

Best Boundary Practices in Clergy Moves

The Michigan Conference Boards of Ordained Ministry and Laity, seeking to understand the important roles of each in the itinerant system, have compiled a list of best practices for congregations and pastors who are experiencing pastoral transition. By Discipline, clergy are called, equipped, and appointed to serve the body of Christ in important ways that necessarily set them apart from laity. However, it is important to recognize that clergy are set apart *within* the body of Christ which is based on relationships: ours with God and ours with each other. It is incumbent upon both clergy and laity to understand and foster healthy personal and professional boundaries during transition, so that we might realize the many benefits afforded United Methodists that come with the richness of the itinerant system. It is our hope that these best practices will serve to help all of us transition well as we serve our communities together, as the Body of Christ, in the world.

- Take advantage of readily available resources on healthy boundaries in transitions. on the Michigan Conference Website. <https://michiganumc.org/pastoral-transition/> There are helpful pieces here for both clergy and laity.
- The Annual Conference mandated Safe Sanctuaries on-line training in 2023 for all clergy. There are excellent pieces here on pastoral moves, ethics, and healthy boundaries.
- Once an announcement is made that a clergy person is being reappointed, pastor and lay leadership should take advantage of the time between an announcement and move to express care and appreciation for the ministry shared. It is also time for clarity that the professional relationship is coming to an end and affirm the professional relationship that will be shaped as the new pastor settles in. Clarity of boundaries at this point is critical.
- It is most helpful for the out-going pastor to be clear that they will not be performing any pastoral responsibilities or functions at that church or in that community once they leave the appointment.
- A liturgical passing on of the yoke of responsibility from the out-going to the incoming pastor is often a very helpful visual, spiritual, display of the reality that God is doing a new thing.
- For both laity and clergy, the relationships built have been largely based in the life of the church you share. Once the pastor has been reappointed, any connection is a connection in the shared church history. Maintenance of that connection is not helpful in that the tendency is to talk about the church then and the church now. Another way to put it is that while working together in ministry, the relationship was professional. When a move occurs that professional relationship ceases. For both clergy and laity, keeping contact to a minimum after the appointment allows the contact to do simple "catching up" without opportunity to blur the boundaries between professional and personal.

- Consistent communication between clergy and lay leadership with the congregation is critical. This is the time for reminders of the need to keep faithful covenant in the ministry we share to, for the sake of that ministry, respect healthy boundaries in person and digitally (on social media, in particular). Remember that the focus of the laity is on their shared membership in the local church, while the focus of the clergy is on their shared membership in the Michigan Conference.
- In summary, the Boards of Laity and Ordained Ministry share the view that for the mission of Christ, healthy boundaries in our ministry together are absolutely necessary in the fulfillment of that mission. For the sake of Christ, we put aside the relationships that feel good, the affirmations that build our egos, the relationships that have formed us in order that a new, next step may be taken by your congregation, in your community and in the world.