

saying goodbye and saying hello

For churches and pastors experiencing a change of appointment, it is difficult to say goodbye or offer a welcome during pandemic.

Even as churches reopen, social distancing will continue.

Here are some ideas on making the transition meaningful, while protecting the health of everyone.



MEANINGFUL TRANSITION FROM A DISTANCE

An Order of Farewell to a Pastor *(UMC Book of Worship | Page 598)*

Put the liturgy on a video screen or in a bulletin. If the church is doing a recorded service, a layperson, such as SPRC chair or lay leader, can record the congregational response. Use physical symbols to ritualize the change, but do not have the laity bring these items forward and hand them to the pastor. Display symbols (Bible, bread, cup, towel, basin, etc.). Pastor lifts up each symbol and proclaims, "I offer these as signs of the ministry that I am turning over to your new pastor, (name)." Leave symbols on the altar for the new pastor's first Sunday.

An Order for the Celebration of an Appointment *(UMC Book of Worship | Page 595)*

Same guidelines as above. If recording service, SPRC chair can officiate the liturgy, while lay leader can read the congregational parts. New pastor can accept symbols left on the altar, and proclaim thanksgiving for new ministry.

Pastoral Letter to the Congregation

Moving pastor may write two letters: a goodbye letter and an introduction letter. Goodbye letter could include words of thanksgiving, highlighting good ministry accomplished together, and words acknowledging the power of God to transform any difficulties that occurred. Introduction letter would be about yourself. Consider three points: How a person becomes a pastor (your call story). How a pastor becomes a person (your "normal" life outside church). How a pastor becomes your pastor (your trust in the appointment process).

Letters to the Pastor from the Congregation

Members can send outgoing pastor cards and letters saying goodbye and expressing appreciation. Members also can shower new pastor with cards and letters of welcome and Christian hospitality.

Parsonage Parade

Instead of a traditional goodbye or welcome reception, consider organizing a parade of cars, perhaps with members holding signs or balloons, driving by the parsonage at a day/time organized by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.

Greetings on Zoom

SPRC and pastor might consider offering a time of goodbye or hello on Zoom or other online meeting platform. SPRC chair could ask questions of the outgoing pastor: What is your fondest memory of your time with our church? What did you learn about God while you were with us? Questions for the new pastor: What are you most excited about as you enter this appointment? What do you want the church to know about you?

Reception Line

If your church has resumed in-person worship on the outgoing pastor's final Sunday, a greeting line could be formed, with persons six feet apart and the pastor six feet away. Share words of farewell from a safe distance. Masks are recommended. Even safer: Do the reception line outside. Same type of reception line could be arranged to welcome the new pastor.