

CHAPTER 14

Provisional Membership

For more information contact GBHEM's director of Provisional Membership, Deacon Support, and Certification in Specialized Ministries, deacons@gbhem.org or 615-340-7375.

"A person shall be eligible for election to provisional membership in the annual conference by vote of the clergy session on recommendation of its Board of Ordained Ministry" (¶324)

"Commissioning is the act of the church that publicly acknowledges God's call and the response, talents, gifts and training of the candidate. The church invokes the Holy Spirit as the candidate is commissioned to be a faithful servant leader among the people, to lead the church in service, to proclaim the Word of God and to equip others for ministry" (¶325)

Requirements for Approval to Provisional Membership (¶324)

Provisional membership requirements are detailed in ¶324 of the *Discipline*. Provisional membership lasts a minimum of two annual conference years and no longer than eight. Paragraph 324 details the various required and accepted educational routes for elder and deacon candidates, and for local pastors applying for provisional membership (¶324.3-6). Background checks, a written doctrinal exam, and an interview with the BOM are all required for approval to provisional membership. The following votes and recommendations are required:

- Recommendation in writing by the dCOM to the BOM, based on a three-fourths majority vote of the dCOM.
- Recommendation to the clergy session by a two-thirds majority of the BOM.
- Approval by vote of the clergy session.

Expectations of Provisional Members and the BOM Residency Program

Provisional members are appointed to serve in a local church, extension ministry, or appointment beyond the local church. They also may be appointed to attend school. Provisional elders receive a license for pastoral ministry, while provisional deacons receive a license for the ministry of the deacon. Provisional deacons who are self-employed are expected to form an advisory committee in consultation with the DS for support, supervision, and evaluation of effectiveness. Throughout the provisional period, all members are supervised and evaluated both by the DS and the

BOM. They apply to the BOM for recommendation for ordination and full membership, based on their demonstration of developing effectiveness in ministry.

The BOM is required to develop a Residency in Ministry program in which all provisional members participate. This program provides:

- Nurture for ongoing development of effectiveness in ministry
- Continuing theological education
- Clergy mentoring
- Participation in a peer covenant group

Foundational Principles for the Residency Program for Provisional Members

Christian faith must be at the heart of the residency program. The purpose of the program is to help residents define themselves vocationally and personally, and to enhance the practice of ministry by helping them growing spiritually.

The residency program also is designed to have a positive effect on the entire annual conference. Support, education, and supervisory systems can be beneficial for all involved, not just for provisional members. The residency program should be a holistic program, including practices of faith, discernment, and covenant that allow time and space for the BOM and provisional members to work together in developing effectiveness in the provisional members' practice of ministry. Both clergy and laity partner in leading the program, and the BOM ensures that adequate support systems are in place for leaders and participants. Additionally, the BOM should develop an educational process that is relevant to the state of development and expectations of ministry for the provisional members.

Developing the Residency Program

As annual conferences develop and manage a residency program, they should regularly evaluate the program to ensure that anticipated results are being achieved. The BOM is responsible for clearly defining the goals of the program and relying on input from those affected by and participating in the program to ensure its success.

The BOM should seek feedback from those recently completing residency, bishops and district superintendents, laypersons in provisional members' appointment settings, covenant group leaders, mentors, and others. This should consist of periodically asking if the program assists provisional members in becoming effective in ministry. If not, why not? What can be changed to produce the desired outcomes?

Resources and guidelines for developing a residency program:

[Clergy Mentoring: A Manual for Commissioned Ministers, Local Pastors, and Clergy Mentors](#), GBHEM

[From Readiness to Effectiveness: Principles and Guides for Annual Conferences](#), GBHEM

[The Journey from Readiness to Effectiveness](#), Lewis Center for Church Leadership

Conceptual Framework for the Residency Program

The residency program is built around three major components: growth in effectiveness in ministry; assessment of growth; and covenantal relationships. For each of these areas, key points include:

Growth in Effectiveness in Ministry

- Growing in effectiveness is a lifelong process, but is the focus of the residency program. Each participant is responsible for pursuing education and growth.
- Growth can occur in the covenant relationships of the annual conference.

- Peer groups, mentors, and educational course work for provisional members may be provided, and even mandated, by the BOM.
- Peer groups, mentors, and educational courses support the identity formation of provisional members in their vocational and personal lives.
- During this time, other life covenants such as marriage/family and personal friendships are often adjusted and refined.

Assessment of Growth

- When a clergy's identity is based primarily on organizational affirmation, he/she will be unable to provide positive leadership in times of conflict and stress.
- The BOM and district superintendents must state clear assessment criteria, knowing that effectiveness is measured using data and impressions. Clear criteria and process helps the provisional member understand the annual conference's expectations, and allows that member to invite and receive appropriate feedback.
- Self-differentiation is strongest when founded upon faith in Jesus Christ and reliance upon God's grace, and contributes to clergy effectiveness.
- Theory and practice must be integrated as effectiveness is developed.

