

Leadership Discipline White Paper No. Four: Executing with Integrity: Doing it the Right Way

Definition: A leader's integrity speaks volumes about his/her character. I believe executing with integrity involves not only saying the right words but doing the right things the right way. Words and actions that consistently mesh are keystones of a leader with integrity.

Appointment-making matters. I learned this lesson first-hand, initially as the daughter of a United Methodist Pastor and later as a United Methodist Pastor myself. Both clergy and laity have every right to expect that the Bishop and Cabinet show the highest integrity from the beginning to the end of the process because quality leadership is vital to every local congregation.

My first experience with appointment-making was the summer before my senior year in high school when my father received a new appointment in a church that required us to move from the community where I had lived for 15 years. My parents gave me the option of staying and living with my grandparents, thus allowing me to finish out my senior year with my friends. However, I chose to move with my family to the new community and school. Though I approached the move with some apprehension, it turned out to be a blessing that resulted in many new friends and opportunities for personal growth.

Another impactful moment occurred the year Bishop Robert C. Morgan ordained me an Elder. Having served on a multiple staff for 10 years, I felt ready for my first lead pastor appointment. Much to my disappointment, it did not happen that year. It turned out that the wait was worth it, though, as the next year I received a wonderful appointment as Senior Pastor in a medium sized church in a delightful Central Kentucky town.

Finally, I have been a part of a clergy couple throughout much of my ministry. My husband Lee, a full connection Deacon, has served for 23 years as Executive Director of one of the Kentucky Conference camp and retreat centers. Our ministry appointments have always ranged from 1-2 hours apart in distance. Though this has been a challenging living arrangement, God has given us and our 2 children the grace for it.

Key moments such as these formed the backdrop for my first round of appointment-making as a District Superintendent. As I sat at the table that spring day in 1999 making appointments with the 11 other District Superintendents and the Bishop of the Kentucky Conference, I understood the dramatic change that our decisions could have upon clergy and families. I knew from my personal experiences that appointment-making mattered so much it deserved the very best the Cabinet members could offer, including our full integrity. To the best of my ability I showed integrity in my words and actions.

What is integrity? It is not your reputation. It is not the face you give to people. It is what you are deep down. And therefore it is what comes out in the stressful times of life. It is that part of you which says, "I'll do what is right, regardless of the cost." It is matching your private actions with your public proclamations. It is living in a way that is consistent with how you say you are living.

How might integrity be demonstrated as a foundational element in the appointment-making process? Integrity in the appointment-making process involves not only saying the right words but also doing the right things the right way. It means speaking candidly and acting courageously. It requires conveying a consistent message of care and truth to clergy and churches.

Appointment-making with integrity happens as the Bishop and Cabinet objectively consider:

- the input and effectiveness of the clergy under appointment;
- the feedback and health of the setting to which the clergyperson will be appointed;
- and the overall needs of the Annual Conference.

Conversely, appointment-making with integrity resists factoring in:

- personal agenda;
- how much the District Superintendent(s) or Bishop likes a particular church or clergy person;
- and taking care of clergy friends and favorite churches at the expense of better-suited matches.

How does one develop such integrity? Integrity in appointment-making flows out of a grounded and vibrant relationship with the living Christ. I have discovered in my personal Christian journey that it is only as Christ lives in me that I have the integrity and the courage to do what I understand is right and good, especially when the going gets tough. John's Gospel states it so well. "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5b)

What might constitute some of the principles for appointment-making with integrity?

During my 6 year tenure on the Kentucky Conference Cabinet, I served under two Bishops and experienced more than one "right" process for appointment-making. Though processes vary from Bishop to Bishop, I learned and practiced some key principles that are characteristic of appointment-making with integrity.

- Appointment-making is a mixture of both art and science. Statistical data, track records of clergy and churches, clergy and church profiles and more are helpful background information in assuring strategic matches (science). However, less tangible insight also plays into the equation (art). Appointment-making with integrity pays attention to both head and heart factors.

- The likelihood of accurate representation of churches in Cabinet discussions increases as the District Superintendent listens to and consults with Pastor/Staff-Parish Relationship Committees. Similarly, consultation with each clergy under appointment (Local Pastors, Deacons and Elders) increases the productivity of appointment-making.
- Well-rounded evaluation measures both the effectiveness of the clergy and the health of the church. One cannot be fully measured without the other. Even the most effective clergy will have difficulty showing fruit when the church they are leading is unhealthy. Likewise, even healthy churches often struggle when under the leadership of ineffective leaders.
- Appointment-making with integrity requires courage. Some churches are hesitant to receive their first female or cross-cultural clergyperson, even when everything but gender and ethnicity points to a “perfect” match. Or a church may be certain that they must have a young married clergyperson with two preschool children when the right appointment for them is a widower with grown children. Appointment-making with integrity pays close attention to, but is not limited by the expectations of clergy and churches. On occasions when the Cabinet is clear that the best match will not be an initially popular one, integrity requires courageously making the appointment.
- Appointment-making with integrity is saturated in prayer. When all is said and done, only God knows the best next appointment for a clergyperson and a church. The empowered Cabinet takes the time to ask God’s guidance in appointment-making and has the humility to listen carefully for God’s nudges throughout the process.

Yes, appointment-making matters to all affected by the process. So do the principles and integrity used in the appointment-making process. It is appropriate that a white paper on integrity be applied to the appointment-making process. Integrity requires more than words, though. Actions must follow that match the words. Words and actions that align are keystones of a leader with integrity.