

PARSONAGE GUIDELINES

West Michigan Annual Conference
of The United Methodist Church

PHILOSOPHY OF PARSONAGE GUIDELINES

The historic parsonage system is the basic housing policy. It is important that local church or conference-owned parsonages across the conference meet certain standards so that differences in quality, size and equipment are kept to a minimum. These guidelines apply for local church pastors, district superintendents and conference professional staff, when a parsonage is provided.

These parsonage guidelines shall be presented to all new pastors and reviewed at the New Pastor's Orientation or individually with each new pastor by each District Superintendent.

The conference affirms that the parsonage is the private home of the pastor. Therefore, the parsonage should not by design or intention be considered as an extension of the church space for program use. The church and the pastor should maintain the home so that it can be opened to friends and parishioners alike with dignity and pride.

The conference recognizes that families in our culture are of varying sizes and needs. In the interest of Christian stewardship, we must seek homes that make efficient use of space, are energy efficient and are adaptable to the needs of clergy family members.

These parsonage standards are offered to help us be faithful to this philosophy. Because of the United Methodist itinerant system, the local church maintains the parsonage. The following is an effort to help the local church provide an adequate, comfortable, and dignified parsonage.

SECTION I - GENERAL GUIDELINES

LOCATION

Locate the parsonage so as to be conducive to the best possible living conditions for the family, with special reference to accessibility to schools and stores. The family should have the opportunity to follow customary family patterns without unnecessary interruption. The parsonage should not be located where it could conceivably be a hindrance to the future expansion of the church buildings.

BARRIER FREE CONCERNS

All parsonages purchased, built, or remodeled in the future shall conform to the needs of the handicapped. One entrance shall be wheelchair accessible.

SOUND CONSTRUCTION

The parsonage shall be of sound construction with sound foundations. Cracking walls and sagging floors are danger signs of structural unsoundness. Do not attempt to remodel an existing parsonage if it involves extensive structural modifications, partition moving, or cutting of exterior walls.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

It is advisable that an energy audit be considered to determine what might be done to make the parsonage more energy efficient with attention to water seals, storm windows and doors, etc. It is further recommended that any parsonage built or purchased in the future be as energy efficient as possible. (Example: zone heating, minimum of 12" of insulation in ceiling and 6" in sidewalls.)

Parsonages with fireplaces shall include glass doors for energy conservation.

Sliding storm doors can be added and should be considered for energy conservation.

SAFETY

The parsonage shall contain certain safeguards for the parsonage family's safety.

At least three fire extinguishers, one in the house, one in the garage and one in the basement, shall be kept in working condition and should be professionally inspected annually.

Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors should be provided – a minimum of one for each floor including the basement.

A radon test shall be performed in geographic areas where radon seepage is suspected to be problematic.

Motion lights should be provided in dark areas.

PARSONAGE GUIDELINES

West Michigan Annual Conference
of The United Methodist Church

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Motion lights should be provided in dark areas.

Dead bolts shall be provided on outside doors.

There shall be a lead-based paint disclosure.

There shall be safe wiring of the electrical system, adequate power to serve the house, and sufficient outlets.

SECTION II - SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR EXISTING PARSONAGES

1. **BEDROOMS:** There should be a minimum of three bedrooms of standard size with ample closet space in each. It is recommended that one room on the main floor be adaptable to use as a fully accessible bedroom. Having one of the bathrooms adjoined to the main bedroom is desirable. If the house does not have central air, window air-conditioning in the bedrooms and/or the study should be provided. Window coverings shall be furnished.
2. **BATHROOMS:** Two bathrooms are recommended. One could be with shower only. One should be on the main floor and be handicapped-accessible. Window coverings shall be furnished. Each bathroom shall have washable walls or tiles, mirror and adequate medicine chest and storage. Adequate linen storage shall be provided.
3. **KITCHEN:** The minimum kitchen would include adequate built-in cabinets, garbage disposal and dishwasher, sink, stove with self-cleaning oven, microwave, frost-free refrigerator with frozen food storage, good light and electric outlets that meet current electrical standards. Window coverings shall be furnished. Carpeting is not recommended but there must be appropriate, safe and desirable floor covering. A breakfast area is desirable. Plumbing shut-off valves should be provided at appliances.
4. **LIVING ROOM:** Appropriate, safe and desirable flooring (with attention given to health issues) and window coverings shall be furnished.
5. **DINING ROOM:** A separate dining room is considered important. Appropriate, safe and desirable flooring (with attention given to health issues) and window coverings shall be furnished.
6. **STUDY:** A study is advisable and should be away from the family activities and noise. Where possible, it is preferable to have the pastor's main office in the church, but if it is in the parsonage, it should be at least 200 square feet with an outside entry if at all possible. Bookshelves, desk, chairs, private telephone line and other essential equipment shall be provided. Window coverings and appropriate floor covering shall be furnished. High-speed internet access should be provided if the office in the home is the primary office.
7. **FAMILY ROOM:** Very desirable, especially for the children of the family. It should be located away from the living room and study.
8. **CLOSETS:** Adequate closet and storage space shall be provided throughout the house.
9. **GARAGE:** Two-car garage with automatic garage door opener and outside door, storage room (in the garage or in the basement) and storage for yard equipment shall be provided.
10. **LAUNDRY FACILITY:** A fully handicapped-accessible laundry facility shall be furnished. Automatic clothes washer and dryer shall be furnished and maintained.
11. **UTILITIES:** All utilities shall be provided by the church, including water, gas, electric, and waste removal. Utilities shall be secured in the name of the church to insure uninterrupted service during a change of pastors.
 - a. **Telephone:** The church shall provide a minimum of two touch-tone telephones and outlets. The local church shall pay basic telephone charges; personal long distance costs are the pastor's responsibility.
 - b. **Water:** There shall be a safe and dependable hot and cold water system throughout the house, including water softening equipment where needed. The church shall provide the salt. Two or more outside spigots shall be provided.
 - c. **Light:** The pastor shall furnish standard light bulbs. The church shall provide specialty outdoor lamps (example: mercury vapor or halogen).

