

PART FIVE THE MINISTRY OF THE CLERGY

¶501. MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH. The church's ministry is derived from the ministry of Christ, who calls all people to receive salvation and follow him as disciples in the way of love. The primary call to ministry is to the people of God, or Laity. The Laity are members of “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that [they] may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9 NRSV). The Laity are called out of the world, and called into the church for witness and service in the world. Baptism initiates this call to ministry, empowered by the Holy Spirit. The whole church receives and accepts this call.

With the exception of the offices of bishop and presiding elder, which are reserved for Elders, all Laity and Clergy may serve in various offices. Offices of ministry refer to what followers of Christ do for the general building up of the body of Christ. Offices include, but are not limited to, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, administrators, miracle workers, healers, and helpers (Eph 4:11-13, and 1 Cor 12:28).

¶502. ORDERS OF MINISTRY. Clergy are those called out from the laity and set apart, through the laying on of hands, for particular service to the church. The early church called and set apart seven disciples who were “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” to distribute food to the widows among them (Acts 6:1-6). Clergy, such as Stephen, Phoebe, and Timothy, served in various ways to benefit the people of God. All clergy are required to live lives of integrity and self-control as they hold fast to the mystery of faith (1 Tim. 3:1-13).

Ordination is the action, through the physical laying on of hands, by which the church sets apart and orders those called by God to this particular ministry for the good of the whole church. There are two orders of clergy.

1. *Order of Deacons.* Deacons are called out from the laity to service. Within and beyond a local church, Deacons may, among other ministries, lead in worship, preach and teach, conduct marriages, bury the dead, care for the sick and needy, and interpret the needs of the world to the church. Deacons may also consecrate or assist with the Sacraments in accordance with paragraph 508. Deacons may serve in a variety of offices within and beyond a local church, including, but not limited to, serving as pastor of a local church. Deacons retain their call as Laity to witness and service in the world. Deacon is a permanent and full ordination, even for those who are then called to the order of Elder. Persons may remain as permanent Deacons indefinitely. Deacon’s orders are received through the laying on of hands by a bishop

among the people of God in conference after examination by Clergy.

2. *Order of Elders.* Elders are called out from the Deacons to the particular service of oversight of word, sacrament and order in the church. Elders retain their call as laity to witness and service in the world, as well as their call as Deacons to serve among the people of God. Elder's orders are received through the laying on of hands by a bishop among the people of God in conference after examination by elders.

¶503. TYPES OF ORDAINED MINISTRY. There are two types of ordered ministry: located ministry and apostolic (or itinerant) ministry.

1. *Located Ministry.* Clergy called to minister in a particular place, serve in located ministry. Deacons and Elders who are called to an office of ministry in a particular location shall have that call affirmed and be appointed by the bishop over the annual conference wherein they would minister. Their ministries shall be overseen by those appointed to apostolic ministry on the circuit that includes their church or ministry.
2. *Apostolic Ministry.* Elders called and appointed to travel receive itinerant (apostolic) ministry. The office of bishop is an apostolic office for an Elder who has been elected to oversee and discipline churches that gather in annual conference. Bishops may call and appoint other Elders as Presiding Elders to organize new churches, provide superintendency over other Elders and Deacons, and assist, discipline, and provide sacramental support to Laity, Deacons, and Elders in located ministry.

¶504. BASIC QUALIFICATIONS OF THE ORDAINED. Those to be ordained must:

- a) Have a personal faith in Christ and be committed to Christ as Savior and Lord.
- b) Nurture and cultivate spiritual disciplines and patterns of holiness consistent with the General Rules including responsible self-control by exhibiting personal habits that are conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional maturity, integrity in all relationships, fidelity in a Christian marriage between one man and one woman, and chastity in singleness, social responsibility and the knowledge and love of God.
- c) Have a call by God and the people of God to give themselves completely to the work of ministry.
- d) Be able to effectively communicate the Christian faith.

- e) Give evidence of God's gifts for ordained ministry and promise of future usefulness in the mission of the church.
- f) Accept the authority of Scripture; be competent in the disciplines of Scripture, theology, church history and polity; possess the skills essential for the practice of ministry, and lead in making disciples for Jesus Christ.
- g) Be accountable to the church, accept its doctrinal standards and Discipline and authority, accept the supervision of those appointed to the ministry of oversight, and live in covenant with its ordained ministers.

