

CHAPTER 19

Seminary Relations and the Ministerial Education Fund

For more information contact the associate general secretary for the Division of Ordained Ministry at dom@gbhem.org or 615-340-7417.

BOM's Relation to Seminaries

The BOM relates to seminaries in order to educate church leaders in ministry and theological reflection. Strong partnerships between the seminaries and the church strengthen this process.

The BOM maintains ongoing communication with the seminaries to create a formation process that begins with calling and candidacy, continues through theological education, and is completed during provisional membership and the residency in ministry program. There are various points when interaction between the BOM and seminary is critically important, especially during recruitment and candidacy.

Support Recruitment and Candidacy

The BOM works to assist students as they pursue theological education.

The BOM works with dCOMs to:

Encourage candidates to attend a UM seminary (§ 310.2f). The BOM, dCOM, and the vocational discernment coordinator should make materials available that highlight opportunities at the 13 UM seminaries and help students understand the added value of attending a UM seminary. [Fact sheets](#) are available on the GBHEM Web site for each of the UM theological schools.

Create opportunities for UM seminary representatives to meet with prospective students, candidates for ordained ministry, clergy, and BOM leaders.

- Guide students who are unable to attend a UM seminary to one of the University Senate-approved seminaries. [This list](#) is maintained on the GBHEM Web site.
- Help students understand the disciplinary requirements for ordination related to theological education (§ 324). The BOM needs to know the various educational requirements for deacons, elders, and local pastors who seek to be ordained as elders.

United Methodist Seminaries

The closest ties are between the BOM and the UM seminaries located within their particular annual conference or geographical area.

- The BOM should maintain an ongoing dialogue with seminaries that serve its students. This could include inviting faculty from the seminaries to participate in continuing education and formation events in the annual conference.

- Regular campus visits, including conversations with administration, faculty, and students are valuable for both the BOM and the schools.
- Adequate feedback between the BOM and seminaries concerning students is important in developing a partnership for candidate formation. Seminaries are limited by FERPA rules in how much information they are allowed to disclose about particular students, so a common understanding is needed between seminaries and BOMs about the type of information the BOM can expect seminaries to share. The BOM should also provide opportunities to hear seminaries' concerns.
- In addition to formal dialogue, UM faculty from the seminaries can assist the BOM, cabinet, and annual conference. Many UM seminary faculty members are willing to work with the BOM, and frequently serve as BOM members.
- The residency program or provisional period is a minimum of two years and no longer than eight years following the completion of educational requirements. The residency program includes mentoring, covenant or peer groups, supervision, and continuing education. The continuing education requirement can often be completed in collaboration with seminaries.
- UM seminaries continue to work closely with the Division of Ordained Ministry and BOM leaders to shape the ways in which the seminaries can assist the BOMs. The Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary has completed research regarding provisional membership ([From Readiness to Effectiveness](#)) and has made that research available to BOMs.

Non-United Methodist Seminaries

The BOM also relates to non-UM seminaries where candidates are enrolled. In addition to the 13 UM seminaries, the University Senate's Commission on Theological Education (CTE) evaluates and approves a select number of non-UM seminaries to assist in training UM students. This quadrennial evaluation process includes a review of information on the full program of the school. These reviews focus on the school's ability to offer theological education that honors the UM tradition. "[A Wesleyan Vision for Theological Education and Leadership Formation for the 21st Century](#)" produced by the Council of Bishops, the Association of United Methodist Theological Schools, and the Division of Ordained Ministry sets the vision for theological education in the Wesleyan tradition. This document is helpful in framing a BOM's discussion of theological education.

The Commission's review of an institution is confidential, and its content is held between the CTE and the individual school. However, the bishop and the BOM of the conference where the school is located will be asked to evaluate the school during the review process, and information on the final decision is provided to the BOM. The CTE regards the evaluations given by BOM leadership as critical for the decision making process. [The University Senate's Organization, Policies, and Guidelines](#) contain the working rules of the CTE and the criteria for evaluating non-United Methodist schools of theology. This handbook should be shared with the full BOM. A current list of all [University Senate-Approved Seminaries](#) is posted on the GBHEM Web site.

