



## The Ministry of Elders • • • • • • • • • •

### Ordained to Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service

Elders lead and serve the entire church in the ministries of Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service. The elder has primary responsibility for Word, the apostolic task of communicating the faith and proclaiming God's Word. This includes primary responsibility for the preaching and teaching ministry, although preaching in the United Methodist tradition also includes the lay minister, the local pastor, and the associate member. The elder is responsible for administering the sacraments and ordering the ministry of the church. Most elders serve as pastors in charge of local congregations. However, elders may be appointed to extension ministries (§343), and serve in a variety of settings. Bishops and district superintendents are chosen from among ordained elders, because the ordering of ministry and administering the *Discipline* are the elders' responsibilities.

### Service

Ordained ministry has its roots in servant leadership. As servant leaders, elders embody the teachings of Jesus wherever they are appointed (§340.2d). For John Wesley this meant refusing the limitations of parish boundaries and claiming the world as his parish. Today, elders lead in service by organizing the church for its mission and service in the world. Through prophetic preaching, biblical interpretation, sacramental administration, theological reflection, and organizing the church for ministry, the elder equips Christians for their ministry of service in the world. Elders appointed to extension ministries (e.g., chaplaincy, counseling, campus ministry, and education) also carry out this task.

Wherever elders serve, they carry their vows of 'Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service' as ordained representatives of the church of Jesus Christ.

### Itinerant Clergy

In 200 years of Methodism, the distinguishing mark of elders has been the willingness to offer themselves "without reserve to be appointed and to serve" (§333). The elder commits to full-time service in the church as an itinerant, or "traveling preacher," under the authority of the bishop. Through the itineracy system, the church assures pastoral leadership for every local congregation.

All elders who are in good standing and continue to fulfill their professional responsibilities (§337) shall be continued under appointment unless they are on leave, and are assured equitable compensation for their ministry (§342).

### Elder as Pastor in Charge

The elder oversees the total ministry of the local church in its nurturing ministries, and in fulfilling its mission of witness and service in the world. This includes administrative oversight, evangelistic leadership, and programmatic planning, as well as spiritual nurture and pastoral care in the congregation (see Responsibilities and Duties of Elders and Licensed Pastors, §340). The pastor sets the vision and direction of the congregation for its witness in the world and leads the church in worship and liturgical life.

### First Steps – Elder

- Read *The Christian as Minister*. Discuss your insights with a clergyperson or candidacy mentor. This book is available for purchase at [www.Cokesbury.com](http://www.Cokesbury.com).
- Contact a pastor, an elder, a deacon, or the district superintendent, to inquire about admission into the candidacy process. The district superintendent is responsible for inviting candidates to enter the candidacy process.
- Participate in a candidacy mentoring group or meet with a candidacy mentor (as determined by the annual conference) to complete *Fulfilling God's Call: Guidelines for Candidacy* (Candidacy Guidebook) and refine your call to ministry.

### Becoming a Certified Candidate – Elder ¶ 310

- Show proof of a minimum one year membership in the UMC or other United Methodist ministry setting.
- Register online in the Candidacy Application System and pay the candidacy application fee.
- Meet with the district Committee on Ordained Ministry (dCOM) to discuss your call to ordained ministry and your written statement of call (¶ 310).
- Complete all steps required to become a certified candidate as listed in ¶¶ 310-314 and determined by the annual conference.
- Complete Orientation to Ministry as scheduled by your annual conference (¶ 314).

### Educational Requirements and Academic Qualifications – Elder ¶ 324

- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Bachelor's degree (some exceptions apply) and at least one-half of the Master of Divinity degree must be completed before commissioning and provisional membership in the annual conference.
- Master of Divinity degree from a University Senate-approved seminary.

### Continuing Steps – Elder

- Demonstrate gifts for ministries of service and leadership to the satisfaction of the dCOM.
- Complete application requirements including health certificate, background checks, written theological exam, and autobiographical statement.
- Interview first with the dCOM and then with the BOM to be recommended for commissioning.
- Receive approval from the Clergy Session of the annual conference by being elected to provisional membership, followed with commissioning by a bishop.
- After successfully completing the requirements of the provisional membership period, apply for recommendation by the BOM, and approval by the Clergy Session for ordination and full membership.
- Be ordained by a bishop.

The candidacy process is listed in ¶¶ 310-314 in *The Book of Discipline*.  
The ministry of the Elder is described in ¶¶ 332-340 in *The Book of Discipline*.



Visit [www.gbhem.org/candidacy](http://www.gbhem.org/candidacy) or [www.gbhem.org/elders](http://www.gbhem.org/elders) for more information.

Telephone: 615-340-7389 • E-mail: [dom@gbhem.org](mailto:dom@gbhem.org)