus. Current-day change is nowhere near the scale of those changes in belief systems, yet change can still be difficult. God calls the community to a great adventure in faith, no matter what comes its way.

Children’s Messages

Leaving

Title: “Nothing Separates Us From Love”

Objects Needed: A kitchen timer and a long tape measure.

Scripture Reference: I Corinthians 13:7-8

Synopsis: “Neither time nor space can separate us from those we love. I wonder, will we still be friends in five seconds?” Set the timer and make it ring in five seconds. “Are we still friends?” (*Yes.*) “What about in 10 seconds?” Set the timer and make it ring in 10 seconds. “Are we still friends?” (*Yes.*) Continue to ask the question about still being friends after increasing lengths of time. “If I could set this timer for a day/week/month/year, would we still be friends?” Affirm that, yes, you’ll still be friends. No amount of time will change that. The passage of time doesn’t change the love between friends.

Next, ask for a volunteer to hold one end of the tape measure. Have the person stand two feet from you and ask, “Are we still friends?” (*Yes.*) Have the person stand six feet from you and ask, “Are we still friends?” (*Yes.*) Send the person halfway down the aisle and ask the same question with the same response. Send the person to the back of the church with the same question and response. Would we still be friends? (*Yes.*) Continue to use increasing distances. “No amount of distance can change the love between friends. St. Paul says something like that in his letter to the Corinthians.” Read I Corinthians 13:7-8. Close with prayer.

Title: “It’s All in a Picture”

Objects Needed: A camera.

Synopsis: Take out a camera and ask the children how they remember things. Answer: “Take pictures!” How else do they remember things? Possible answers: writing, imagining, dreaming, talking about things. Then ask them to pose for a picture—just them. Then ask the children to ask the congregation to stand up and wave—make sure the kids are asking—and take a picture of everyone waving. Tell them you will remember them in all the ways they mentioned and you will pray for them, too. Sing a song together. Close with an echo prayer.

Welcoming: Transitions/Change Focus

Title: “You’re Important To Me!”

Synopsis: Invite the children forward and tell them your name. Ask them to repeat it. Then ask them to shout their names all at once on the count of three. Tell them you now know each one of them, right? Share an object important to you that you might keep in your office for when they visit. Have them name an object important to them. If reasonable, ask them to bring their objects in to show you next week before/after the service. Sing a song together. Close with an echo prayer.

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Title: "New Shoes"

Object Needed: A pair of old running shoes, new sneakers in a bag.

Synopsis: Call the children forward. Hold up the old shoes. "I have something to show you today. Tell me, how would you describe these? (*Dirty, worn, old, or the brand name.*) Well, all those things that you say describe these shoes. I have to tell you they are my favorite running shoes. I have had them for at least four years. I really don't want to replace them. (*Give examples of previous use.*) My son/daughter/wife/husband said it was time to get a new pair. But I really didn't want a new pair. Some of you may feel that same way about Rev. _____. You were comfortable with him/her. You did a lot of fun stuff with her/him. You really didn't want a change. And it is okay to feel that way. I know I am a new shoe for you. (*Show new sneaker.*) I want you to give me a try. Just like you try on a new shoe. We'll do fun and important things together. Pretty soon you'll break me in and we'll be like old friends. We'll be real comfortable. Close with an echo prayer.

Title: "Welcome Here"

Synopsis: "I want you to learn two new words with me today. (*Don't say anything but sign, 'Welcome here.'*) I just said, 'Welcome here' in sign language. Let's try it together. (*Repeat the sign.*) Now I want you to point with your pointer finger. That is how you say, 'You.' Now, let's do the whole phrase. (*Sign, 'You welcome here.'*) If I couldn't talk or couldn't hear and you used your hands that way, I would feel happy inside and probably smile. It is such a good feeling inside when someone says, 'Welcome.' You feel included. That is what this Sunday is all about. You are welcome here. I am welcome here. We are all part of one beautiful loving family—God's family. One of the most important messages Jesus said to the children is, 'You are welcome here.' Use these signs this week to share God's love." (*Repeat the sign and close with prayer.*)

Signing instructions:

Index finger points out.

Right Hand at eye level, palm toward face.

Left hand at chest level, palm up, waiting to accept something.

Right hand curves downward and rests in open palm.

Move hands over to side, palms up, like you have just caught something.