The Ministerial Education Fund (MEF)

The MEF is one of the great strengths of the UMC regarding theological education and clergy preparation. It has generated more than \$682 million in the past 40 years. GBHEM did not receive an increase in the MEF for the 2013-2016 quadrennium and continues to promote giving to this fund. The BOM has the opportunity to tell the story of the MEF within each annual conference.

MEF Distribution

The Annual Conference MEF

Twenty-five percent of funds raised by the MEF apportionment remain in the annual conference for recruitment, training, and support of ordained deacons and elders. Funds may also be used to support local pastors, diaconal

ministers, and those in certified ministries; however, the BOM's administrative costs are funded by the annual conference, not the MEF.

The BOM is encouraged to discuss the MEF with conference leaders, particularly the Council on Finance and Administration and the conference treasurer, to determine the best way to interpret the MEF as part of the annual conference's apportionment commitments. The placement of the MEF in the conference budget, the ways in which apportionments are assigned to the local church, and an understanding of conference apportionment procedures is important to the MEF coordination and the BOM's work.

In most annual conferences, the MEF is used as follows:

- **Student Financial Aid**—The MEF's first priority is scholarship assistance for seminary students as they complete basic theological education to prepare for ordination. Local pastors in the Course of Study may also receive assistance. Policies for fund distribution are developed and approved by the annual conference and should be reviewed quadrennially.
- **Call and Enlistment**—The BOM may use MEF funds for programs that help potential candidates hear and respond to God's call to ordained ministry. Across the church there is an urgent need to recruit racial/ethnic and younger candidates for ordained ministry (see Chapter 4) and enlistment is one of the BOM's priorities. MEF funds may underwrite discernment events in each annual conference or region.
- **Continuing Education**—The second most common use of the MEF is continuing education for appointed clergy. The *Book of Discipline* (§351) sets continuing education standards (see Chapter 21), and the BOM administers the funds.
- **Support of the Orders for Ministry**—The BOM is responsible for the Order of Deacons (§306), Order of Elders (§306), and Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members (§323) to provide ongoing formation and covenant building among licensed and ordained clergy. The BOM provides program funds for the orders and fellowship.
- **Clergy Care**—Additional services for clergy may include career counseling, training in clergy sexual ethics, out-placement of persons leaving ordained ministry, etc. These services should not detract from the primary recruitment and theological education purpose of the fund, but the BOM should seek to respond to clergy needs throughout ministry in order to strengthen their profession and vocation.
- **General Church MEF**—Of the 75 percent of the MEF received by the general church, 83.6 percent of that amount supports the 13 UM seminaries. The balance supports the work of the Division of Ordained Ministry in general services to the church relating to the call, education, and support of clergy leadership.

The DOM's commitments to the church's global mission, including the Oxford Institute, the Theological Education Committee of the World Methodist Council, and partnership with Central Conference schools of theology, are funded through this portion of the MEF. The Dempster Fellowships, Georgia Harkness Scholarships, Diakonia Fellowship, and the Women of Color Scholars Program are also supported through the DOM program budget. Efforts are underway to endow all of these programs.

MEF Promotion

The BOM is responsible to interpret and promote the MEF in the annual conference, and help the local church understand how each church benefits from the fund through the recruitment, training, and support of licensed local pastors and ordained deacons and elders.

MEF Coordinator and Committee

The BOM should appoint an MEF Coordinator to oversee the promotion of the MEF in the annual conference. Because the MEF was created by a layperson, and often laity are the best advocates for the fund, GBHEM recommends the coordinator be a layperson, either a BOM member or someone who is not on the BOM, but

advocates for the MEF and reports to the BOM. An advocacy committee comprised of BOM and non-board members should be appointed and funded to carry out this task.

Materials for Interpretation

Materials for interpretation, including bulletin inserts, brochures, and videotapes are available through the [Division of Ordained Ministry](#).

