

United Methodists vote to end guaranteed clergy appointments

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c. 2012 Religion News Service (RNS) In a move that will give bishops more flexibility to remove ineffective pastors, the United Methodist Church voted on Tuesday (May 1) to end guaranteed clergy appointments.

Clergy appointments have been guaranteed since the 1950s, when they were instituted to protect ministers from discrimination or arbitrary abuse, supporters say. But critics say those original goals have helped mediocre clergy retain their posts. A commission studying the appointments said a more "nimble" process was necessary.

We Chang, a Belmont, Mass., pastor, argued unsuccessfully for the UMC reconsider the issue, United Methodist News Service reported.

"We have just done away with the security of appointment," he said, "that allowed us to have much gender and racial justice in terms of our appointments."

But Ken Carter, a district superintendent from North Carolina, thought the vote should stand and the focus should not be on providing guaranteed appointments.

"We want to place the emphasis on the mission -- making disciples of Jesus of Christ for the transformation of the world," he said.

The Study of Mission Commission recommended the change in policy, as the UMC searches for ways to stanch a decades-long decline in U.S. membership.

"We acknowledge the difficulties associated with this vision such as uncertainty, loss of security, caring for those in employment transitions, concern about episcopal authority, and loss of historic protections," the commission wrote in its report to the General Conference. "We feel strongly, however, that this vision is critical for the fulfillment of the church's mission."