Title: "Friends"

Synopsis: "I would like all of you to do this with your fingers. (*Hook index fingers.*)

Good job! Let's do that again. (*Repeat sign.*) Does anyone know that we just spoke a very important word? (*NO.*) Well, we did. We just said, 'Friends,' in sign language. This is my first time to meet all of you, but we are already friends (*SIGN*) because we share something that makes us friends (*SIGN*) all over the world. Do you see how it looks like we are hooked together when we sign friends? (*SIGN.*) We are hooked together by our love for God and God's love for us. No matter if it is our first time together or our 110th time together we are friends—friends in Jesus." Close with an echo prayer.

(This can be adapted for a leaving message: "No matter where we are, this sign means friends, and our love in Christ makes us friends forever.")

Signing instruction:

Index fingers make hook shape.

One up and one down.

Move and hook together.

Title: "It Works Better Upside-Down!"

Objects Needed: A banana.

Synopsis: Take a banana and ask the children how to peel it. Then ask them how people might peel it after watching monkeys peel bananas. Turn the banana over and peel it from the nub at the "bottom." Show them that, if they peel a banana that way, two things are helpful. One, it's easier to start peeling (*at the softer end*), and two, they have a HANDLE! Learning a new way or changing how we do something can tell us there is more than one right answer/right person! Close with an echo prayer.

Title: "Wet or Dry?"

Objects Needed: Dry cloth and a glass of water. **Synopsis:** Have a dry cloth and some water. Ask the children to feel the dry cloth; then add water. Ask them to feel it again. What's the difference? Can they describe how "wet" feels? When a cloth is wet, can it be useful? (*Cleaning, cooling a person off.*) How about when it's dry? (*Polishing, diaper!*) So it can be useful two ways, and it can change and STILL be useful. It can change lots of times. Is change okay? What other changes are okay? (*Weather, teachers, vacations, people.*) Describe the change the congregation is experiencing. Close with an echo prayer.

Books to Consider

The Iona Community Worship Book. Wildgoose, 1994. Glasgow, Scotland. (Available at Cokesbury)

Taste and See by Jacqueline Syrup Began and S. Marie Schwan. St. Mary's Press, 1996.

Touch Holiness by Ruth Duck and Maren C. Tirabassi. Pilgrim, 1990.



A Systems Perspective on Moving

The study of family systems is a study of the processes of human interaction. While this field of inquiry began by studying nuclear families, the observations and insights have helped many to understand the dynamics that occur in any group or human community. The church is a human community, and as the body of Christ, we are a family of believers who find our unity in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Remembering how people and church families tend to function in a group (i.e., system) can help us through the chaotic time of a move. People under extreme stress are more likely to respond with reactive responses rather than with prayerful, purposeful responses. Paying attention to the family systems dynamics may help us gain some distance and objectivity and may ultimately help us become more purposeful in what we say and do for the glory of God.

Leaving and Entering a Congregation

The Significance Of Separation Processes

The idea that once your appointment is announced the pastor becomes a *Lame Duck* is a myth, and according to Edwin Friedman in Chapter 10 of his book, *Generation to Generation*, it is, to say the very least, also short-sighted.¹ The change of leaders is one of the most emotionally charged events any family system endures. The nature of your separation from a congregation can have more lasting effects in that congregation than all your previous years of effort to build and shape the faith within that church family. How you function through the leaving process may make a more lasting witness to your faith and the gospel you proclaim than all your passionately preached messages from the pulpit. Leaving is a time to walk the walk more than talk the talk. It is a time to convert your deepest felt beliefs into a guard for your tongue and a guide for your actions.

During the time of transition, the Staff Parish Relations committee, Pastor, District Superintendent, and Bishop are all subject to endless triangulations. They are constantly being pulled to balance all the voices and expressed needs of the local and larger church system. Using the concept of an emotional triangle helps to bring some objectivity to the emotional processes present in a change of leaders. In gaining objectivity about the emotional processes, we may find ourselves in a better place to control our reactivity and responses to the change.

Friedman suggests that ceremonies marking the end of a given clergy-congregational relationship are often more important for the future of the congregation than the ceremonies initiating the beginning of a new pastor-parish relationship.² Rituals, which publicly release the congregation from dependency upon the leaving pastor, significantly increase the ability of the congregation to move on under new leadership.

