

A UNITED METHODIST GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Note: More details and in-depth information can be found in The Book of Discipline for many of the terms below. Where appropriate, paragraph numbers from The 2012 Book of Discipline are noted.

Annual Conference

A geographical area and organizational term. Defines a region that includes all United Methodist churches and ministries in that area. Members meet annually to approve business, set budget, and promote ministry programs. The annual conference commissions provisional clergy members, ordains deacons and elders, and licenses local pastors for ministry. The bishop appointed to that conference presides over the annual meeting and all matters affecting that conference's ministry (§11, 601-57).

Appointment Beyond the Local Church

One category of service for provisional or ordained deacons. Deacons serve in a local church or in an appointment beyond a local church. Appointments may be to a United Methodist-related agency or other service area (i.e. social work, teaching, health ministries, etc.). Deacons serving an appointment beyond the local church also have a secondary appointment to a congregation (§331).

Apportionments

A portion of local church offerings that churches contribute to their district and conference to support the annual conference and general church ministries.

Associate Members

Local pastors who have reached age 40, completed at least four years of full-time service as a local pastor, and the five year Course of Study, and have been approved by the board of ordained ministry and clergy session. They are not ordained, but are available for full-time service and are guaranteed an appointment within the annual conference. Associate members have voice and vote in every matter except constitutional amendments, ordination, and conference relations of clergy (§321–323).

Bishop

Bishops are elected by lay and clergy delegates of the jurisdictional conference. Bishops oversee one or more conferences and lead The United Methodist Church. They are authorized to “guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine and discipline of the church” and to “lead all persons entrusted to their oversight in worship, in the celebration of the sacraments, and in their mission of witness and service in the world.” (§401-403).

Board of Ordained Ministry

Each annual conference has a board of ordained ministry. The board recruits, nurtures, and supports those preparing for licensed or ordained ministry, and evaluates whether or not candidates have the gifts for ministry and are ready to serve. The board is the credentialing body for clergy in an annual conference and is responsible for continuing formation programs for clergy and for matters relating to changing conference relationships and clergy conduct (§635).

Book of Discipline

The United Methodist Church's book of law. It includes historical information, doctrinal standards, and policies that can only be changed by General Conference. It is updated and reprinted to reflect decisions made by the General Conference.

Book of Resolutions

Reflects The United Methodist Church's stance on current issues of faith. General Conference delegates decide what the resolutions will be based on petitions received.

Book of Worship

Contains the order of weekly services, the liturgy for Holy Communion (or Word and Table), Baptism, marriage, funerals, healing, and other types of services for The United Methodist Church.

Cabinet

The bishop and district superintendents when meeting as a body. All conferences have a cabinet.

Call, Call Story, or Calling

An experience or set of decisions, circumstances, or encouragements that lead an individual to believe God has asked them serve in a certain ministry. Many clergy refer to being "called" to preach or serve. During the candidacy process, candidates will be asked to write and talk about how they have discerned God's calling in their lives and how and where they believe God is calling them to serve.

Campus Minister or University Chaplain

Campus ministers and university chaplains serve on college campuses throughout the world. Some work in United Methodist campus ministries, while some work in ecumenical settings. Others are chaplains at United Methodist-related colleges and universities. Ministry with students is central, but these ministers are also concerned with faculty, staff, and administration—in other words, they work with the whole campus. Some campus ministers and chaplains are ordained deacons and elders. Others are laypeople who have received training for ministry on campus.

Candidacy

A discerning and preparatory period of time and the process by which those wishing to serve as local pastors, deacons, or elders apply, and are evaluated, by their annual conference to serve on behalf of The United Methodist Church (§310-314).

Candidacy Mentor

An ordained deacon, elder, associate member, or local pastor who has completed the Course of Study, trained to provide guidance to candidates. They are assigned a candidate by the district committee on ordained ministry and assist the candidate in understanding the process and further discerning their call as they become certified and licensed or provisional members (§349).

Candidacy Process

Another way of talking about candidacy (§310-314).

Candidate

A person enrolled in the candidacy process who wishes to serve as a local pastor, deacon, or elder.

Central Conference

Central Conferences are the conferences for areas outside the United States. The church has seven central conferences in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines (§540ff).

Certified Candidate

A candidate who has been approved by their local ministry setting and the district committee on ordained ministry to continue the process of moving toward licensing or ordination (§310.2).

Certified Lay Minister

A certified lay minister is a certified lay servant, certified lay missionary, (or equivalent as defined by his or her central conference), who is called and equipped to conduct public worship, care for the congregation, assist in program leadership, develop new and existing faith communities, preach the Word, lead small groups, or establish community ministries as part of a ministry team with the supervision and support of a clergy person.

Chaplain

Elders or deacons working in specialized ministry settings. Endorsed chaplains and pastoral counselors work in settings such as prisons, hospitals, the armed forces, and counseling centers (§1421.5).