PARSONAGE GUIDELINES

West Michigan Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church

- d. **Heating:** A central heating system with the capacity to adequately heat the entire habitable parts of the house, with a humidifier or its equivalent, and the proper automatic thermostatic controls, must be provided. The heating system shall be maintained by the church and shall be inspected annually with regard to soundness of heat exchanger, flue pipes, and chimney condition. If a wood stove or fireplace is in use, it too must be checked yearly with chimney cleaning provided by the church.

An instruction sheet should be posted near the furnace as to the maintenance and care of the furnace. The name of a reputable furnace company to be used should be specified.

For responsible stewardship of energy and finance, the house shall be fully insulated, with energy-efficient storm and screen doors and windows.

The pastor is responsible for the furnace filters to be changed at least twice yearly.

The church, if needed, shall provide a dehumidifier.

- e. **Trash:** The church shall furnish weekly waste removal pick-up service. Recycling is desirable.
f. **Windows:** All moveable windows shall be in operating condition. The parsonage family shall be responsible for window cleaning of the parsonage unless professional cleaning is needed, such as in hard to access parts of the house.

12. DECORATIONS:

- a. At pastoral changes, redecoration of the parsonage is recommended.
b. **Color:** Color preferences vary greatly among clergy families. This is reflected in their furnishings and other possessions. Therefore, it is recommended that the parsonage be decorated in consultation with the parsonage family. The Pastor-Parish Relations Committee should consult the new pastoral family regarding colors.

13. **CABLE AND TV CONNECTION:** The church shall provide basic cable or satellite service with basic internet service, if available. The pastor pays for expanded services. In the event that the parsonage is the pastor's main office, the church shall provide for high-speed internet service, if available.

14. PARSONAGE GROUNDS AND EQUIPMENT:

The parsonage shall have adequate outside lighting.

The grounds around the house shall be well drained and fertilized every year. The parsonage family shall care for the grounds. If the yard is unusually large, contains shrubs, or requires a great deal of time to maintain it in keeping with the surrounding neighborhood, the church shall consider assisting the pastor with additional help or service. Ordinary mowing and trimming of the lawn shall be the responsibility of the pastor. The church, if needed or desired, shall provide fertilizing and lawn treatment, tree pruning and landscaping changes.

Large or long driveways may also require help from the church in the winter.

Grounds-care equipment shall include an adequate power lawnmower and snow blower for the property. It shall also include, but not be limited to, hoses, rakes, spade, ladder, etc.

Landscaping and exterior care of the parsonage shall be such as to be a credit to the church in the community.

There shall be either a septic tank in good working condition, with adequate drainage area on the parsonage property, or sufficient access to a public sewer system.

A sump pump and dehumidifier shall be provided for the basement if conditions warrant.

15. **INSURANCE:** The church is responsible to secure and pay for insurance for the property. It is recommended that 100% replacement cost of the parsonage and church-related structures and church furnishings be carried. It should include home-owner type coverage maintained at a minimum of eighty percent (80%). The pastor shall be responsible for his/her own insurance on personal furnishings and belongings.

SECTION III - PARSONAGE MAINTENANCE

PARSONAGE GUIDELINES

West Michigan Annual Conference
of The United Methodist Church

LOCAL CHURCH RESPONSIBILITY:

Under the direction of the Board of Trustees, there shall be a Parsonage Committee consisting of representatives of the Board of Trustees, Pastor-Parish Relations Committee and/or additional persons (perhaps from UMW or UMM) with special skills and interests. This committee shall adhere to these minimum guidelines for all parsonages.

The District Board of Church Location and Building is required to approve plans for remodeling (if cost exceeds 25% of the value) or new construction or purchase (§2520, *2004 Discipline*).

