

Section III. Candidacy for Licensed and Ordained Ministry

¶ 310. *Candidacy and Certification for Licensed and Ordained Ministry*—The licensed or ordained ministry is recognized by The United Methodist Church as a called-out and set-apart ministry. Therefore, it is appropriate that those persons who present themselves as candidates for licensed or ordained ministry be examined regarding the authenticity of their call by God to set-apart ministry.

Persons, upon hearing and heeding the call to servant leadership through licensed or ordained ministry, shall contact a clergyperson in their local church, another clergy, or the district superintendent of the district in which they participate in a United Methodist ministry setting to inquire about the process of candidacy. Persons are encouraged to use resources recommended by GBHEM, such as *The Christian as Minister* and the *Ministry Inquiry Process*.

1. Those beginning candidacy for licensed or ordained ministry:

a) shall be a professing member in good standing of The United Methodist Church or a baptized participant of a recognized United Methodist campus ministry or other United Methodist ministry setting for a minimum of one (1) year;

b) shall write to the district superintendent requesting admission to the candidacy process and the assignment of a candidacy mentor. Include a statement of call. Request registration through the district superintendent with GBHEM;

c) after registration by the district superintendent with GBHEM, mentor and candidate will study the resources adopted by the conference Board of Ordained Ministry;

d) shall write their statement of call. The candidate will consult with the pastor or equivalent in a ministry setting specified by the district committee on ordained ministry to request a meeting of the pastor-parish relations committee or equivalent body specified by the district committee on ordained ministry to consider the statement of call and to be interviewed in light of Wesley's historic questions;

(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 they are called of God to serve. These we receive as sufficient proof that they are moved by the Holy Spirit.

e) After approval of the candidate by pastor parish relations committee or equivalent body specified by the district committee on ordained ministry, shall meet with a charge conference or body specified by the district committee on ordained ministry called to recommend the candidate to the district committee on ordained ministry. Approval of the candidate must be by two thirds written ballot, and the candidate shall have been graduated from an accredited high school or received a certificate of equivalency.

2. Candidates seeking to become certified for licensed or ordained ministry shall:

a) request to meet with the district committee on ordained ministry. In preparation for meeting with the district committee on ordained ministry, consult with the mentor to provide the following written information, in addition to the material written for ¶ 310.1d: (i) the most formative experience of their Christian life; (ii) God's call to licensed or ordained ministry and role of the church in their call; (iii) their beliefs as a Christian; (iv) their gifts for ministry; (v) their present understanding of their call to ministry as elder, deacon, or licensed ministry; and (vi) their support system;

b) complete and release required psychological reports, criminal background and credit checks. They shall submit, on a form provided by the conference Board of Ordained Ministry:

(1) a notarized statement detailing any convictions for felony or misdemeanor or written accusations of sexual misconduct or child abuse; or

(2) a notarized statement certifying that this candidate has neither been accused in writing nor convicted of a felony, misdemeanor, any incident of sexual misconduct, or child abuse.

The district committee on ordained ministry through the Board of Ordained Ministry shall seek

ways to consider cultural and ethnic/racial realities in meeting these requirements.

c) provide other information as the district committee may require for determining gifts, evidence of God's grace, fruit, and demonstration of the call to licensed or ordained ministry;

d) agree for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world and the most effective witness of the gospel, and in consideration of their influence as clergy, to make a complete dedication of themselves to the highest ideals of the Christian life as set forth in ¶¶ 103-105; 160-166. To this end they shall agree to exercise responsible self-control by personal habits conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional maturity, fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness, social responsibility, and growth in grace and the knowledge and love of God.³ Where possible, the local church is encouraged to assist candidates with the expenses of candidacy;

3. In adopting the statements in ¶¶ 304.2 and 310.2d on the moral and social responsibility of ordained ministers, the General Conference seeks to elevate the standards by calling for a more thoroughgoing moral commitment by the candidate and for a more careful and thorough examination of candidates by district committees and boards of the ministry. The legislation in no way implies that the use of tobacco is a morally indifferent question. In the light of the developing evidence against the use of tobacco, the burden of proof would be upon all users to show that their use of it is consistent with the highest ideals of the Christian life. Similarly, regarding beverage alcohol, the burden of proof would be upon users to show that their action is consistent with the ideals of excellence of mind, purity of body, and responsible social behavior.

e) be voted on by individual ballot by the committee members present. A three-fourths majority vote of the committee members present is required for certification (¶ 666.6); and

f) upon vote of certification, be encouraged by the district committee on ordained ministry to attend a United Methodist seminary.

3. In special circumstances, the district committee on ordained ministry may authorize other United Methodist ministry settings to serve in the role of the local church for the purpose of recommending candidacy and specify the persons or bodies that will serve in the roles of pastor, pastor parish relations committee and charge conference.

