

### CHAPTER 16

# Elders

For more information, visit [www.gbhem.org/elders](http://www.gbhem.org/elders), or contact the Assistant General Secretary for Clergy Life, [elders@gbhem.org](mailto:elders@gbhem.org) or 615-340-7365.

*Within the people of God some are called to the ministry of elder....The ministry of elder exemplifies and leads the Church in service to God in the world, in remembering and celebrating the gifts of God and living faithfully in response to God's grace. ¶305*

NOTE: Unless otherwise stated, the term “elder” in this chapter applies to both ordained and provisional elders.

## Elder Ministry

Elders are ordained to a lifetime ministry of Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service. Elders hold primary responsibility for proclaiming the Word through preaching and teaching. They are responsible for the administration of the sacraments and leading the church in ministry. Most elders serve as a pastor in charge of a local congregation. However, elders may be appointed to extension ministries and serve in a variety of settings. Bishops and district superintendents are ordained elders and serve by leading the general church's ministry in the annual conference and in their districts (¶¶ 332-334).

## Elders' Leadership (¶ 337.1)

- Proclaiming and teaching the Word of God.
- Through worship and in the administration of the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion.
- Providing pastoral care and counsel.
- Conducting marriages and funerals.
- Leading the church for ministry in the world as pastors, superintendents, and bishops.

## Responsibility and Accountability

Provisional elders serve as provisional members of the annual conference, while ordained elders are members in full connection with all the responsibilities, rights, and privileges accorded to all provisional or full members of the annual conference. They are accountable to the annual conference and the bishop for their ministry and leadership, and serve under appointment by the bishop. They offer themselves without reserve to be appointed and to serve, after consultation, as the appointing authority may determine.

## Membership Responsibilities Include (¶ 334)

- Having voice and vote in the annual conference where membership is held.
- Eligibility to serve as clergy on boards, commissions, or annual conference committees.

- Voting for clergy delegates to the General, Central, or jurisdictional conferences, and eligibility to serve as clergy delegates.
- Attendance at the clergy session and annual conference. Ordained elders vote on matters of ordination, character, and conference relations of clergy.
- Participation as members of the Order of Elders after ordination.

## Ordained to Service

Ordained ministry is rooted in servant leadership. Through service to the church, the elder equips Christians for their ministry of service in the world. Elders appointed to extension ministries (e.g., chaplaincy, counseling, campus ministry, education, etc.) also carry out this task and fulfill their vows of “Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service.”

## Appointments

### The Itinerant Clergy System

In Methodism, the distinguishing mark of elders is the willingness to offer themselves “without reserve to be appointed and to serve” (§ 333). The elder commits to full-time service in the connection as an itinerant minister under the authority of the bishop. All elders in good standing who continue to fulfill their professional responsibilities (§ 337.1) shall be continued under appointment unless they are on leave.

The itinerant system is the method by which elders and associate members are appointed by the bishop to ministry settings. All elders and associate members shall accept and abide by these appointments. Bishops and cabinets shall commit to and support open itineracy and the protection of the prophetic pulpit and diversity (§ 338).

### Accountability for Continued Appointment (§ 334.2)

Because elders are guaranteed an appointment from year to year, there are professional responsibilities they are expected to fulfill. These include:

- Annual participation in a process of evaluation with S/P-PRC and DS or comparable authorities. Continuing effectiveness must be reflected in the annual evaluation of work in their ministry setting.
- Growth in professional competence and effectiveness through continuing education and formation. The BOM sets the minimum standards and guidelines for continuing education and formation for clergy.
- Willingness to assume supervisory and mentoring responsibilities within the connection.
- When an elder’s effectiveness is in question, the bishop completes the procedure as outlined in § 334.3 to determine a plan for developing effectiveness or recommending Administrative Location (see Chapter 29, BOM Handbook).

### Elder as Pastor in Charge

The elder oversees the local church’s ministry. This includes administrative oversight, evangelistic leadership and worship, programmatic planning, and ensuring spiritual nurture and pastoral care in the congregation (§ 340). The pastor sets the vision and direction of the congregation for witness in the world and leads the church in worship and liturgical life.

### Less than Full-Time Appointment (§ 338.1, 2)

Full-time service shall be the norm for ordained elders, provisional elders, and associate members in the annual conference. However, at the initiative of the bishop and cabinet, or at his or her request, an elder, provisional elder, or associate member may receive a less than full-time appointment.

- Request is made by the bishop or clergy at least 90 days prior to annual conference. Exceptions shall be approved by the cabinet and BOM Executive Committee.

- The bishop, cabinet, clergy, and BOM agree upon the less than full-time appointment.
- The bishop makes the appointment and notifies the clergy at least 90 days in advance of the annual conference at which the appointment will be made.
- The clergy session approves the appointment by a two-thirds majority.
- Less than full-time appointment must be requested and approved annually, and shall not be granted for more than a total of eight years, except by a three-fourths vote of the clergy session.

## Interim Appointments (§ 338.3)

The bishop may make interim appointments to charges that have special transitional needs. These may be made outside the annual conference where membership is held and are for a specified length of time that is established in advance of the appointment being made.

