

Chapter 12 | Provisional Membership

For more information, contact GBHEM's Director of Deacon Ministry, Provisional Membership and Certification at deacons@gbhem.org or (615) 340-7375. See also www.gbhem.org/ministry/provisional-membership.

“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)

Provisional Membership Requirements (§324)

- Minimum of two Annual Conference years and no longer than eight
- Educational routes for elder and deacon candidates, and for local pastors applying for provisional membership are detailed in §324
- Background checks
- Written doctrinal exam
- Interview with the BOM
- Written recommendation by the dCOM to the BOM, based on a three-fourths majority vote of the dCOM
- Recommendation by the BOM to the Clergy Session, based on a three-fourths majority of the BOM
- Approval by the Clergy Session, based on a three-fourths majority vote

Provisional Members’ Appointed Service

- Appointed to serve in a local church, extension ministry or appointment beyond the local church
- May be appointed to attend school or as instructors, professors or administrators at United Methodist-related colleges, universities or theological schools
- Provisional elders receive a license for pastoral ministry, and provisional deacons receive a license for the ministry of the deacon.
- Requirements for provisional deacons who propose an appointment to ministry settings beyond the local church, including self-employment
 - Detailed description of the proposed setting
 - Provide information that explains their sense of calling to that ministry and their gifts and evidence of God’s grace for it.
 - Explain how the proposed appointment fulfills the ministry emphases of the United Methodist deacon.
 - Describe the accountability structures related to the proposed ministry setting.
 - For self-employment, this could entail the formation of an advisory committee in consultation with the District Superintendent for support, supervision and evaluation of effectiveness.

- Provisional elders in extension ministry settings and provisional deacons in appointments beyond the local church are accountable to the Annual Conference for the practice of their ministry. They must provide an annual report with evidence of annual evaluation and describe the structures in their appointment that provide accountability for the practice of their ministry.
- All members are supervised and evaluated, both by the district superintendent and the BOM.
- All members apply to the BOM for recommendation for ordination and full membership, based on their demonstration of effectiveness in ministry.

BOM Residency Program

The BOM is required to develop a residency curriculum and all provisional members are required to participate. Special attention should be paid to accommodating provisional members in extension ministry or appointments beyond the local church.

RESIDENCY CURRICULUM (¶326)

Intended to extend theological education, build provisional members' understanding of and participation in their covenant with the church and its clergy and provide an opportunity for reflection on the theory and practice of ordained ministry, whether that ministry takes place primarily in congregations or in other settings. Includes covenant groups and clergy mentoring.

BUILT AROUND THREE MAJOR COMPONENTS

- Growth in effectiveness in ministry
 - Growing in effectiveness is a lifelong process. The residency program builds effectiveness during provisional membership and helps provisional members develop practices and disciplines to continue growth in effectiveness even after ordination. The covenant relationships among the Annual Conference clergy can nourish growth in knowledge and practice of ministry.
 - Peer groups, mentors and education 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
 - The BOM and Cabinet must prepare together and distribute to provisional members the conference's standard of effective ministry and clear assessment criteria, knowing that effectiveness is measured using data and impressions. Clear criteria and process help the provisional members understand the Annual Conference's expectations and allow them to invite and receive appropriate feedback.
 - The residency curriculum should intentionally nurture participants' growth in ministry effectiveness as defined by the conference.
 - Effective leaders practice disciplines for spiritual, physical and emotional health. When a clergy person's identity is based primarily on organizational affirmation, he/she will be unable to provide positive leadership in times of conflict and stress. Self-differentiation is strongest when founded upon faith in Jesus Christ and reliance upon God's grace and contributes to clergy effectiveness.
 - Effectiveness will also be evident in the ways that the provisional member integrates theory and practice.

- 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, mutual support, accountability and practicing shared leadership all contribute to relationships that help clergy grow in faith and ministry effectiveness.
 - Provisional members seek help from and provide help to others. The learning process flows in many directions.