Charge Conference

A local church meeting that includes members of the governing body (i.e. church council) and the clergy. It meets at least once a year to review goals, elect new leaders, set clergy salaries, and recommend persons for candidacy. It is typically facilitated by the district superintendent (§246).

Clergy

Commissioned and ordained deacons and elders; associate members, and local pastors serving under the full or part-time appointment of a bishop (§142).

Clergy Mentor

An ordained deacon, elder, associate member, or full-time local pastor who has completed the Course of Study, trained to guide provisional deacons or elders as they prepare for ordination (§349.1b).

Course of Study

Prescribed ministry classes for local pastors. Part and full-time local pastors attend the Course of Study while serving churches. The course takes at least five years to complete.

Deacon

Deacons are called by God, authorized by the church, and ordained by a bishop to a lifetime ministry of Word, Service, Compassion, and Justice. They serve the community and congregation in a ministry that connects the two. Deacons are called to a lifetime of servant leadership, serving the congregation and the world. A deacon serves all people, particularly the poor, the sick, and the marginalized, and equips and leads the laity in ministries of compassion, justice, and service. The deacon's role connects the church's worship with its service in the world (§328-331).

Deaconess and Home Missioner

Deaconesses (laywomen) and home missioners (laymen) are professionally trained and devote their lives to service through the Church's. They are approved by the General Board of Global Ministries and commissioned by a bishop. They may serve with any United Methodist agency or program or in agencies outside The United Methodist Church, provided that approval is given by the board in consultation with the bishop of the receiving area (§1314).

Discern

Synonymous with decide. Carries an underlying assumption that the decision is made with considerable thought, prayer, study, and attention to God's call in one's life.

District

One of several geographic areas in a conference. Each church is part of a district and an annual conference. Typically 60 – 80 churches are in a district. Districts are supervised by a district superintendent. The number of districts in a conference varies depending on the conferences' size.

District Committee on Ordained Ministry (dCOM)

Evaluates, certifies, and recommends to the board of ordained ministry all those applying for licensed or ordained ministry. The dCOM oversees all candidates within that district and supervises all matters related to candidacy and licensing. The committee interviews candidates, recommends candidates for provisional membership, and approves all local pastors serving within the district (§ 666).

District Superintendent (DS)

Supervises the churches within a district of the annual conference. They serve as extensions of the bishop's authority and supervise clergy within that district (§419).

Elder

Those called by God, authorized by the church, and ordained by a bishop to a lifetime ministry of Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service. Like all Christians, elders are committed to a lifetime of service, although this service manifests itself in different ways than deacons or the laity. The elder serves in ministry and servant leadership and gives pastoral leadership to order the life of the congregation. Elders devote themselves to the ministry of the Word, including primary responsibility for preaching and teaching the Word of God (§332-335).

Endorsement

The process to ensure that pastoral counselors and prison, hospital, or military chaplains are qualified and prepared to appropriately represent the Church in their ministry settings (§1421.5).

Episcopal

Refers to something relating to a bishop. For instance, an Episcopal area is the area under the supervision of a particular bishop.

Extension Ministry

Refers to elders who serve in ministry outside of a local church setting. It includes settings such as conference administration, chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, teaching, etc. The bishop appoints the elder to that position. This appointment may happen at the elder's request and through consultation with the bishop (§343-344).

Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members

Provides mutual support for its members for the sake of the life and mission of the church. All local pastors and associate members shall be members of and participate in the Fellowship (§323).

Full Connection

An ordained deacon or elder serves as a member in full connection to an annual conference. Their life and work is amenable to the annual conference and they are supported by and accountable to that annual conference. Except for the election of lay delegates, members in full connection have voice and vote in all matters related to the annual conference, to the clergy of that conference, to the general conference, and constitutional amendments of The United Methodist Church.

Full Member (similar to Full Connection)

Refers to an ordained elder or deacon in good standing with an annual conference.

General Agencies

The United Methodist Church has thirteen general boards and agencies that work in different ways on behalf of local churches, annual conferences and the denomination.

1. General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) - www.umcjustice.org
2. General Board of Discipleship (GBOD) – www.umcdiscipleship.org
3. General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) - www.umcmmission.org
4. General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) – www.gbhem.org
5. General Board of Pension and Health Benefits - www.wespath.org
6. General Commission on Archives and History - www.gcah.org
7. General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (GCCUIC) - www.unitedmethodistbishops.org
8. General Commission on Communication (United Methodist Communications - UCom) - www.resourceumc.org/en/agencies/communications
9. General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) - www.gcorr.org
10. General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) - www.gcsr.org
11. General Commission on United Methodist Men - www.gcum.org
12. General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA)- www.gcfa.org
13. United Methodist Publishing House – www.umph.org

General Conference

The international gathering and business meeting of The United Methodist Church that occurs every four years with about 1,000 delegates who are clergy and laity from each annual and central conference. This body decides on petitions to change the Book of Discipline and Book of Resolutions and is the only body authorized to speak on behalf of The United Methodist Church (§8, 501-511).

