

A question I have been asked fairly often is, "How do United Methodist churches get their pastors, anyway?" Let me explain.

First of all, we United Methodists are divided into Annual Conferences, so named because we usually meet once a year. Annual Conferences, however, are also geographical areas. We belong to the North Carolina Conference, which actually comprises just the Eastern part of our State. Pastors typically spend their careers in the same Conference.

Now, every Conference is divided into districts. We have 12 districts and our church is in the New Bern District. Every district has a District Superintendent.

Every spring the Bishop and the 12 Superintendents meet to discuss which pastors need to go which churches. The superintendents have heard from Pastor (Staff)-Parish Relations Committees and with pastors to get a sense of where changes in pastoral leadership need to be made.

While the Bishop takes seriously the advice of the superintendents, the committees, and the desire of the pastors, the Bishop has final authority and responsibility for assigning pastors to churches. These decisions are made only after much prayer, discernment, and discussion. And, then, when pastors move, they usually all move on the same day, most often in late June.

The decision about whether a pastor stays or goes is revisited every year. There is no set time limit as to how long a pastor will stay at a church. For instance, in June, my wife will be beginning her 13th year at St. James UMC in Newport and Pastor Anne and I will be beginning our 5th year here at Ann Street. . . for which we are most grateful!

– Eric Lindblade