

ON SAYING GOODBYE – ROLE OF THE PASTOR

The way in which you say goodbye is crucial to both how you will begin your new pastorate and how you will create the environment for your successor. Healthy closure is important for you, your family and congregation. Hopefully you will experience some grief as you prepare to leave. Sometimes there is also relief (and you do not need to feel guilty about that). It is natural to experience excitement as you anticipate your new appointment. Regardless, these weeks before moving will be hectic, full and stressful. You are encouraged to be kind to yourself; to pace yourself so that you can begin your new pastorate with a sense of freshness and energy.

You already know what leaving your pastorate involves. These suggestions are merely reminders. (That's what we do for our congregation every Sunday morning -- invite them to remember what they already know!)

Consulting with PPR Chair: Consult fully and frequently with the chair of your PPR Committee regarding all the concerns pertaining to your leaving. It is also well to include at least the Lay Leader in the “loop of information.”

Contact your successor: You and your family should take the opportunity to set up a meeting with the PPR Committee of your new appointment and, also, visit the parsonage.

Share feelings: Honestly convey to the chair of your current PPR Committee ways that the congregation can be helpful in the transition. Some pastors' families want help with packing while other pastors' families prefer as much privacy as possible. Share these and other feelings relative to the move with the PPR Committee.

Seeking closure: Some pastors will find it helpful to make a list of persons with whom they need to seek closure. A practical way to do this is to list those you want to visit with, eat with, telephone or to whom you want to write a note. Seek closure before you move, for our professional procedures stipulate that we should not return for visits or pastoral duties.

Being sensitive: Take the time to reflect on and seek to understand how various ones in the congregation feel about your leaving. Listen with your “inner ear.” Some members may tend to be passively aggressive, and it is really a reflection of their grief, fear of loss or sense of betrayal that you are now leaving them. This is a time that calls for your finest pastoral graces!

Celebrate! Seek to find ways of celebrating the good pieces of your tenure and ministry.

Interpret your leaving: Find ways to interpret to the congregation the appointive process through pastoral letters, newsletters, pulpit and various fellowship occasions. Invite the congregation to rejoice with you in your new opportunity for ministry. Help them to understand that you will not be able to return for visits or pastoral duties, even though it is painful to leave.

Informing the PPR Committee: The District Superintendent will consult with the chair of your PPR Committee informing them who will follow you. A formal announcement should be made to your congregation, by the chair of your PPR Committee, at an appropriate time established by your District Superintendent.

Support for your successor: Do all that you can to show support for your successor. Tell the congregation that you will cease to be their pastor as of moving day. Do not be misled into believing that the church will fall apart when you leave or that your relationship is so important to former members that you must respond by returning for weddings, funerals or counseling sessions. On moving day, just lay down the pastoral mantle of your present congregation.

Relinquish your keys and your control! Rest your ministry for your present church with God.

Responsibilities relating to the parsonage: You are encouraged to invite the Chair of the PPR Committee and a representative of your Trustees to do a walk-through in the parsonage **as soon as possible** to ascertain what needs to be done in preparation for your leaving and the incoming pastor/family. This can be a painful and difficult exercise but keep in mind that the same procedure is being followed to prepare for you. Complete the Parsonage Inspection Moving Report.

Be creative: Discuss with your PPR Committee some of the ways they can prepare for a new pastor -- encourage them to be sensitive and creative.

No lame ducks! You are the pastor of your present church until you move and are responsible for what happens on your "watch."

Pray! Above all, pray for patience, sensitivity, understanding and love in working through the transition. God still has a stake in your ministry!

Anticipate: Look to the future with joy and anticipation!