Group Candidacy Mentoring

The opportunity for candidates to meet with a candidacy mentor and a group of other candidates. Many conferences offer this structure to provide candidates opportunities to learn from mentors and each other.

Home Missioner

See deaconess (§1314).

Itinerate

Indicates an elder, associate member, or local pastor agrees to serve where the bishop appoints. This system is called itineracy. Often “itineracy”, “guaranteed appointment” or “security of appointment” are discussed as parts of this system that is the basis of the commitment between the church and clergy who serve.

Jurisdiction

A group of annual conferences within a geographical region in the United States. There are five jurisdictions (North Central, Northeast, South Central, Southeast, and Western). The Jurisdictional Conference meets every four years after General Conference and consists of delegates from each annual conference in that region. The conference elects bishops for their jurisdiction (§512-537).

Layperson

A member of a local church.

Licensed Local Pastor

Someone who is not ordained as an elder or deacon but is appointed to preach, conduct worship, and perform the duties of a pastor in a particular setting. That person must complete licensing school, Orientation to Ministry, and receive an appointment to serve. Local pastors attend Course of Study school each year and meet with the district committee on ministry annually for continual approval and eligibility. Local pastors are not required to earn a Master’s of Divinity, or to itinerate, are not guaranteed an appointment, and usually serve smaller congregations (§315-320).

Online Candidacy Application System (OCAS)

The online system managed by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry to track candidates for licensed or ordained ministry. District superintendents invite candidates to enroll in the system after they have written to request admission to candidacy (§310.1).

Ordained Ministry

The ministry of deacons and elders who have been ordained by a bishop to serve in The United Methodist Church (§301-304).

Order of Deacons/Order of Elders

A covenant community within the church to mutually support, care for, and hold accountable members for the sake of the life and mission of the church. These orders seek to respond to the spiritual hunger among clergy for a fulfilling sense of vocation, for support among peers, and for a deepening relationship with God. All ordained persons upon election to full membership in the annual conference shall be members of and participate in an order appropriate to their election (§306).

Ordination

Performed by laying-on of hands by the bishop. Signifies that the church affirms and continues its ministry through these persons. Persons may be ordained as deacons or elders and commit to living and proclaiming the gospel. Deacons are ordained to the ministries of Word, Service, Compassion, and Justice. Elders are ordained to the ministries of Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service (§301-304).

Orientation to Ministry

Sponsored by the board of ordained ministry and required for all ministry candidates. Helps to build collegiality and develop an understanding of deacons', elders', and local pastors' ministry (§312).

Pastor

A pastor is an elder, associate member, or local pastor appointed to serve in charge of a station, circuit, cooperative parish, extension ministry, ecumenical shared ministry, or church of another denomination, or on the staff of such. Deacons, who may serve similar roles as the pastor, should not be called pastors (§339).

Polity

Refers to the rules and traditions of The United Methodist Church. It includes the Book of Discipline, history, practices, and beliefs of the denomination.

Professional Certification

Recognition that someone has met academic standards, experience, and continuing study to achieve and maintain professional excellence. Visit gbhem.org/certification for a listing of current certifications.

Professional Ministry

To make one's living by serving in full-time in ministry. Can apply to laity or clergy.

Provisional Membership

The step in the ordination process between candidacy and ordination when a commissioned deacon or elder serves as a provisional member. Those applying for ordination serve as a provisional member for a minimum of two years, depending on annual conference policy. Provisional membership ends with ordination, or when a decision is made not to proceed toward ordination (§324-327).

Seminary or Theological School

Term for post-graduate school of theology that educates and prepares people for ministry. Candidates for ordination must graduate from a school approved by the University Senate of The United Methodist Church.

Social Principles

A prayerful and thoughtful effort of the General Conference to speak to contemporary issues from a sound biblical and theological foundation. The Social Principles are a call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice (§160-166).

Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee (S/P-PRC)

The committee in each church that assists clergy and staff in setting leadership and service priorities. Evaluates and approves those beginning candidacy for licensed or ordained ministry from that congregation. (§258.2).

University Senate

A body of higher education professionals that determines schools, colleges, universities, and theological schools that meet criteria for United Methodist Church affiliation. Ordination candidates must complete educational requirements at a University Senate-approved institution (§1414-18).

Vocation

1. a particular occupation, business, or profession; calling.
2. a strong impulse or inclination to follow a particular activity or career.
3. a divine call to God's service or to the Christian life.
4. a function or station in life to which one is called by God: the religious vocation; the vocation of marriage.

Works Cited *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012*. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012.

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