¶ 505. ENTRANCE INTO ORDAINED MINISTRY. 1. Persons who hear a call to ordained ministry should meet with their local pastor or presiding elder to inquire about candidacy. They must have held membership in a local church for at least one year and shall complete a background and credit check. Upon the recommendation of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee or equivalent, the local church shall vote whether to approve them for candidacy.

2. Candidacy Discernment. After local church approval, a candidate shall spend a minimum of six months in discernment, which must include a supervised internship or employment in a ministry setting. During which time, the candidate shall:

- a. Engage with discernment, including, but not limited to, completion of a guidebook, mentoring, and participation in a small group with other candidates;
- b. Complete required coursework on doctrine, history, discipline, and basic Bible;
- c. Undergo a psychological evaluation; and
- d. Pass a basic knowledge examination in doctrine, history, discipline and Bible.

Upon completion of the foregoing, the candidate shall write a statement detailing his or her call to ordained ministry and submit it to the annual conference board of ministry.

¶ 506. HISTORIC QUESTIONS. In addition to whatever other questions may be asked, persons seeking ordination as Deacon shall be evaluated during their interview by the annual conference board of ministry or equivalent based upon the historic questions first asked about those desiring to be "traveling preachers":

"(1) Do they know God as pardoning God? Have they the love of God abiding in them? Do they desire nothing but God? Are they holy in all manner of conversation?

(2) Have they gifts, as well as evidence of God's grace, for the work? Have they a clear, sound understanding; a right judgment in the things of God; a just conception of salvation by faith? Do they speak justly, readily, clearly?

(3) Have they fruit? Have any been truly convinced of sin and converted to God, and are believers edified by their service?

As long as these marks occur in them, we believe that they are called of God to serve. These we receive as sufficient proof that they are moved by the Holy Spirit."

Prior to ordination as Elder, candidates shall answer the following questions historically asked by bishops within the Methodist tradition:

- (1) Have you faith in Christ?*
- (2) Are you going on to perfection?*
- (3) Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?*
- (4) Are you earnestly striving after perfection in love?*
- (5) Are you resolved to devote yourself wholly to God and to God's work?*
- (6) Do you know the General Rules of our Church?*
- (7) Will you keep the General Rules of our Church?*
- (8) Have you studied the doctrines of the Methodist Covenant Church?*
- (9) After full consideration do you believe that our doctrines are in harmony with the Holy Scriptures?*
- (10) Have you studied our form of Church discipline and polity?*
- (11) Do you approve our Church government and polity?*
- (12) Will you support and maintain them?*
- (13) Will you exercise the ministry of compassion?*
- (14) Will you diligently instruct the children in every place?*
- (15) Will you visit from house to house?*
- (16) Will you recommend fasting or abstinence, both by precept and example?*
- (17) Are you determined to employ all your time in the work of God?*
- (18) Are you in debt so as to embarrass you in your work?*
- (19) Will you observe the following directions?*
 - (a) Be diligent. Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly employed. Never trifle away time; neither spend any more time at any one place than is strictly necessary.*
 - (b) Be punctual. Do everything exactly at the time. And do not mend our rules, but keep them; not for wrath, but for conscience' sake.*

¶ 507. ORDINATION PATHWAYS. Within the _____ Church, certified candidates must first be ordained as deacons and, after ordination as deacons, may be ordained as elders.

1. *Ordination as Deacons.* Upon completion of educational requirements, a candidate for ordination as Deacon shall be interviewed by the annual conference board of ordained ministry or equivalent. During such interview, the candidate shall be asked the following questions:
 - (a) What is your personal experience of God?*
 - (b) What is your understanding of evil?*
 - (c) What is your understanding of grace?*
 - (d) How do you understand the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers and in the church?*

- (e) What is your understanding of the Kingdom of God?*
- (f) What significance do you believe that the Resurrection holds?*
- (g) What is your understanding of the nature and authority of scripture?*
- (h) What is your understanding of the nature and mission of the Church?*
- (i) What gifts and graces do you bring to the work of ministry?*
- (j) What is the meaning of ordination?*
- (k) What is the role and significance of the sacraments?*
- (l) For the sake of the church's witness, are you willing to dedicate yourself to the highest ideals of the Christian life, exercising self-control in your personal habits, integrity in all of your relationships and if married, fidelity in your covenant with your spouse, or if single, chastity in your personal conduct?*

The annual conference board of ordained ministry or equivalent will interview the candidate for readiness for ordination as deacon. After being interviewed and recommended by the annual conference board of ministry or equivalent by a two-thirds vote, and approved by the two-thirds vote of the clergy of the annual conference in executive session and the bishop, a certified candidate shall be ordained as Deacon by the bishop through the laying on of hands.