Strategies of Separation

A pastor-congregation separation in many ways has all the emotional processes of a marital divorce. The following are some coping strategies from a systems perspective.

Regulate your own emotional reactivity to others. The best thing you can do is to stay rooted and grounded in your spiritual disciplines of prayer, meditation, journaling, and Bible study etc. Those disciplines will help you find purposeful responses to all the emotional reactivity coming at you. The partner who did not initiate the separation will tend to be more reactive. It will be up to the initiating partner to be prepared for the reactivity and to regulate his or her own reactivity. Unregulated, the reactivity will escalate, deepening the pain of separation and leaving long-term wounds.

Permit reactivity in the other. Allow others to express their reactivity without the need to control what they say or the way they feel. This requires being present as opposed to fleeing or retreating because their reactivity is uncomfortable. The challenge is to be present but not add to the reactivity by forming a reactive feedback loop. If you can watch the fire burn without trying to put it out or throw gas on it, you will promote the other's ability to move on with the least amount of emotional baggage.

Engage actively in the transition process. Here, you can help your congregational partners see what they look like from the perspective of their new partner. One way to do this is to help them clarify and articulate their congregational identity through the annual and long-term church profiles. Their new pastor will be selected on the basis of that information. Help them to articulate what gifts they will need in their new pastor. Again, this must be done in a non-reactive way so it is clear you are not trying to control the process but rather are trying to help them clarify their needs.

Stay in touch after the separation. While it is good etiquette that pastors not return to our former parish for at least a year, contact with former parishioners is still likely. How we handle those contacts will either

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promote separation or encourage unhealthy dependencies. Therefore, any pastoral functions, such as weddings and funerals involving former parishioners, are inappropriate. The continued contact that fosters further separation involves detriangling and continued disengagement. This means responding to complaints about the new pastor with disinterest. If we refuse to conspire in an emotional alliance with former parishioners against a successor, we promote further separation. No one else has as much power as you have to promote a healthy separation and the ways to deal more effectively with our own grief.

Strategies for entering a congregational family. When you move into a new congregation, you have no guarantee your predecessors handled their leaving well. Two major variables affect the nature of the baggage your new congregation may be carrying: a) the length of the congregation's "marriages" (the number of years pastors usually stay at that church), and b) the nature of the previous separations and how those "break-ups" were handled. The following three strategies for entering arise from the body of family system theory:

Avoid interfering with or rearranging the triangles in the established relationship system. The model most applicable is that of a "blended family." In this situation one partner marries into an established family relationship system. The one coming in "skates on thin ice" when he or she tries to fix or rearrange the relationship patterns that already exist. Expressing ideas or suggesting changes is one thing; but coming on as the fixer or the re-arranger is another. When a harmless suggestion results in a strong emotional reaction, the root of that reaction is most likely the threat of change to a pre-existing triangle in the relationship system.

Be wary of efforts by members of the congregation to triangulate you with the "departed" or with other members of the system. Friedman suggests all triangling remarks are residue from unresolved issues.³ They are attempts to get the pastor to take one or another side. A new relationship based upon "triangling out" a third party is based on a false intimacy. Remove the third party and the relationship dies. Triangling remarks about the congregation's "ex" partner are hard to resist because the remarks are usually presented in a manner that praises the new minister by comparison. Refusing to become a replacement in the old triangles can force a resolution of the residue left by the previous partner.

Work at creating as many direct one-to-one relationships as possible with key members of the "family." More than developing new programs, work at being grafted into the emotional processes of the body. Building relationships will lay the foundation for a longer stay, lead to the greater chance your programs will be accepted, and in the end, leave less residue when it comes time for you to leave.

Building on the past for the future. The process of entering a congregation is in many ways really a response to the residue of former separations. Many congregations are on the rebound and looking for a new partner whose qualities are the opposite of the former partner. The inference is the differences will somehow heal their pain and solve their problems. In fact, the changes that result from grafting these different qualities into the body bring a different kind of unexpected pain. From a family systems perspective, this means the nature of the new connections is primarily a function of the nature of the previous separations.

When your move is announced, you are anything but a *Lame Duck*. You are entering one of the most crucial and effective times of your ministry. The way you separate from a congregation has future consequences for that family of faith.

