



## **A United Methodist Pastor Reflects on the Benefits of Longer Appointments by Bruce Bennett**

Over the years, I have done my share of “living in my next appointment,” dreaming of the day when I would serve “First Church of Big City.” But a retired pastor, who had spent forty years in ministry moving every two to three years, changed my perspective. This pastor told me that I would serve only one or two churches in my career where everything would “click.” I decided that when I got to a place that really fit and where remarkable things started to happen, I would stay for the long haul, regardless of the church’s size – not because I never desire a larger church, but because I desire more to know that God is using me to make a difference.

I am now in my thirteenth year at my current church. It is a perfect fit. The people challenge me enough that I must constantly grow spiritually and develop new skills to accomplish our goals. Some colleagues are concerned that I have lost my mind because the congregation has only grown from 150 to 215. I guess I am the only one who sees just how great that change really is.

When I came, members of the congregation suffered from low self-esteem. They thought their church was the weakest and least desirable church in town. I started to highlight the loveliness of their fellowship, the kindness of the people. I let them know if I were new in town and looking for a church, I would choose them. That came as a surprise to many of them. But over time, they too figured out that they were a great church.

A lot has happened in twelve years. Together we have gained a vision. Two years ago, we undertook a \$1.75 million building and remodeling project, adding a fellowship hall, a kitchen, new youth space, and a new parking lot. On Wednesday evenings, we have 150 - 230 people dining together and taking part in Christian education classes. This is phenomenal, in light of the church’s not-so-distant past.

It has not always been easy to find new energy to compel ministry over thirteen years. Many times, I felt ready to move on to greener pastures, to a place where I would not have to live with the mistakes I have made in this place. But when things “click,” a long ministry is indeed the most rewarding. In our mobile society where people are scattered from family, they want to know their pastor, and they want their children to grow up with one pastor. Longer tenures, when the fit is right, are crucial to the future of the church and should become the rule rather than the exception.

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