¶ 311. *Appointment of Certified Candidates*—A certified candidate is eligible for appointment as a local pastor upon completion of License for Pastoral Ministry (¶ 315). Those appointed as local pastors are clergy members of the annual conference (¶ 602.1) and are no longer listed as certified candidates. They do not continue with candidacy mentors but are assigned a clergy mentor (¶ 349.4).

¶ 312. *Orientation to Ministry*—An orientation to ministry is required for all candidates for licensed and ordained ministry. Attendance at the orientation and becoming a certified candidate may be sequential or concurrent. This common ministry preparation experience is for the purpose of building collegiality and understanding among the varieties of set-apart ministry (deacons, elders, local pastors).

1. The orientation shall be held in each annual conference and is the responsibility of the conference Board of Ordained Ministry.

Therefore, the changes here do not relax the traditional view concerning the use of tobacco and beverage alcohol by ordained ministers in The United Methodist Church. Rather they call for higher standards of self-discipline and habit formation in all personal and social relationships. They call for dimensions of moral commitment that go far beyond any specific practices which might be listed. (See Judicial Council Decision 318.)

The General Conference, in response to expressions throughout the Church regarding homosexuality and ordination, reaffirms the present language of the *Discipline* regarding the character and commitment of persons seeking ordination and affirms its high standards.

For more than 200 years candidates for ordination have been asked Wesley's Questions, including ". . . Have they a clear, sound understanding; a right judgment in the things of God; a just conception of salvation by faith? . . ." (¶ 310). All candidates agree to make a complete dedication of themselves to the highest ideals of the Christian life and to this end agree "to exercise responsible self-control, by personal habits conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional

2. Collegiality in ministry and commonalities and distinctions among the categories of ministry (deacon, elder, local pastor) will be emphasized to facilitate understanding and appreciation of the gifts contributed through team ministry, and the practice of set-apart ministry within the United Methodist connection will be articulated.

3. Guidelines will be made available from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Division of Ordained Ministry.

¶ 313. *Continuation of Candidacy*—The progress of candidates shall be reviewed annually by the district committee on ordained ministry which shall interview the candidate annually and may then

continue the candidacy when the following conditions have been met satisfactorily:

1. The candidate has received the annual recommendation of his or her charge conference or equivalent body as specified by the district committee on ordained ministry (see ¶ 310.3).

maturity, integrity in all personal relationships, fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness, social responsibility, and growth in grace and the knowledge and love of God" (¶ 304.2).

The character and commitment of candidates for the ordained ministry is described or examined in six places in the *Book of Discipline* (¶¶ 304, 310.2, 324, 330, 333, and 335). These say in part: "Only those shall be elected to full membership who are of unquestionable moral character and genuine piety, sound in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and faithful in the discharge of their duties" (¶ 333).

The statement on ordination (¶ 304.2) states: "*The Church expects those who seek ordination to make a complete dedication of themselves to the highest ideals of the Christian life . . . [and to] agree to exercise responsible self-control by personal habits. . . .*"

There are eight crucial steps in the examination of candidates. They are:

(1) The self-examination of the individual seeking ordination as he or she responds to God's call in personal commitment to Christ and his church.

(2) The decision of the committee on pastor-parish relations, which makes the first recommendation to the charge conference when a member seeks to become a candidate for ordained ministry.

(3) The decision of the charge conference, which must recommend the candidate.

(4) The decision of the district committee on ordained ministry, which must recommend the candidate to the conference Board of Ordained Ministry and, where applicable, the decision of the district conference.

(5) The decision of the Board of Ordained Ministry, which must recommend deacon's ordination and provisional membership. See Judicial Council Decisions 513, 536, 542.

(6) The decision of the clergy members of the annual conference, who must elect candidates to provisional membership.

(7) The recommendation of the Board of Ordained Ministry for deacon's or elder's ordination and full membership.

(8) The election to deacon's or elder's ordination and full membership by the clergy members of the annual conference.

All clergy members of the annual conference are accountable as to character and effectiveness to the annual conference throughout their entire ministry.

2. The candidate is making satisfactory progress in his or her studies. A candidate preparing for ordained ministry who is enrolled as a student in a school, college, university, or school of theology recognized by the University Senate shall present annually to the district committee on ordained ministry an official transcript from the school the person is attending.

The transcript shall be considered by the district committee on ordained ministry as part of the evidence of his or her progress.

3. The candidate continues to evidence gifts, fruits and God's grace for the work of ministry.

4. A person who is a certified candidate or who is in the candidacy process may have her or his status or studies accepted by another district committee in the same or another annual conference.

5. A certified candidate may be continued as a candidate for no more than twelve years following certification (¶ 324.1).