Triangles in a Pastoral Move

Family system theory suggests that triangles occur more frequently and with greater intensity when we are going through some kind of life stress. Since moving qualifies as a significant life stress, you may wish to think through some of the triangles with which a pastor might be confronted. An attempt will be made to describe some of the common triangles, but this is by no means intended to be an exhaustive list nor is it absolute.

Basic Triangle Processes

Triangles are one of the basic processes of human emotional functioning. When God created more than two persons, the door was open for people to build alliances or to involve another person in the emotional interaction between two people. Triangle theory tries to take a step back in order to look at the way relationships between three persons interact and actually shift emotional energy from one relationship to another.

Triangles occur when the relationship between two people becomes anxious, conflicted, or uncomfortable. When this happens, a third party will be "triangled in" to ease the emotional intensity. This process operates automatically, often without conscious awareness or intent. It is a natural process that is descriptive of the way human beings operate in community.



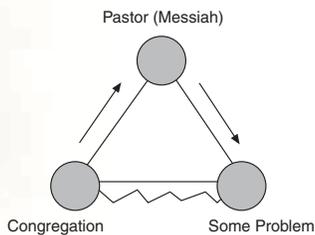
Sometimes two people will set aside their discomfort with each other to help someone who is characterized as a “victim” and “needy,” or at other times, to defend against someone who is characterized as a “villain” and “a problem.” Another common formation of a triangle is when one person takes on the role of mediator, peacemaker, or fix-it person for the relationship between the other two. The effect of every triangle is that one person’s behavior becomes a function of the relationship between the other two corners.

The following are some signs that you are in a triangle: You feel torn between the pull of others. You feel a conflict between two of your loyalties. Someone is reacting toward you in an extreme and excessive manner, far beyond what might be considered normal. You feel yourself pulled into gossip about the flaws of another. You feel the need to rescue someone. You come home and want to kick the dog because of some unpleasant happening in your day.

The goal of understanding triangle processes is to lift our level of functioning to an intentional and purposeful level. This means overcoming the pressures that the corners of the triangle place on you so you act in an intentional way rather than in a purely reactive, impulsive way. This is, in part, what being self-differentiated means. You are acting in a more self-differentiated way when you purposefully relate to each of the other two sides independently of their relationship with each other. Another thing to note is that one corner of the triangle may be something other than another person. It also may be an idea, issue, or group of people. It may even be God. As a pastor, you may very well want to develop the spiritual art of “triangling” God into your relationships with others.

Finally, as neat as a three-sided relationship is, we must also be aware that a pure isolated triangle practically never exists. More likely, layers of triangles interlock with one another. Add a fourth or fifth person to the mix, and the possible triangles multiply rapidly, increasing the complexity of the system significantly. The following are suggestions for possible triangles you may find yourself in as you change churches.

The “Great Messiah” Triangle

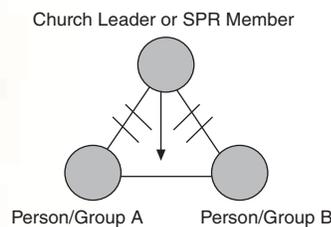


The seduction of this triangle for the new pastor is that your new congregation believes you can fix its problems. Because you really want to please them, you jump into your best fix-it mode. Typical problems presented may include: low attendance, lack of visitation, a poor financial position, struggling Sunday school, etc.

It is healthy to realize that because of the homeostasis (the forces that keep things running the same way) you may not be able to fix the problem completely. Giving the problem back to your new congregation and leading them in finding their own resources to fix the problem is one strategy of healthy leadership.

To manage your own reactivity in this triangle, think for a moment about how you are being manipulated by the hopes of your new congregation. Evaluate how you feel about the problem they are presenting. Be aware of how the problem triggers anxiousness in you. Strive to avoid an impulsive response to the fears and anxiousness; act with prayerful, purposeful intention.

The “Meddling” Triangle



Closely related to the “Great Messiah” triangle is the “Meddling” triangle. Once again the pastor is invited, but in a more subtle way, to be the fix-it person. This time the danger is in trying to fix a relationship that she or he is not in.

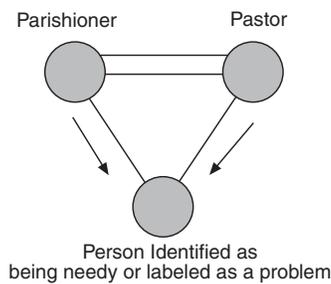
As a new pastor, you may be sought by persons wishing to build an alliance with you against another person or group. Realizing there is conflict within the body, you may then feel the impulse to step in to mediate or fix the conflict.