STRUCTURE AND DISCIPLINARY COMPONENTS

- Supervision
 - Provisional members are supervised by both the BOM and the District Superintendent.
 - This entails the provisional members' participation in regular meetings and receiving annual reports that evaluate their work.
 - Pastor/Staff-Parish Relations Committees or other employing agencies shall provide an evaluation of the provisional member's performance.
 - The BOM oversees the provisional and ordination process, sets interview times and develops and publicizes 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 for the clergyperson to rely on throughout ministry.
 - To guarantee that provisional members have the needed time for continuing education, the BOM expects that churches or employers will make study times available to the provisional member.
 - The residency curriculum's continuing theological education may entail core courses, required reading, occasional seminars, guidance for independent study, on-campus and extension courses or study trips.
 - Some conferences expect provisional members to attend a variety of educational workshops on subjects such as public speaking, urban/rural ministry, church finances, etc.
 - The BOM may partner with seminaries and GBHEM to develop the educational process.
- Mentoring
 - Promotes vocational identity and effective ministry through a covenant relationship that is based on support and accountability.
 - Clergy Mentors are selected, trained and assigned by the BOM.
 - 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.
- Covenant and peer groups
 - Covenant groups are a key characteristic of Wesleyan discipleship.
 - Covenant groups are a central part of the residency curriculum and help provisional members develop the habit of sharing ministry joys and concerns with other clergy, while providing each other support and accountability.
 - Since covenant groups can prepare provisional members for participation in the life of the order of deacons or elders, the orders may be partners in developing covenant groups.

SUPERVISION

- During provisional membership, clergy face many expectations. From demonstrating 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.
- 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, Pastor/Staff-Parish Relations Committees and other employing agencies.
- When the residency program and supervision are meeting their related but separate goals, provisional members will receive the support, nurture, mentoring, education and supervision they need to help them demonstrate their developing effectiveness and potential for full membership in the Annual Conference.
- The BOM is responsible for developing and implementing a strong, successful residency program that will provide the foundation of effective ministry for individual clergy, as well as the entire Annual Conference.

Project that Demonstrates Fruitfulness

- Provisional members are to present a project “that demonstrates fruitfulness in carrying out the church’s mission of ‘making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.’”
- There are three required components: “fruitfulness,” “making disciples” and “transformation of the world,” but the BOM has flexibility in their implementation.
- The BOM will establish its definition of “making disciples” and “transformation of the world” as well as how it will measure fruitful leadership in these areas.
- The BOM will also prepare and distribute the requirements for this project to provisional members soon after their commissioning. BOMs have flexibility in how to implement this project.
- Possible project requirements are:
 - The BOM’s definitions of “making disciples” and “transformation of the world” and how these interrelate
 - The criteria and tools that the BOM will use to measure fruitfulness
 - The project’s reporting deadline
 - Possible mid-course reporting including feedback from convenient groups
 - The general categories of partners the provisional member may enlist for the project (e.g., community leaders, church members, etc.)
 - Report medium: Narrative description during ordination interviews, a written report of a prescribed number of pages, an audio-visual presentation and other
 - Report requirements: This might include presenting the project’s specific goals (e.g., reach neighborhood latchkey kids with the Good News and provide them a safe space to gather after school), the project’s method (e.g., start a neighborhood children’s chorus and drumming group), the partners engaged (e.g., volunteers at First Church, the local music store for donated instruments, a local drummer, etc.), strategic steps toward putting the project

into action, the provisional member's assessment of whether the goals were met, assessment from project participants and partners and the provisional member's reflection what he or she learned from the process.

- Consider including, as part of the residency curriculum, some training in goal setting, organizing volunteers and setting budgets to support provisional members' work on their projects.

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: The Residency Program for Provisional, Commissioned Members of The United Methodist Church – Principles and Guides for Annual Conferences,” GBHEM.
- “From Readiness to Effectiveness: Preparation for Professional Ministry in The United Methodist Church – Tool Kit for Annual Conference Leaders,” GBHEM.
- “Making Disciples for the Transformation of the World” Project Guidelines for BOMs: GBHEM
- “Resources for the New Fruitfulness Project Component for United Methodist Ordination,” Lewis Center for Church Leadership (www.churchleadership.com/bom/).