



50 Ways to Welcome your New Pastor or Associate Pastor

From the Lewis Center for Church Leadership

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Prepare to welcome your new pastor

- 1. Open your hearts and decide that you are going to love your new pastor.
- 2. Begin praying daily for the new pastor and family, even as you continue to pray for your departing pastor and family.
- 3. Invite church members individually to send cards of welcome and encouragement to the incoming pastor.
- 4. Know that welcoming your new pastor in genuine and effective ways lays the ground work for a healthy and vital relationship and the development of stable, long-term ministries together.
- 5. Plan for the transition. Occasionally important welcoming gestures are missed with everyone thinking someone else is handling these details.
- 6. Appoint a specific liaison person to whom the pastor can go for help and information during the transition.

Say goodbye to your current pastor in a healthy way

- 7. Show love, regard, and even grief, for your departing pastor. This is one of the best things you can do for the new pastor.
- 8. Acknowledge the change in public ways. Especially in the case of a much-beloved pastor, this allows the congregation better to let go and receive the new pastor.
- 9. Provide the congregation the opportunity to say thank you and goodbye to the outgoing pastor, even if things have not always gone well.
- 10. Find appropriate occasions — in worship and at other times — to thank the outgoing pastor.
- 11. Express appreciation in ways that are consistent with what you have done in the past.
- 12. Consider giving the pastor the last two weeks off. This helps the pastor enter the new situation rested and gives an emotional buffer between one pastor's last Sunday and another pastor's first Sunday.
- 13. Plan goodbye celebrations prior to the beginning of the two weeks off.

- 14. Provide information to the local media about the outgoing pastor's accomplishments and future plans.
- 15. Do not invite the former pastor to return for weddings, funerals, or baptisms. This allows your former pastor to engage fully with his or her new congregation, and it establishes your new pastor as everyone's pastor from the beginning.

Make things move-in ready

- 16. Make sure the parsonage and pastor's office are clean and ready. Offer to provide help or a cleaning service if needed.
- 17. Determine if the parsonage is in need of repairs or painting. Consult the outgoing and incoming pastors about timing so as not to disrupt the lives of either party. Do not ask a new pastor to move into a parsonage "under construction."
- 18. Consult the new pastor on any paint, design, or furnishings issues.
- 19. Offer to have someone cut the parsonage grass.
- 20. Make sure the new pastor and church officials are clear on how moving expenses are paid and all matters related to compensation, benefits, and reimbursement policies.

Welcome your pastor on moving day

- 21. Stock the parsonage refrigerator and pantry with some staples.
- 22. Make sure there are kid-friendly foods and snacks in the refrigerator if children are arriving.
- 23. Have a small group on hand to greet the new pastor and family when they arrive and to help as needed.
- 24. Offer child care if there is an infant or toddler in the household.
- 25. Invite children in the household to do things with others of their same age.
- 26. Welcome any youth in the household by having church youth group members stop by and offer to show them around.

Continue the welcome during the entry period

- 27. Take food over for the first few days. Many churches continue the practice of having a “pounding” for the new pastor when persons bring food items.
- 28. Provide a map with directions to local dry cleaners, grocery store, drug store, veterinarian, etc., and information on local options for internet and cable television providers.
- 29. Give gift certificates to several of your favorite restaurants in the community.
- 30. Give the pastor and family a welcome reception on the first Sunday.
- 31. Plan a worship celebration of the new appointment.
- 32. Invite the new pastor to any social events held by Sunday School classes or other groups in the early months.
- 33. Make sure the pastor’s spouse and children, if applicable, are invited to Sunday School and other appropriate small groups.
- 34. Continue to remember your new pastor and family in your daily prayers.

Help the new pastor become familiar with the congregation

- 35. Introduce yourself to the pastor repeatedly! You have one name to learn; your pastor has many names to learn.
- 36. Wear name tags. Even if name tags are not a tradition, the congregation can wear them for a few weeks to help the pastor learn names.
- 37. Provide a current pictorial directory of all the church members, if available.
- 38. Provide an up-to-date list of all church committees and officers.
- 39. Provide the new pastor with a tour of where things are kept inside the church and perhaps a floor plan of the facilities.
- 40. Orient the new pastor to information systems and the way records are kept.

- 41. Make sure the pastor has a list of home bound or nursing home members, a list of those struggling with long term illness, and a list of those still in grief over recent deaths in the family. Better yet, take the pastor for an introduction to each of these households.
- 42. Have an appropriate person offer to go with the pastor for introductions and support if there are particularly urgent pastoral situations (a member near death or the family of a member who has just died).
- 43. Have a lay official offer to take the pastor to meet church members in their businesses or other work settings, if they are easily accessible.
- 44. Offer to help arrange small group sessions to meet and talk with the congregation.
- 45. Create a “church yellow pages” (a list of people in the church who have specific skills that a new-comer may find beneficial.... auto mechanic, doctor, dentist, dry cleaners, book store, office supply, etc.).

Help the new pastor connect to the community

- 46. Provide local media with information about the new pastor.
- 47. Provide a list of hospitals, nursing homes, and community service agencies.
- 48. Introduce your new pastor to other clergy in the community. Provide information on any ecumenical activities or associations.
- 49. Introduce the new pastor to public and community leaders.
- 50. Ask church members in civic clubs to take the new pastor to one of their meetings.

Dr. Robert Crossman, Minister of New Church Starts and Congregational Development for the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church, is the primary author of this document. The Lewis Center staff and others provided suggestions and editorial assistance.

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