It is helpful to remember the basics of a triangle. You can have a relationship with Person/Group A, and you can have a relationship with Person/Group B, but you cannot have the relationship *between* Person/Group A and Person/Group B. Give the responsibility for fixing the problem back to those who are in the relationship with one another. Encourage the use of their spiritual resources for resolving the difficulty. You will function best when you stay focused on the relationships you are actually in and trust God to work in the relationships you are not in.

Frequently, when you try to fix a relationship you are not in, you find yourself pushed back or cut off from both persons/groups. Another result is that Person/Group A & Person/Group B may team up, set aside their problem, and make you the problem. In the latter scenario, the pastor has fixed their problem with each other by becoming a greater problem. Choose wisely: Do you want to solve a problem by becoming a greater problem in your new congregation?

Acting in a self-differentiated way means not allowing your relationship with Person/Group A to affect your relationship with Person/Group B or vice versa. It means either purposefully becoming the problem that allows them to set aside their problem or refraining from fixing it and giving the problem back to them to fix. It means being the pastor of the whole flock and resisting attempts at binding loyalties that exclude others.

The "Need for Closeness" Triangle

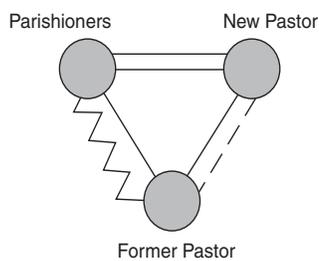


Sometimes the need for the pastor and parishioners to feel close with one another leads to the formation of a triangle. Here, teaming up to defend against someone or teaming up to help someone generates the closeness. A negative way of building closeness is to focus on a threat or an enemy of the body. This is a closeness built upon fear and sometimes generates paranoia. A positive way to build closeness is to focus on the mission of the church. This is a closeness built upon a common vision (or the hopes and dreams) people have for their church.

Remember closeness between two people built in the ways mentioned will always require a third corner which may be a person or an issue. In some sense, it is a false closeness because it is dependent on a third party.

This triangle is not the only way to build closeness. Closeness may also be built through opportunities for playful fellowship. Consider how you will respond to the need to build closeness with your new parishioners. Who or what are the enemies, visions, issues, or playtimes that will bring you together?

The "Former Pastor" Triangle

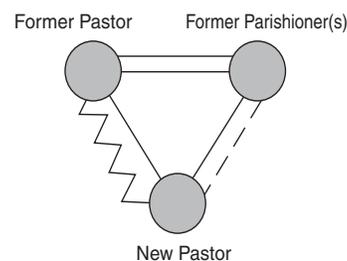


A particular example of the "Need for Closeness" triangle is that of building closeness at the expense of your colleague and predecessor. If your new parishioners have found something to dislike about their former pastor, you can bet you will hear about it. Sharing the flaws of your predecessor may be an attempt to build closeness with you as well as an attempt to shape your behavior through binding loyalties.

Remember that building closeness on this basis is dependent upon a third party. Once the former pastor becomes just a memory, the closeness dissipates.

One strategy for healthy leadership may be to substitute pastor-bashing with vision-casting. Resist being critical of your colleague with parishioners. If you must vent, do it somewhere outside your congregation or system. Turn conversations from gossip about another to talk about people's hopes and dreams.

The "Grieving Leaving" Triangle



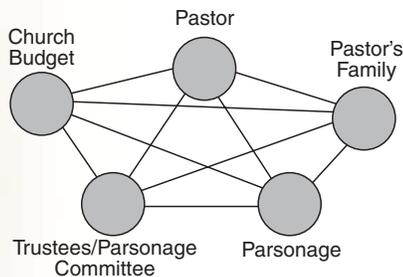
Moving brings the grief of changing your pastoral role with persons you have grown to love and care for. There is no question that it is hard to leave and let go of the pastoral role for loved ones in our former churches.

However, the dynamics according to triangle processes are as follows: If you keep former parishioners dependent upon your pastoral care, they will not need to turn to their new pastor for care. The results may include a rejection of the new pastor or at the very least a distant relationship. Further, you may also find yourself in a conflict with your pastoral colleague.

Not keeping good pastoral role boundaries shifts our opinions about our colleague into the relationship.