Deacons are clergy members in full connection of the annual conference with full voice and vote on all matters except the ordination and conference relation of Elders. Deacons not serving under appointment shall be classified as inactive and shall have no voting rights in the annual conference.

Deacons may be asked to serve as part of a ministry team in a local church or another ministry setting by the bishop or presiding elder, or they may secure their own position with the approval and appointment of the bishop. Deacons may continue to serve as a deacon indefinitely under appointment by the bishop and are encouraged to continue their education in regard to whatever ministry specialty they are called to pursue.

Deacons considering a call to ordination as an Elder, or in whom the gifts and graces for the ministry of Elder are recognized by a bishop or presiding elder, may be appointed to the office of pastor in a local church. If such an appointment is more than a temporary assignment, a deacon who accepts such an appointment must declare candidacy for ordination as an Elder and begin the process toward such ordination.

2. *Ordination as Elder.* Deacons who desire to be ordained as an Elder shall declare their candidacy for such ordination to the annual conference board of

ministry or equivalent. They shall be eligible for ordination as Elder once they:

- a. Prove themselves faithful and mature over a period of a minimum of two years' service as a Deacon;
- b. Complete the educational requirements for ordination as an Elder;
- c. Pass an advanced level examination in doctrine, history, discipline and Bible;
- d. Be interviewed and recommended by a two-thirds vote of the annual conference board of ordained ministry or equivalent for ordination as an Elder; and
- e. Be approved by two-thirds vote by the Elders of the annual conference in executive session and be approved by the bishop.

Upon completing such requirements, the candidate shall be ordained Elder by the bishop through the laying on of hands.

All requirements for ordination as an Elder must be completed within seven (7) years of having declared candidacy for ordination as Elder. Persons who do not complete such requirements in a timely manner shall be ineligible thereafter to serve in the office of pastor of a local church, but may continue to serve as a Deacon.

Elders are clergy members in full connection of the annual conference with full voice and vote on all matters. An Elder not serving under appointment shall be classified as inactive and shall not have voting rights in the annual conference. Elders may be appointed by the bishop as a presiding elder, to local ministry as pastor in charge, to the staff of a local church, or to other ministry settings. Elders are eligible to be elected to the office of bishop.

¶ 508. SACRAMENTAL AUTHORITY. Elders have sacramental authority. A bishop or presiding elder may grant sacramental authority to a Deacon appointed to the office of pastor in a local church or in another specialized ministry setting where the sacraments are required. Such sacramental authority for Deacons is limited to that ministry setting and is exercised under the oversight and authority of a presiding elder.

¶ 509. EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS.

1. Deacons shall meet minimum educational requirements at the time of ordination as determined by their annual conference. Following ordination, deacons must fulfill the educational requirements established for deacons by General Conference and their annual conference within seven years. Upon completion of studies a deacon may apply for elder's orders. Deacons who do not complete all educational requirements within the allotted time shall be

- classified as inactive until such educational requirements are completed.
2. Prior to ordination as an Elder, a candidate for such ordination shall have completed, at an approved Educational Institution (a) the Course of Study, or (b) a Bachelor of Arts in the practice of ministry, or (c) a joint Bachelor of Arts and Masters of Divinity, or (d) a Masters of Divinity, or (e) a Master of Arts or equivalent degree in the practice of ministry. Annual conferences may establish more stringent educational requirements.

¶ 510. APPROVED EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. An approved list of schools for ministry education will be maintained by the Commission on Higher Education and Ministry (CHEM). Upon appeal, the commission will consider any exceptions to this list and may grant its approval on an individual basis. It will also recommend competencies and courses for ministerial training, as well as supervise the course of study in conjunction with the annual conference boards.

