

Pastoral Change Frequently Asked Questions

Why is Pastor Heather leaving?

Pastor Heather is leaving because the Bishop is appointing her to serve a different church. Pastor Heather is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church and as such is “itinerant”: sent by the bishop, not called or hired by the church. Elders in The United Methodist Church agree to serve where their bishop appoints them.

Who decided Pastor Heather would leave?

Pastoral changes can be initiated by the pastor, the congregation via the staff-parish relations committee, or by the bishop because a pastor’s gifts and graces are needed elsewhere. In this case, neither Pastor Heather nor the staff-parish relations committee requested a pastoral change. However, after having Pastor Heather for 12 years, we were aware of the possibility she could be sent elsewhere, especially now that Sarah will be graduating from high school this spring. While the Bishop and Cabinet ultimately make the decision, Heather was invited to be a part of the discernment process and said “yes” to taking a new appointment.

What is a Bishop?

A bishop serves as a general superintendent for the church, assigned to an annual conference, in our case the North Carolina Annual Conference. Bishops give general oversight to the worldly and spiritual interests of the church. They have the authority to ordain elders and deacons and to appoint elders. Our Bishop is the Reverend Connie Shelton.

What is the Cabinet?

The Cabinet consists of the resident bishop and the district superintendents. The Cabinet provides oversight and direction for the work of the annual conference, districts, and local churches. This work includes the appointment process.

What is a District Superintendent?

The district superintendent is an ordained elder appointed by a bishop to oversee the pastors and local churches in a district. The superintendent carries a wide range of responsibilities for the local churches in the district and for the Annual Conference as a whole. Duke Memorial is within the Corridor District of the North Carolina Annual Conference. Our District Superintendent is the Reverend Claire Clyburn.

Do churches have a say in who gets appointed to them? What is the appointment making process?

When the cabinet considers appointments, the goal is to match the gifts and graces of a particular pastor with the ministry needs of a particular congregation. The bishop consults with others who know the congregation and community, including the district superintendent, the pastor, and the staff-parish relations committee (SPRC) of the local church. The needs and desires of the pastor and the congregation are considered, but the mission of the church comes first.

In early March, the District Superintendent met with the SPRC to learn more about Duke Memorial and what the church wants and needs in their new pastor. In March and April, the Cabinet meets to weigh the needs of all the pastors and congregations anticipating a pastoral change. The goal of this process is to match, as much as possible, the gifts and graces of the particular pastor with the needs of a particular congregation or ministry setting. This results in a given church receiving a series of different pastoral leaders over time to help form and develop ministries in the church to meet the changing needs of the community. In June, at the annual conference, the bishop sets the pastoral appointments.

When is Pastor Heather leaving?

In the North Carolina Annual Conference, the appointment making process occurs in the spring of each year. The announcement of appointments is made on the Sunday following Easter. Pastors normally move the last week of June and preach their first sermon in their new congregation on the 1st or 2nd Sunday in July.

Due to special circumstances, Pastor Heather has been given a two month sabbatical by the bishop – the month of June from Duke Memorial and the month of July from her new appointment. She will preach her last sermon at Duke Memorial on June 7 and begin her new appointment in August.

How will the Ministry Team at Duke Memorial cover the preaching/teaching/pastoral care work during the month of June?

The Ministry Team has identified clergy and other persons in the congregation willing to assist with preaching, worship leadership, teaching, and pastoral care as needed during the month of June.

Are there plans to celebrate Pastor Heather's ministry and say goodbye?

We plan to celebrate Pastor Heather's ministry with us and have a chance to say goodbye after worship on Sunday, June 7. Suzanne Roudebush is leading a team to plan this celebration. If you would like to help, contact Suzanne, suzanne.a.roudebush@gmail.com, or Jim Coble, SPRC Chair, jim.coble@gmail.com.

Where is Pastor Heather's new appointment?

Heather will be the Lead Pastor at Pleasant Grove UMC in Raleigh.

Will the same thing happen to Pastor Mick?

No. Pastor Mick is an ordained deacon in the United Methodist Church. While he is appointed by the Bishop, he does not itinerate. His leaving can only be initiated by him or the staff-parish relations committee of Duke Memorial.

What is the difference between an elder and a deacon?

In the United Methodist Church, elders and deacons are both ordained clergy. Elders are most often called to order and serve the life of the local church, whereas deacons are called to bridge the gap between the church and the world. Elders and deacons both serve under appointment,

though as noted above, elders itinerate (move from church to church at the direction of the bishop) while deacons do not. While some deacons (like Pastor Mick) serve in local churches, others do not, but rather serve outside the local church in community organizations and other settings in outreach and justice ministries.

How often is an ordained elder up for a new appointment?

Elders are appointed for one year at a time but with the goal of a longer term. Historically they stayed 1-4 years. Now the goal is to stay longer. It takes time for a pastor and congregation to get to know each other and build trust. Research indicates it takes 7-9 years in an appointment to reach full effectiveness.

To where can pastors in this conference be moved?

Elders are appointed to churches within the annual conference. The North Carolina Annual Conference covers the eastern half of the state, from just west of Burlington to the Atlantic Ocean.

Who will be our new pastor?

Our new pastor will be Rev. Hope Ledbetter-Bock. Rev. Ledbetter-Bock is currently serving as Associate Director of New Faith Communities and Clergy Life for our Annual Conference. Prior to working at the conference, she served as Pastor of Community Life at Fuquay-Varina UMC. She and her husband Adam have lived in Durham for 10 years. Adam is an Ordained Deacon who serves as the Summer Camp Director at Camp Chestnut Ridge.

When will our new pastor start?

Moving day is Tuesday, June 30. We expect the Rev. Ledbetter-Bock to preach for the first time on Sunday, July 12.

Where will our new pastor live?

In the Duke Memorial UMC parsonage.

How will we welcome our new pastor?

Thomas Philips is leading a team to plan how best to welcome the new pastor. If you would like to help, contact Thomas, ttomconosur1@gmail.com, or Jim Coble, SPRC Chair, jim.coble@gmail.com.