Responsibilities of MEF Coordinators

- Understand the history and purpose of the MEF.
- Track the performance of the MEF in the annual conference.
- Understand the way the MEF is apportioned in the annual conference, the financial processes of the CFA, and how to influence that process.
- Promote and interpret the MEF on behalf of the BOM.
 - Use members of the BOM, conference publications, and events to communicate the importance of the MEF.
 - Use personal stories of those who benefit from the MEF:
 - seminary students
 - continuing education grant recipients
 - counseling services
 - Encourage local pastors, diaconal ministers, and ordained clergy to “tell their story” in the local church to encourage support of the MEF.
 - Ask seminary students to encourage their home church to support the MEF as a way of supporting them.
- Develop materials specifically for the annual conference.
- Involve lay leadership in promoting the fund.
- Become familiar with UM seminaries, particularly those in the immediate area.

Suggestions for Promotion of the MEF

- Distribute materials to each church and the annual conference session.
- Emphasize support of the MEF in the BOM report at the clergy session of annual conference.
- Identify and recognize key churches that contribute the majority of the income to the MEF.
- Develop a catalogue of continuing education opportunities supported by the MEF.
- Publish a regular newsletter for clergy that tells of the benefits of MEF.
- Write articles for the conference newspaper telling the story of seminary students from the conference.
- Focus on the ways the MEF benefits the local church.
- Schedule a time for an MEF report at annual conference session.
- Recognize clergy who have attended events with continuing education grants.
- Introduce seminary students who have received grants.
- Include a reference to the MEF in relation to the granting of local pastors’ licenses.
- Work with the Council on Finance and Administration to ensure that the MEF stands out on the apportionment statement in the local church.
- Encourage pastors and other clergy to educate congregations about MEF.
- Ask those applying for continuing education funds if their church has paid the MEF in full.

- Include a reference in grant materials indicating that funds come from the MEF.
- Include a note with all continuing education awards reminding recipients that these are MEF dollars.
- Ask seminary graduates to thank their local church and BOM for supporting the MEF.
- Invite seminary professors as guest preachers and resource persons for conference events.
- Reduce costs for continuing education events for those whose churches pay the MEF in full.
- Inform provisional members and participants at new pastors' orientation of the importance of their advocacy for the MEF.
- Find meaningful ways to thank local churches for their commitment to the MEF.
- Encourage pastors and other clergy to share with congregations the benefits of their continuing education experiences.
- Encourage the P/SPRC to promote the MEF.
- Invite lay people to share a "MEF moment" from pulpit.
- Identify those who have entered full-time Christian service from the congregation through the years.
- Include a note in the ordination service bulletin that the ordinands are supported by MEF (see below).

Sample Paragraphs for Acknowledgment of the MEF in the Ordination Service Program

A Word of Thanks

As we celebrate this day in the life of the church, we also celebrate the role of the Ministerial Education Fund in the preparation of ordinands. Through the MEF, the UMC directly supports 13 United Methodist seminaries, scholarships for seminary students, and the recruitment of candidates for ministry. When your local church paid its MEF apportionment, you invested in the lives of these who are ordained today. Thank you for your support of the Ministerial Education Fund.

Today, we ordain men and women for service in the church. They will bring many gifts to our church's ministry and we give thanks to God for the gifts they bring. Many of them also have significant indebtedness. As the cost of seminary education has increased, our support through the Ministerial Education Fund has decreased. Often our students bear the weight in higher tuition costs.

As these ordinands have committed themselves to the church's ministry, let us all renew our commitment to them through donating to the MEF.

We celebrate God's call, and commission these for service in Christ's name. They represent the church's future. But the preparation of ordained ministers for the future will depend on more than faith and hope.

The Ministerial Education Fund exists to support 13 United Methodist seminaries and scholarships for our students. When we support the MEF we are investing in the future. As you share the joy of this event in your local church, will you share the importance of the MEF to the future ministry of the church?

Conclusion

The church's future will in large part be determined by the calling and training of licensed and ordained clergy who will lead the church for the sake of Jesus Christ. The BOM's work in relation to theological education is crucial to that task. As you work with candidates, seminaries, and Course of Study programs, you are helping to form those who will form the life of the church.

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