¶ 511. MINISTERIAL EDUCATION FUND. A fund shall be maintained for ministerial education by the Commission on Higher Education and Ministry (CHEM). Once certified, a candidate may request a loan to assist with educational requirements. A service commitment of five years duration after ordination is required of any clergy who receives such assistance, with twenty percent of the loan amount forgiven for each year of ministry within the _____ Church.

¶ 512. CHAPLAINCY AND OTHER ENDORSEMENTS. An ecclesiastical endorsing board of the Commission on Higher Education and Ministry shall recommend persons to specialized ministries that require a denominational endorsement.

¶ 513. TRANSFER OF CLERGY CREDENTIALS. Clergy applying to transfer to the _____ Church from another Christian denomination must provide the following: (1) A formal resume with references, (2) Proof of ordination, and (3) Official transcripts of all post high school education. The applicant must also: (1) Submit to a background and credit check, and psychological examination, (2) Interview with a presiding elder, (3) pass denominational exams on doctrine, history, polity, and Bible for their level of ordination, and (4) Interview with the annual conference board of ministry or equivalent. Upon the completion of these requirements, and upon the recommendation of the annual conference board of ministry or equivalent by two-thirds vote, transfers must be approved by the bishop and a two-thirds vote of the clergy session of the annual conference to which the applicant is seeking admittance.

¶ 514. LEAVES OF ABSENCE. A change in conference relations may be affected by the following:

- (1) Clergy may request in writing a voluntary temporary leave of absence of up to one year from their ministerial duties due to medical needs, family circumstances, or other personal issues. Transitional leaves may similarly be granted for clergy in good standing who are temporarily between appointments.

Such a change in conference relationship may be granted by the clergy members of the annual conference upon recommendation of two-thirds of the annual conference board of ordained ministry or equivalent. Between sessions of annual conference, a voluntary leave of absence may be granted or terminated, with the approval of the bishop and presiding elders, by the executive committee of the annual conference board of ordained ministry. Those on voluntary leave shall continue to be held amenable to the annual conference for their conduct and the performance of ministry.

(2) Clergypersons on voluntary leave shall have no claim on conference funds but may be eligible to continue in conference health programs through their own contributions. They shall also remain eligible for membership on annual conference commissions, committees or boards, as well as election as a delegate to General Conference, and may vote for other clergy delegates to such meetings. Renewal of voluntary leave may be made annually by the vote of the clergy session, for a period up to five years.

(3) Involuntary leaves may be requested by the bishop and the presiding elder and referred to the annual conference board of ministry or equivalent who shall determine what if any disciplinary action is also required. The fair process for administrative hearings shall be followed in any involuntary absence procedure.

(4) Clergypersons on involuntary leave shall have no claim on annual conference funds and the conference shall assume no responsibility for salary, pension, or other benefits during the leave of absence. Clergy on involuntary leave shall not participate in the boards and committees of the annual conference, be delegates to General Conference, or vote on other clergy delegates. When an end to the involuntary leave of absence is requested by the bishop and presiding elders, the annual conference board of ministry or equivalent shall review the circumstances surrounding the granting of the relationship in order to determine if the conditions of the leave have been met. If the board determines that such is not the case, it may continue involuntary leave of absence for up to three years, or pursue administrative location as elsewhere specified.

(5) Maternity or paternity leave shall be granted up to three months to any local pastor or clergy member who so requests it at the birth or arrival of a child into the home for purposes of adoption. During the leave, the clergyperson's annual conference relations will remain unchanged, and the health and benefit plans will remain in force. Compensation shall be provided by the salary-paying unit for no less than eight weeks of leave.

¶ 515. RETIREMENT. Within the _____ Church there is no mandatory retirement age, but clergy members may be granted retired status with the majority vote of the board of ministry. Retired clergy will remain eligible for membership on annual conference commissions, committees or boards. Retired clergy under appointment have voice and vote at meetings of the annual conference, are eligible to be elected as a delegate to General Conference, and may vote for other clergy delegates. Retired clergy not under appointment shall have voice, but no vote at meetings of the annual conference, are not eligible to serve as a delegate to General Conference, and may not vote for other clergy delegates.