No assets from the sale of a church-owned parsonage shall be used for current operating expenses of the charge (*2004 Discipline*, §2542). Proceeds from the sale of such a church-owned parsonage shall be placed in escrow by the trustees of the local church, at least equaling an amount necessary to cover the future purchase of a parsonage or an amount to cover a down payment (of not less than 20% of cost of home meeting parsonage standards in the area) plus closing costs. It is recommended that the principal account on the escrow be adjusted annually to provide equity with inflation and the real estate market. Interest received from an escrow account may be used toward the provision of a housing allowance. If a period of five (5) years has passed and there is no evident need to purchase another parsonage, then the escrow funds may be released for the purpose of church capital improvements. The evident need shall be determined by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of a called church conference. Any such sale of a church-owned parsonage must include consent of the pastor, district superintendent, board of church location and building, and the charge conference.

The local church board of trustees or elected parsonage committee shall properly maintain an adequate and comfortable home for the parsonage family. The parsonage shall be regarded as the pastor's home and the privacy of the parsonage family shall be respected at all times. No unannounced "inspections" shall be conducted. Keys to the parsonage shall be limited to the parsonage family and the church office or a person mutually designated by the parsonage family and the Board of Trustees. At the convenience of the parsonage family, the parsonage committee shall inspect the home annually to see what needs to be done, if anything, to meet these guidelines and to take the necessary steps to accomplish any improvements.

Prior to the annual inspection, the persons making the inspection should review this booklet as a reminder of the provisions and maintenance standards. They shall keep a record of their inspection so that they can take initiative in improving the parsonage and grounds. It is suggested that such inspections take place in late spring prior to annual conference, and/or in the fall prior to charge conference.

To better facilitate maintenance, a log of major appliances should be kept by the parsonage committee, including dates items were purchased, repairs, warranties, and service contracts.

A refurbishing and replacement schedule should be set up.

The church shall pay for cleaning carpets and window coverings annually.

The pastor and parsonage committee should have an understanding of what separates minor repairs (pastor's responsibility) and major repairs (church's responsibility). If the use of an extension ladder is needed, the pastor should negotiate help from the church.

The church budget should include a separate line for parsonage maintenance and improvement in the amount of 2% of the insured value of the parsonage. If the funds are not used in any given year, they are held in escrow for the time when needed.

PASTOR'S RESPONSIBILITY:

The pastor should care for the parsonage as a "good steward" of the property, avoiding undue wear and tear. The pastor is responsible for any damages caused by pets, guests or family members. All necessary precautions shall be taken to prevent pets from damaging the parsonage. The parsonage family must correct such damage.

MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY:

At the time of change of pastors, the parsonage committee shall take responsibility for seeing that the parsonage is in good condition for the in-coming pastor. Needed cleaning shall be the responsibility of the out-going pastor, but if this has not been cared for, the parsonage committee shall assume this responsibility. If needed cleaning is due to neglect or carelessness, the out-going pastor shall pay for the cost of said cleaning.

The parsonage committee (or trustees) must meet with the in-coming pastor, and develop a clear understanding of the procedures for maintenance: 1) which repairs and maintenance the pastor should expect to do; 2) which breakdowns should be reported for referral to get the job done (and to whom notification is to be given by the pastor); 3) what amount is in the church budget in a

PARSONAGE GUIDELINES

West Michigan Annual Conference
of The United Methodist Church

separate parsonage maintenance and improvement fund.

In the area of interior decorating, the parsonage committee and the parsonage family shall work together before any changes are made. If non-washable drapes are used, cleaning responsibility is with the church. Carpet repair, replacement, and periodic major cleaning are the responsibility of the local church unless damage is caused by carelessness of the parsonage family.

All sub-standard parsonages shall be considered for recommendation to conform, as nearly as possible, to the above guidelines as soon as possible.

RECORDS:

Keep a record of each annual inspection and update as problems are resolved. The trustees shall be responsible for duplicate inventory lists; one shall be kept at the church, and one at the parsonage. This list should include all church-owned furnishings of the parsonage and garage, as well as yard and grounds equipment. A copy of this list should be made available to each new pastor.

The pastor and parsonage committee shall provide a record of local servicing agencies and a file of service manuals, and any other information necessary for all mechanical equipment related to the parsonage. Place and date of purchase, serial number, warranty information, and all parts lists should be included. The list should be updated annually, the list given to the pastor, and reviewed with him/her when he/she leaves the charge.

SECTION IV - PROCEDURES AT PASTORAL CHANGE:

PASTOR LEAVING: When there is a pastoral change, there shall be an inspection of the house with the pastor before the pastor leaves for his/her new appointment.

PASTOR ARRIVING: When there is a pastoral change, the new pastor shall inspect the parsonage, making a list of needed repairs and creating a written statement of property conditions for the trustee record.