

## Chapter 14 | Elders

For more information, contact the Assistant General Secretary for Clergy Life at [dom@gbhem.org](mailto:dom@gbhem.org) or 615-340-7389. See also [www.gbhem.org/elders](http://www.gbhem.org/elders).

*“Within the people of God some are called to the ministry of elder . . . . Those called to the ministry of elder are called to bear authority and responsibility to preach and teach the Word, to administer the sacraments and to order the life of the church so it can be faithful in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”* (§305)

*Elders are ordained to a lifetime ministry of Word, Sacrament, Order and Service. By the authority given in their ordination, they are authorized to preach and teach the Word of God, to provide pastoral care and counsel, to administer the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion and to order the life of the Church for service in mission and ministry.*

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

### Functions of Elder Ministry

Ordained ministry is rooted in servant leadership. Elders equip Christians for their ministry of service in the world. (§340)

- Proclaim and teaches the Word of God
- Lead worship and administers the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion
- Provide pastoral care and counsel
- Conduct marriages and funerals
- Serve as pastors, superintendents and bishops, who lead the church’s ministry in the world

### Appointments

#### THE ITINERANT CLERGY SYSTEM

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).

- The distinguishing mark of elders in Methodism is the willingness to offer themselves “without reserve to be appointed and to serve” (§333).
- Elders commit themselves to full-time service in the connection under the bishop’s authority.
- Elders in good standing who continue to fulfill professional responsibilities shall be continued under appointment unless they are on leave (§337.1).

**MINISTRY SETTINGS**

- Pastor in Charge
  - Oversees the local church’s ministry, including administrative oversight, evangelistic leadership and worship, programmatic planning and ensuring spiritual nurture and pastoral care in the congregation (§340)
  - Sets the vision and direction of the congregation for witness in the world and leads the church in worship and liturgical life

**EXTENSION MINISTRY**

- “Elders, associate members, provisional elders 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 ministry (§344)
  - Connectional structure appointments (§344.1a)
  - GBHEM endorsed appointments (§344.1b and Chapter 20, BOM Handbook)
  - General Board of Global Ministries service appointments (§344.1c)
  - Other extensions of the Christian ministry of the church (§344.1d)
  - School attendance or participation in clinical pastoral education (§338.4)

**LESS THAN FULL TIME (§331.6d)**

- Full-time service shall be the norm for ordained elders, provisional elders and associate members. 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.
- The bishop, Cabinet and BOM agree upon the less than full-time appointment. The bishop makes the appointment and notifies the clergy at least 90 days prior to final termination of the current appointment. The Clergy Session approves the appointment by a two-thirds majority.
- Must be 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 (§331.6d)**

- 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.

**Membership****PROVISIONAL AND FULL MEMBER ELDERS**

- 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.

- Attend the clergy session and Annual Conference
- Have voice and vote in the Annual Conference where membership is held
- Eligible to serve as clergy on boards, commissions or Annual Conference committees
- Eligible to vote for clergy delegates to the General, central or jurisdictional conferences

### FULL MEMBER ELDERS

- Vote on matters of ordination, character and conference relations of clergy
- Eligible to serve as clergy delegates
- Participate as members of the Order of Elders after ordination

## Accountability

Accountable to the Annual Conference and the bishop for their ministry and leadership and serve under appointment by the bishop

- Elders are guaranteed an appointment from year to year and therefore have professional responsibilities (§334.2)
  - Participate in an annual evaluation process with P/S-PRC and DS (or comparable authorities). This evaluation must reflect continuing effectiveness in their ministry setting
  - Participate in an in-depth assessment process every eight years (§349.3)
  - Grow in professional competence and effectiveness through continuing education and formation, for which the BOM determines the minimum standards and guidelines
  - Assume supervisory and mentoring responsibilities within the connection when requested
  - 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 26, BOM Handbook).

## Guidelines for Appropriate Appointments to Extension Ministry (§344.1d)

- Those seeking extension ministry 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.
- Suggested questions provided by GBHEM to Annual Conferences can help 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 THOSE SEEKING EXTENSION MINISTRY (§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.
- 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?
- 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?

## Accountability and Support in Extension Ministries

Appointments in these settings should provide a balance of support and accountability.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

- Elders are amenable to the Annual Conference and are to have a charge conference relationship in their home Annual Conference.
- Annual report
  - Details service and continuing education
  - Provided to the bishop, DS, charge conference and BOM
  - Includes an evaluation from their ministry setting (§337.3)
  - For appointments outside of home conference, the report must also be filed with the affiliate charge conference and the bishop of the area where they serve because elders are to have an affiliate charge conference in the area where they serve.
  - Endorsed clergy file an annual report with the United Methodist Endorsing Agency.

### SUPPORT

- The bishop, representatives of the cabinet and an endorsed representative from extension ministries within the BOM are to meet annually with clergy in extension ministries. (§344.2b)
- The church has a responsibility to develop structures and programs that support extension ministers, and the BOM is to provide "maximum contact with and support of persons" (§635.1e) in such appointments.
- Suggestions for BOM support
  - A BOM member maintains contact with elders in extension ministry and reports their concerns. Or the BOM should establish a committee to support extension ministries when possible.

- Primary areas of support
  - Transition into and out of extension ministry appointments
  - Communication and contact with appointed elder
  - Advocacy and interpretation of issues and concerns
- Functions in these primary areas of support (may include but are not comprehensive)
  - 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
- Act as a liaison with GBHEM's United Methodist Endorsing Agency regarding the endorsement of conference members