## Extension Ministry

Elders and deacons, associate members, provisional members, and persons licensed for pastoral ministry may be appointed to ministry settings that extend the ministry of the UMC and the witness and service of Christ's love and justice in the world. . . . Such ministry settings shall include teaching, pastoral care and counseling, chaplaincy, campus ministry, social services, and other ministries so recognized by the BOM and approved by the bishop (§337.3).

## Categories of Extension Appointments

The categories for extension ministry appointments are mainly guided by § 344. Extension ministries include appointments:

- Within the connectional structures (§ 344.1a).
- To settings endorsed by GBHEM (§ 344.1b) – Chapter 23, BOM Handbook.
- To service under the General Board of Global Ministries (§ 344.1c).
- In other settings that are an extension of the church's ministry (§ 344.1d).
- To attend any school or participate in Clinical Pastoral Education (§ 338.4).

## Guidelines for Appropriate Appointments to Extension Ministry under the Provisions of § 344.1d

Those seeking such appointments shall submit a written statement to the cabinet and BOM that describes the proposed ministry setting, and shares how they are called to that ministry, their gifts for that setting, and how that setting allows for the intentional fulfillment of their ordination vows.

GBHEM provides these questions as a way for annual conferences to determine if an extension ministry setting is appropriate for the elder's ministry and is a true extension of the church's ministry.

## Recommended Questions to Evaluate a Ministry Setting Request

- Is there evidence that the person is responding to a call to the particular form of ministry being proposed?
- Does the ministry enrich the church's effectiveness in mission?
- Is the ministry congruent with the annual conference's missional commitment to the world?
- Is the ministry one in which the ordination vows of Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service can be fulfilled?
- Does the person possess the gifts, training, education, and experience required?
- Does the setting provide the kind of accountability that allows for responsible participation in covenant community?
- Is this person prepared to accept an appointment to a local church if requested to do so?

## Recommended Questions for Candidates Seeking Appointment under the Provisions of ¶344.1d

- How is the proposed ministry one in which the vows of ordination to Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service can be fulfilled?
  - Within the context of your call to ordained ministry, identify your sense of call to this particular ministry.
- The Church in Mission
  - How does ministry in this setting enrich the church's effectiveness in mission?
  - In what ways does serving in this setting minister to the world's needs as related to the church's mission?
- Fulfilling ordination vows: in reference to the intentional fulfillment of your ordination as an elder to Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service.
  - How do you intend to proclaim and teach the Word of God in this setting?
  - How is the ministry of sacraments important in this ministry setting? What opportunities exist for providing the sacraments?
  - How will your ministry be a witness to the church's involvement with persons on behalf of the community of faith?

## Connectional Accountability for those Serving in Extension Ministries

Those appointed to extension ministry should be in settings that provide support and accountability. They are amenable to the annual conference, and must provide an annual report detailing their service and continuing education. They must also include a copy of their evaluation from their ministry setting (¶ 337.3).

- Clergy are to have a charge conference relationship in their home annual conference.
- If appointed outside the bounds of their home conference, they are to have an affiliate charge conference in the area where they serve.
- The annual report is provided to the bishop, DS, charge conference, and BOM.
- If clergy serve outside the bounds of their home conference, the report must also be filed with the affiliate charge conference and the bishop of the area where they serve.
- If the clergy is endorsed, the United Methodist Endorsing Agency also receives the report.

## Support for those Serving in Extension Ministries

The bishop, representatives of the cabinet, and an endorsed representative from extension ministries within the BOM are to meet annually with ordained clergy in extension ministries (¶ 344.2b). Accountability must be balanced by support. Therefore, the church has responsibility to develop structures and programs which support extension ministers. The BOM is to provide "maximum contact with and support of persons" (¶ 635.1d) in such appointments.

## Suggestions for Providing BOM Support

- A member of the BOM maintains contact with elders in extension ministry, and reports their concerns.
- When there are more than a few persons in extension ministry, the BOM should establish a committee to work in this area.
- Primary areas of support responsibility
  - Transition into and out of extension ministry appointments.
  - Communication and contact with those persons.
  - Advocacy and interpretation of issues and concerns in this area.
- Functions in these areas may include (but are not limited to)
  - Receiving and responding to annual reports.

- Interpreting extension ministry through the BOM's annual report.
- Assisting in the placement of extension ministers on conference boards and agencies; assisting them in making their talents and skills available to the conference and the local church.
- Maintaining liaison with the Division of Ordained Ministry, United Methodist Endorsing Agency, regarding the endorsement of conference members.
- Serving as a resource to persons moving into or out of extension ministry settings; providing information on endorsement, certification, or retirement; serving as a referral point for those returning to local church appointments; assisting with recruitment for persons to serve in extension ministry.

## Conclusion

Elders serve on the behalf of The United Methodist Church in local churches and in ministry settings throughout the world. The support provided for their ministry, and the standards for accountability established by the BOM and cabinet provide for the ongoing development of effective leadership and faithful ministry service.

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