

Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC)

The Staff-Parish Relations Committee — SPRC, or in some churches PPRC, the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee — is the closest thing a United Methodist church has to an HR department. It cares for the pastor and staff, evaluates them, writes their job descriptions, recommends who gets hired, and speaks for the congregation when appointment season comes. If you just got elected chair and nobody handed you anything: this page is the thing nobody handed you.

What the Discipline says

The Discipline spends more words on this committee than on almost any other part of local-church organization (§258.2). The load-bearing parts, in plain English:

Who's on it. Five to nine members, elected annually by the charge conference, representative of the whole charge. One must be a young adult; one may be a youth. The lay leader and the lay member of annual conference serve in addition. No staff member — and no immediate family of the pastor or any staff member — may serve, and only one person per household (§258.2a). Members serve in three rotating classes of three-year terms, and may serve at most two consecutive terms (§258.2b). On a multi-church charge, every church gets at least one representative plus its lay leader (§258.2c).

How it meets. At least quarterly, and additionally at the request of the bishop, the district superintendent, the pastor, the chair, or anyone accountable to the committee (§258.2e). Three rules from that same subsection people get wrong constantly, so read them twice:

1. The committee meets **only with the knowledge of the pastor and/or the district superintendent** — no secret meetings.
2. The **pastor is present** at every meeting unless they voluntarily excuse themselves. The committee may meet with the DS without the pastor, but the pastor must be told beforehand and brought into consultation immediately after.
3. The committee meets **in closed session, and what's shared is confidential**. Not “confidential-ish.” Confidential.

What it does. Fifteen enumerated duties (§258.2g) that cluster into six real jobs:

- **Care.** Encourage, support, and respect the pastor, staff, and their families; promote unity; counsel on effectiveness, priorities, health, and work-life balance — including arranging time and money for continuing education and renewal (duties 1–4, 8).
- **Evaluate.** An annual evaluation of pastor and staff, built for growth and for identifying continuing-education needs — not an ambush (duty 5). Some conferences run this in the fall instead of (or in addition to) the winter cycle below — Rio Texas, for one, evaluates the pastor Nov–Dec alongside a form where the pastor indicates remain / either / move, feeding the consultation process that follows (§426). This particular timing and form aren't in the Discipline itself; check your own conference's calendar rather than assuming the schedule below is universal.
- **Staff the church.** Recommend to the church council what staff positions the church needs; develop written job descriptions and titles for associate pastors and staff, with the senior pastor;

recommend a written hiring / evaluating / dismissing policy for non-appointed staff — and until the council adopts one, the committee and pastor themselves hold that authority. Recommend health and life insurance, severance, and pension for lay employees (Wespath’s denominational program is the named default) (duties 7, 12; ¶339 defines “associate pastor”).

- **Feed the pipeline.** Interview and recommend candidates for lay servant ministry and for licensed and ordained ministry, track the charge’s students preparing for ministry, and interpret the Ministerial Education Fund to the congregation (duties 9–10; ¶¶247.8, 310). “Lay servant ministry” is three stacked certifications, not one: certified lay servant (¶266) is the base tier; certified lay speaker (¶267) adds pulpit supply; certified lay minister (¶268) adds a supervised ministry-team assignment from the DS. Each tier requires a recommendation from the pastor and the church council or charge conference, and the lay speaker and lay minister tiers renew annually. In practice this means: whoever in your charge holds one of these certifications belongs on your charge conference packet checklist every year, not just at first certification — confirm with them before the meeting, don’t assume the district office is tracking it for you.
- **Speak into appointments.** Confer with the pastor and DS when a change of pastors may serve the church best — knowing the committee’s relationship to the DS and bishop is **advisory only**. Appointments are the bishop’s to make, through the consultation process (duty 11; ¶¶425–428). The committee also interprets open itineracy to the congregation (duty 6).
- **Stay competent.** Keep informed on personnel policy, professional standards, liability, and civil law; recommend a separate personnel committee when the staff is big enough; educate the congregation on the value of diversity in clergy and staff (duties 13–15).

