

The Superintendency

The duties of superintending are in the hands of bishops and district superintendents, who are ordained clergy. The tasks are part of ordained ministry. Superintending has been a part of the church since apostolic times.

The District Superintendent

The district superintendent (D.S.) is in many ways *the connector* of our connectional system, the visible symbol to the laity of the local church of United Methodism as a whole. Therefore, persons appointed as district superintendents must merit the trust and respect of both clergy and the laity of the conference.

In the pursuit of their duties, the D.S. will usually spend a proportionally larger share of their time with the smaller churches than the larger churches, who tend to have adequate leadership to take care of their problems. The D.S. is the “district missionary” to those small usually remote communities.

One duty is to be a pastor to pastors and their families. Even though the D.S. is the authority figure, there is still a lot of counseling and warm encouragement that happens with the pastors in their care.

Authority of D.S. revealed in two areas. First, is that the D.S. is charged with seeing that the provisions of the *Discipline* are observed, so if the local church plans to do something that is not in accord with the *Discipline*, the D.S. has the duty & responsibility to see that its provisions are abided by. Second, is the important role of the D.S. in the appointment process for pastors and churches.

Tenure of D.S. is not more than six years and must be out of office for at least three intervening years before being eligible to be appointed again. But 1992 General Conference allowed up to a two-year extension for missional reasons, with an outside limit of twelve years. The short term of being D.S. curbs any tendencies toward too much power and ensures that the D.S. will remain close to the problems of the pastorate. District superintendents are appointed by the bishop, not elected by pastors and/or laity.

The Episcopacy

Bishops are elected and consecrated to the office. They function under the same ordination as every other elder in the Church. They are elected by jurisdictional conferences in the U.S. and by central conferences in other parts of the world. The conference, on recommendation of its committee on episcopacy, assigns the bishop to a residence.

Bishop’s power is severely circumscribed by the Constitution and *Discipline*. No vote at General Conference and cannot speak to an issue there unless permitted by the body. Same for jurisdictional conference. Presides over the annual conference but is not a member of that body. Improper to speak from the presiding officer’s chair on issues before the conference. Bishop has no part in making decision of who will be admitted as clergy members of the conference, nor in the ultimate decision to terminate a clergyperson’s relationship to the conference.

The power of the bishop springs almost entirely from the power of appointment of all clergy members of the annual conference. Bishop does consult with the cabinet, the PPR committee and the pastor involved but the actual appointment is the bishop's prerogative and responsibility. Bishop also makes certain nominations of personnel for general Church boards and agencies and offices. The process of setting of appointments is difficult and time-consuming and many false starts and "back to the drawing board"—very thorough process that considers the needs of each church and each clergyperson. The power of appointment is considered to be a sacred trust and a matter of stewardship by the bishops.

The bishop does take part in programs of the annual conference, particularly major evangelistic efforts or major capital funds campaigns. Bishop also has responsibilities on a general board, agency, or committee and may be chairperson of one. The bishop is a general superintendent (work on behalf of the whole Church) and a resident bishop (work of a particular area of the Church). Work with the local churches keeps them in touch with reality and work on the general level helps avoid parochialism.

Elected for life. May resign from office (very rare!). May request retirement after 20 years of ministerial service including at least four years as an active bishop, but won't receive pension until age 62. They *must* retire at the jurisdictional conference if their 66th birthday occurs prior to the first day of the month in which the conference is held (so retirement is sometime from ages 66 to 69). Provisions for voluntary and involuntary retirement for reasons of health.

Retired bishop continues to sit in the Council of Bishops but without vote.

Criticism of the episcopacy being too much of an administrative office and not enough of a pastoral office. A bishop, like a pastor of a local church, can get so bogged down in administrative work that there is no time left to be a pastor. May be preference for administrative work or may be expectations of the people for the accomplishment of other things that seem more pressing than pastoral work. Bishop and the local church pastor must give pasturing some priority and the people need to see the value of that priority, and then respect it. While we continue to seek for structures that make the office more of a pastoral one, the will of the officeholder is of as great or greater importance.

Accountability of Bishop and District Superintendent

They are accountable to the entity that chooses them. District superintendent is accountable to the bishop. Bishop is accountable to the jurisdictional conference through the committee on episcopacy. There is also a conference committee (annual conference) on episcopacy to be supportive, to provide counsel, and make reports to the jurisdictional committee. District superintendents have district committees on the district superintendency that supports and provides counsel to the D.S.