The "Parsonage" Triangles

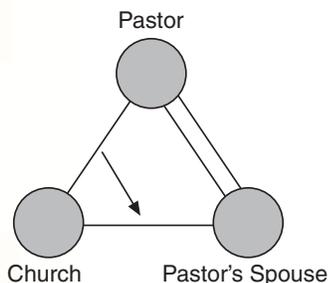


One of the more complex triangle systems revolves around the pastor and the parsonage. As you can see by the diagram, the pastor must manage many interlocking triangles. There are at least eight interlocking triangles in the diagram.

In the case of interlocking triangles, issues in any one of the relationships may move quickly to another relationship. For example, it is possible that the emotional energy in the pastor's family relationship with the parsonage may move into the relationship the trustees have with the church budget.

Here, the new pastor stands in the middle, juggling and processing many competing values, i.e., the love and comfort of one's family, acceptable living conditions in the parsonage, sacrificing or compromising to please the Trustees/Parsonage Committee, and the commitment toward missions in the church budget. At the very least, the pastor's family and the pastor must agree to acceptable conditions and acceptable sacrifices. Otherwise, resentment will build and flow to other relationships in the system.

The "Pastor's Love" Triangle



As you begin your new appointment, parishioners and family members will be watching to see how you balance your love for the church with your love for your family. Both will pull at you with their need for attention.

Sometimes, the pastor's spouse or children find themselves growing resentful of the church because of the relationship between the pastor and the church. This happens whether the relationship is good or bad. Often, pastors make sacrifices to accommodate the church that affect the spouse or family. Be aware this is a situation ripe for resentment and anger.

Traditionally, this triangle's process places expectations upon the pastor's spouse or children that are a direct consequence of the expectations the church has placed on the pastor. Often, persons in the church have difficulty relating to the pastor's family independent of their relationship to the pastor. The pastor will be tempted to try to mediate or act as a buffer in the relationship between the church and spouse. The pastor will benefit from being self-defined and vocal about how he or she will meet the needs of both loves (i.e., in defining when work time is and when family time is).

Things to Remember about Triangles

Triangles are a fact of life. Whether or not they will spin themselves out in the ways described here, you will most likely still feel caught in the middle in some area of your life. The important things to remember are:

- Stay focused on the relationships you are actually in.
- Stay focused on your own functioning.
- Manage your own reactivity to what is being pushed on you.
- And most importantly, build your relationship with God so you will have some idea of what pleases God as you work your way through the complex web of triangle processes.

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Quick Reference Guide

Information Needed	Where to Find It
Area Center: Annual Conference Office	330-499-3972 Tollfree: 1-800-831-3972
District Offices	Canal: 330-825-2761 Firelands: 419-668-6115 Mahoning Valley: 330-270-3400 Mid-Ohio: 419-522-3881 North Coast: 216-664-1602 Ohio Valley: 740-264-1601 Southern Hills: 740-425-4355 Three Rivers: 740-622-8880 Tuscarawas: 330-492-7817 Western Reserve: 440-352-2083 Tollfree: 1-866-442-4403 Tollfree: 1-877-206-4445
Pastoral Care & Counseling Office	330-456-0486 Toll-free 1-866-456-3600
Parsonage Standards	“Conference Policies and Rules: Parsonage Standards”.
Policy on Clergy Housing	“Conference Policies and Rules: Policy on Clergy Housing”.
Conference Policies Affecting Clergy	“Conference Policies and Rules: Conference Policies Affecting Clergy”.
Where does it say pastors should not return for at least one year?	“Conference Policies and Rules: Conference Policies Affecting Clergy”.
How many moving company estimates are suggested?	“Annual Conference Reports: Conference Council on Finance and Administration: Moving Expenses: Distance, Packing and Weight Limitations: Estimate”.
Moving Expense Reimbursement Policy	“Annual Conference Reports: Conference Council on Finance and Administration: Moving Expenses”.
Obtaining Recommendations for Movers	There is no prescribed process. Talk with other pastors, parishioners, SPRC chairpersons or inquire at your District Office.
Minimum Salary Schedule	“Annual Conference Reports: Commission on Equitable Salaries”.
Pastor’s Day Off, Vacation, Continuing Education and Professional Responsibilities	“Conference Policies and Rules: Conference Policies Affecting Clergy”