First 90 days as chair

- ☐ Read this page, then read ¶258.2 itself — it’s a few pages and it’s your whole charter.
- ☐ Get the file. Last year’s minutes, the current job descriptions, the staff policy if one exists, last year’s evaluations. If nobody can find these, that’s your first agenda item, not a reason to skip it.
- ☐ Meet the pastor one-on-one. Ask what they need from this committee and what the last one did well or badly.
- ☐ Confirm the roster is legal: 5–9 members, classes staggered, no staff or staff family, lay leader and lay member of AC included.
- ☐ Put four meetings on the calendar now — quarterly minimum, and appointment season will add more.
- ☐ Check that every staff member has a written job description (¶258.2g.12). In most churches at least one doesn’t.
- ☐ Find out when evaluations were last done, and calendar this year’s before charge conference.

The annual rhythm

A typical July-1 appointment year. Your conference’s calendar may shift these — this is shape, not law.

When	What
July–Aug	New appointment year begins. If the pastor is new: onboarding, introductions, covenant conversation about expectations.
Sept–Oct	Charge conference prep: compensation recommendation, candidacy interviews and recommendations, roster nominations.
Nov–Dec	Adopt next year’s meeting calendar; check continuing-education plans and unspent allowances. In some conferences (Rio Texas among them) this is also when the pastor’s evaluation happens, paired with a remain/either/move form that starts consultation early — confirm your own conference’s timing.
Jan–Feb	Annual evaluations of pastor and staff, where this hasn’t already happened in the fall. Consultation season opens — the DS asks pastor and committee about the appointment (§426).
Mar–Apr	Appointment announcements happen in this window. If a change is coming: transition work starts now, not in June.
May–June	If transitioning: exit work, farewell, the handoff. If not: review job descriptions and the staff policy while nothing is on fire.

A sample agenda

1. Opening prayer; a word of care — how are the pastor and staff, actually? (10 min)
2. Follow-ups from last meeting’s minutes (5)
3. Main item — one per meeting, e.g. this quarter: draft the church’s written hiring-and-evaluation policy (§258.2g.12) (30)
4. Pastor’s reflection: workload, priorities, upcoming continuing education (10)
5. Anything for the DS or coming charge conference (5)

6. Confidentiality reminder and closing prayer (2)

Where this goes wrong

- **It becomes the complaint window.** Members relay anonymous grievances as agenda items. The fix: the committee promotes unity (§258.2g.2); its posture is care first. Complaints with no name attached don't get floor time.
- **Confidentiality leaks.** One member "just tells their spouse." Closed session is a Discipline requirement (§258.2e), and one leak ends candor permanently. Restate it at every meeting; it's on the sample agenda for a reason.
- **The evaluation is a surprise.** An annual evaluation the pastor first hears about in the meeting is an ambush, not duty 5. Share the format in advance; no new grievances may debut inside an evaluation.
- **No written job descriptions.** Then the first conversation about a staff problem has no baseline, and every expectation is retroactive. Duty 12 exists precisely for this.
- **The committee thinks it hires the pastor.** It doesn't. Appointments belong to the bishop through consultation (§§425–428); the committee's voice is real and advisory. Chairs who promise the congregation an outcome set everyone up.
- **Meetings only happen in a crisis.** Quarterly is the floor (§258.2e). A committee that only convenes when something is wrong can only ever be a tribunal.

In a single-board church

Churches on a simplified structure (one board holding council, trustees, finance, and SPRC functions — see the governance-model pages) still must do everything above, and the SPRC-function conversations **still happen in closed session with the same confidentiality**, typically as a designated portion of the board meeting or a standing subset of board members. The membership restrictions (no staff, no staff family) still bind for those matters. What merges is the meeting, not the rules.

Elsewhere

- **Cokesbury's *Guidelines: Pastor-Parish Relations*** — the official UMPH booklet for this committee, updated each quadrennium; the companion worth the few dollars. (cokesbury.com)
- **Lewis Center for Church Leadership** — research and short practical pieces on clergy transitions, evaluation, and staffing. (churchleadership.com)
- **Wespath** — the denominational benefits agency named in §258.2g.12's pension recommendation. (wespath.org)
- **GCFA / UMC Support** — legal and HR resources for local churches, including employment topics. (gcfa.org)
- **Your annual conference's HR or personnel handbook** — many conferences publish one; it may bind you beyond the Discipline. Ask your district office.

This is a starting point, not legal advice. Employment law varies by state, and your annual conference may have policies that go beyond the Discipline. Before you rely on anything here for a hiring, firing, or compensation decision, run it past your conference office or chancellor.

Paragraph references are to the 2020/2024 Book of Discipline. This document paraphrases; for the binding text, see the Discipline itself.

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