

North Carolina United Methodists, we are in a season of appointment-making. The Bishop and District Superintendents receive the discernment of local church Staff-Parish Relations Committees, and we receive the Holy Spirit stirrings of pastors, and we seek God's guidance in making clergy appointments. We look at the mission of the local church and the potential impact on their broader community. Then, we listen deeply to what clergy gifts are needed to lead at this moment in the church's life.

This moment has never come before. Know that we are always making appointments for the future - and our prayer is that we are discerning God's preferred future. We don't make appointments trying to re-enact the glory days that a church may remember and celebrate. We look at the current reality of the congregation and the beauty of their surrounding community, and we discern, "Who is God calling to lead and serve this community?"

I am asking you and your church to pray for your North Carolina Conference Cabinet as we practice this deep discernment work. Pray that we will be open to the surprises of God through this process. We need every clergy person, active or retired, every lay person, every congregation, every extension ministry, and everyone who can hear my voice to pray - because there is a great deal at stake for every congregation and every pastor.

Have you considered the impact on the children of clergy families? We trust that God is working out what we cannot anticipate for clergy families. As intentional and as attentive as the cabinet is regarding clergy who are single, married, have children, or don't have children, moving into a new appointment is exciting and disrupting for families. Pray for all the clergy and those with families who now prepare to "let go" and prepare the way for the next clergy family to arrive.

Grief is real. Give yourself space to experience all the emotions of transitions. Stay open to one another in the releasing and in the welcoming. Also, be attentive in your prayers for congregations and clergy who begin a new relationship with one another, learning a different culture, language, and a different way of doing things. This can be exhilarating and terrifying.

This past week, I worshiped at two of our amazing North Carolina Conference churches in Mt. Gilead, NC. Zion United Methodist and Mt. Gilead First United Methodist. These two predominantly white congregations welcomed their first Hispanic clergywoman five weeks ago, Pastor Rosanna C. Panizo-Valladares. I sat on the edge of my seat, listening intently to every word as Pastor Rosanna preached the good news. While English is not her first language, her hospitality to articulate each word for the hearer to understand moved me to tears! The gospel message crystal clear, and God's new thing was present.

Yet, I know when there is a first for any congregation, a first for any pastor, it takes great intentionality and prayer to fully show up for one another. Please pray for every appointment, new or existing, that trust will be cultivated with the relationship between the pastor and the congregation, as well as with all of us in this beautiful United Methodist connection.

What if, with every new appointment, we respond knowing that God has birthed this new relationship, and we receive it with expectancy, knowing God has dreams for the church - The United Methodist Church? Will you join me?

Let us pray:

“Creator God, thank you for the gift of transitions and new ways of co-creating in your church. You see what we cannot see! Give us joy and hope that you are ever working so that the entire world will be saved - every person made whole. Use your church to bear witness to your love in this world. Jesus, you promised you would prepare a place for us. As we name the pastors and congregations who are preparing for a transition of appointment, we trust you will guide the cabinet to hear your voice in this appointment-making process. Go prepare a place. Prepare the hearts of the friends who will welcome pastors, spouses, and children into friendship. Prepare the way by preparing the work you are calling the spouses to engage. Prepare the way - provide for the financial needs and extended family needs that our clergy families face, and prepare the congregations, who will receive the pastors and families so that deep community is formed. Keep congregations and pastors from comparisons. Give eyes to see the unique gifts each brings to the other. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. May new appointments ignite innovation, reconciliation, imagination, compassion, and even transformation. May we live into our baptisms, initiated into Christ's holy church and incorporated into your mighty acts of salvation through the power of the Holy Spirit. Give peace, joy, and hope in your name, Jesus, Amen.”

I invite you to continue to offer prayers over these next few months. We will be extending prayers weekly through our Conference Office and invite you to join us in those prayers. Peace be with you.