Covenantal Relationships

- Provisional membership is a time for developing relationships within the covenant membership of the conference, and includes learning the values, norms, and procedures expected of clergy in the annual conference.
- Confidentiality, seeking and providing help, and practicing shared leadership all contribute to developing effectiveness.
- Provisional members seek help from and provide help to others. The learning process flows in many directions.

Structure and Disciplinary Components for the Residency Curriculum (§326)

“During the provisional period, arrangements shall be offered by the Board of Ordained Ministry for all provisional members to be involved in a residency curriculum that extends theological education by using covenant groups and mentoring to support the practice and work of their ministry as servant leaders, to contemplate the grounding of ordained ministry, and to understand covenant ministry in the life of the conference” (§326).

Supervision

Provisional members are supervised by both the BOM and the district superintendent; this involves participating in regular meetings and receiving annual reports that evaluate their work. Additionally, S/P-PRCs or other employing agencies provide an evaluation of the person's work. Finally, the BOM oversees the provisional and ordination process, sets interview times, and develops expectations for effectiveness in ministry.

Continuing Theological Education

Learning throughout ministry has been characteristic of the Methodist movement from its beginning, and remains vital for effective ministry. Provisional membership allows time to deepen habits, attitudes, and practices of theological study that the clergyperson will rely on throughout ministry. To guarantee that provisional members have the needed time for continuing education, the BOM requires that study times are provided by the provisional member's local church or employer.

The residency curriculum for continuing theological education includes core courses, occasional seminars, and guidance for independent study, on-campus and extension courses. Some conferences expect provisional members to attend a variety of educational workshops on topics such as public speaking, urban/rural ministry, church finances, etc. The BOM partners with seminaries and GBHEM to develop the educational process.

Clergy Mentoring

Mentoring promotes vocational identity and effective ministry through a covenant relationship that is based on support and accountability. The BOM selects, trains, and assigns clergy mentors. Throughout the mentoring process, provisional members engage in covenantal, confidential relationships, where mentors and provisional members share in the spiritual disciplines and mutual recognition of God's presence and leading. Spiritual discernment concerning the provisional member's call and authority are also central to this process (see chapter 17).

Covenant and Peer Groups

Provisional members are expected to participate in covenant groups "to support the practice and work of their ministry as servant leaders, to contemplate the grounding of ordained ministry, and to understand covenant ministry in the life of the conference" (§326). Since these covenant groups can prepare provisional members for participation in the life of the Order of Deacons or Elders, these groups should be initiated and supported by the orders, and should meet regularly. Since peer group leaders also need support systems, GBHEM recommends that they also participate as members of a covenant group.

Length and Limitations of Provisional Membership (§327)

- Annual conferences may ordain provisional members after two full annual conference years under appointment, following completion of educational requirements.
- No member shall be continued in provisional membership beyond the eighth regular session following his/her admission to provisional membership.
- Those not approved for full membership and ordination after eight years shall return to the status of laity or local pastor, and may be considered annually for local pastor licensing.
- Provisional members may not retire under the provisions of §358 and shall be automatically discontinued when they reach the mandatory retirement age. Provisional elders may be classified as retired local pastors under the provisions of §320.5.

Residency and Supervision

During provisional membership, clergy face many expectations. From demonstrating developing effectiveness in ministry, to assimilating into the culture and responsibilities of the annual conference, to serving successfully in an appointment setting, demands are high. The BOM has the unique opportunity to develop a residency program that will shape the future ministry of its participants, as well as the future quality of annual conference leadership.

While participation in a residency program is required of provisional members, it is critical to keep the residency program and supervisory processes separate. Each process is important, and each has a different place in the development of a provisional member's ministry. Opportunities to learn, grow, and find support through a residency program should not be undermined by the threat of inappropriate and premature reporting to a supervisor or other authority figure.

Likewise, the need for demonstrating ministry skills development and success in an appointment setting afford the provisional member the chance to demonstrate his/her growing effectiveness, while also learning how to provide input and receive feedback on performance of ministry as covenants for work are developed with district superintendents, S/P-PRCs, and other employing agencies.

Residency programs should provide provisional members with the support, nurture, mentoring, education, and supervision needed to help them demonstrate their developing effectiveness and eligibility for full membership in the annual conference.

The BOM has many responsibilities, but the responsibility for developing and implementing a strong, successful residency program can greatly influence the life of individual clergy as well as the future leadership of the annual conference.

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