

Appointment Covenants for Deacons



Why develop an appointment covenant?

It clarifies and documents what is expected of both the appointed clergyperson and the congregation. When used in the context of a thoughtful review process, it can head off misunderstandings, clarify communication, increase the likelihood of effective ministry, and keep all parties responsible to a just process.

“A covenant is a mutually created commitment to ministry . . . that binds the parties in a mutually agreed-upon process to see that particularly segments are done and reflected upon,” says Gwen Purushotham in her helpful book *Watching Over One Another in Love* (General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2010; p. 16). **Please read this brief and clear manual as you develop your appointment covenant.**

What’s in a covenant?

The covenant should include (but not be limited) to the following:

- The ministries overseen and/or practiced by the deacon and these ministries’ relationship to the church’s specific mission goals
- The deacon’s goals, based upon the vision and mission of the conference and the congregation in its ministry context.
- Other specific expectations related to ministry performance
- Statement of how the Staff-Parish Relations Committee will support the deacon in meeting agreed-upon goals
- Provisions for periodic mutual reflection and feedback (who convenes the meetings, how frequently will the deacon and SPRC meet, communication guidelines for giving and receiving feedback, etc.)
- Confidentiality agreement
- Annual evaluation process
- List of who receives feedback and evaluation reports
- In cases of cross-racial or cross-cultural appointments, steps to foster

understanding of cultural and racial differences, especially as they relate to feedback

- A process for handling grievances and conflicts
- Reiteration of the Disciplinary process for termination (90-day notice; prior consultation with the deacon and the SPRC and prior notification of the district superintendent and the bishop)
- Lines of accountability for all parties

Find a sample outline in *Watching Over One Another in Love*.

Development process

- Research and agree upon the context for the church’s ministry. Discuss the neighborhood, the area’s demographics and socioeconomic factors, and discernment of how God is calling the church to participate in God’s transforming work in that place. “Churches that establish goals without regard for the needs and assets of the community in which they are located set themselves up for programs of maintenance and survival, which ultimately lead to decay and decline,” the Rev. Purushotham notes (p. 33).
- Develop the covenant collaboratively by all parties. **The deacon, the lead pastor, and the SPRC** should do some separate thinking and consulting about specificities in the covenant, in relation to the church’s and the conference’s ministry priorities and the deacon’s gifts for ministry. **The district superintendent** is also a party to the covenant and provides the conference’s mission priorities and expectations for ministry. These parties should bring these elements to a joint meeting to develop together a covenant upon which they all agree and sign. (The district superintendent may choose not to attend the meeting, but should sign off on the final covenant.)

Review & renewal

The covenant is effective only when used as part of a process. This process includes regular meetings and feedback between the deacon, the lead pastor, and the SPRC.

Quarterly meetings between the deacon and the SPRC will include conversations on how the deacon is meeting goals and other ministry activities and concerns. The SPRC provides constructive feedback and agrees on ways they will help the deacon meet and prioritize goals, and respond to unexpected challenges and opportunities.

Annual evaluations use the covenant in these steps:

- a) The SPRC and deacon review the covenant.
- b) The deacon conducts a self-assessment related to the previously agreed-upon goals. Which goals were achieved? Which were not and what prevented achievement? How might the deacon adjust her/his ministry goals to better meet the church's mission plan? What steps does the deacon propose to take to meet the goals (specific skill training, coaching, accountability procedures, etc.)?
 - i. The SPRC conducts a self-assessment on these questions: What would we change about our covenant? What would we change about our process? How did we meet our promise to help the deacon meet the ministry goals we agreed upon?
- c) The deacon and the SPRC share feedback along the above-mentioned lines. If necessary, they discuss a remediation plan for unmet performance requirements. If the deacon's continued employment is in question due to persistent performance shortcomings, the bishop is a party to the remediation conversation, per *The Book of Discipline's* rules on Administrative Location.
- d) The SPRC prepares a summary and discusses it with the deacon.
- e) The feedback may inform continuing education plans.
- f) The deacon and SPRC review and possibly revise the covenant.

The lead pastor and the deacon should meet on a regular schedule to discuss their goals.

Find in *Watching Over One Another in Love* some important guidelines on giving and receiving feedback.

Secondary appointment covenants

Deacons appointed beyond the local church have secondary appointments to local congregations. Secondary appointments have less demanding requirements than primary appointments. Nonetheless, a covenant can be very helpful in clarifying expectations and maintaining communication.

The deacon requests a specific secondary appointment from the bishop after consultation with the lead pastor and the SPRC.

Covenants in secondary appointments are mutually agreed-upon by the deacon, the lead pastor, and the SPRC.

These covenants may address the following:

- The church's mission statement
- The deacon's roles in areas such as teaching, leading specific ministries, leading worship, conducting funerals or weddings, pastoral care, advising committees, other; time commitment
- Lines of accountability
- Support-staff availability and processes
- Building use
- Boundaries practices (same as those that apply to paid clergy and staff)
- Office space
- Continuing education support, if any
- Regular meetings with lead pastor and/or staff
- Annual meeting with SPRC to review and evaluate the relationship

The covenant should be flexible and adapt to the specific and changing ministry context of the church as well as the deacon's healthy work/life balance.