

WELCOMING YOUR NEW PASTOR

RESEARCH HAS SHOWN that a healthy pastor/congregation relationship, the basis for a long-term, stable tenure at the church, and a productive, vibrant ministry together, IS FORMED IN THE FIRST 90 DAYS. The Great Plains Conference of the United Methodist Church (Kansas) offered this advice to congregations receiving a new minister.

“The first several months of a new (call) often sets the trajectory of one’s service in a new congregation.” And, “The transition process isn’t just up to the pastor [or the nominating committee]. Leaders in the church also contribute to making a smooth transition process for both the church and the pastor.”

At the May 14, 2022 Officers’ Retreat, we spent nearly two hours talking about the steps congregations do to welcome their next minister, whether Head of Staff or Associate. The summary of the material shared at the retreat were part of the Pastor’s report for the May Session meeting.

This is a summary of some specific and philosophical steps to keep in mind as you prepare to welcome the new Nolan in four weeks, and the new Head of Staff in a few months.

- Embrace the uniqueness of your pastor. She/he brings special gifts & strengths for ministry drawn from their personal and professional life. Celebrate these. Younger pastors in particular may have had experiences in worship, multimedia and mission that have shaped their lives and outlook on the way the church will look like in the coming decade. Allow your new minister to blossom and flourish.
- Do not compare the new minister to other pastors of the congregation’s past. To do so is to disrespect the Spirit’s role in guiding you to this minister in the first place.
- Be prepared to follow. Open minded and open hearted. Your pastor will be skilled, gifted and experienced. And the ideas he or she brings to Highland may be a needed renewal for the congregation.
- Give you pastor permission to fail. Pastors will have missteps, lose their cool, get off on the wrong foot. They may offer ideas and suggestions that challenge tradition or rock-the-boat. These new ideas and experiences might be the opportunity to move forward as a church.
- Every pastor has a philosophy or a practice about how to begin a new ministry. Some pastors are very intentional and will bring new ideas forward quickly, some will focus more on building relationship and offering pastoral care, and still others may begin slowly and learn the traditions and embrace the ethos of the congregation. Let your new pastor enter the life and service of Highland at the pace that suits them.
- After a hard stretch, where a few things fall off the wagon, tell your pastor you are supporting them. Ask how you can be helpful.

TRANSITION TEAM

- Plan for a Transition Team to prepare and coordinate the arrival of the pastor. This supplements the work of the PNC, but doesn’t not interfere. Find people with a gift of hospitality, to be intentional about the church’s welcome for the pastor and their family. All too often, church members think that someone else will take on that task.
- Provide insight, advice, and support for the pastor through first year of ministry.

