

## Chapter 17

## Seminary Relations and the Ministerial Education Fund

For more information, contact the Office of the Associate General Secretary for the Division of Ordained Ministry at [dom@gbhem.org](mailto:dom@gbhem.org) or 615-340-7417.

### BOM and Seminaries

- The BOM partners with 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.
- The BOM, in conjunction with dCOMs, works to assist students as they pursue theological education by supporting recruitment and candidacy.
  - Encourages 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. Visit [www.gbhem.org/seminaries](http://www.gbhem.org/seminaries) for more information about the United Methodist Theological Schools.
  - Creates opportunities for UM seminary representatives to meet with prospective students, candidates for ordained ministry, clergy and BOM leaders.
  - Guides students who are unable to attend a UM seminary to one of the University Senate-approved seminaries. This list is maintained on the GBHEM website
  - Helps 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 may 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 Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (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 provisional membership period is a minimum of two years and no longer than eight years following the completion of educational requirements. During provisional membership, new clergy complete a residency program that 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.
- **Non-United Methodist Seminaries** – The BOM also relates to approved non-UM seminaries where candidates are enrolled.

## 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 is a quadrennial evaluation process that 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.
- 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 theological schools, as well as current University Senate guidelines are posted on the GBHEM website.

## The Ministerial Education Fund (MEF)

By providing needed scholarships, the MEF is one of the great strengths of the UMC regarding theological education and clergy preparation.

Has generated more than \$682 million in the past 40 years and has funded the theological education of thousands of ministers. The BOM has the opportunity to tell the story and promote the work of the MEF within each Annual Conference.

### DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS

- **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 promote the MEF with conference leaders, particularly the Council on Finance and Administration and the Conference Treasurer, and to collaborate with them to determine the best way to promote 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 vitally important to the BOM’s work of supporting candidates for ministry and funding continuing education for clergy.

### MOST ANNUAL CONFERENCES USE THE MEF FOR CERTAIN COSTS.

- **Student Financial Aid** – The MEF’s first priority is scholarship assistance for seminary students who are completing 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 3), 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* (§350) sets continuing education standards (see Chapter 19), 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, support 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 the 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, more than 75 percent of that amount supports the 13 UM seminaries. The balance supports the work of the Division of Ordained Ministry (DOM) 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 Graduate 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 for interpreting and promoting the MEF throughout the Annual Conference and for helping local churches understand how each church benefits from the fund through the recruitment, training and support of licensed local pastors and ordained deacons and elders.
- Materials for interpretation, including bulletin inserts, brochures and videos, are available through the Division of Ordained Ministry.
- **MEF Coordinator and Committee**
  - The BOM should appoint an MEF Coordinator to oversee the promotion of the MEF in the Annual Conference.
  - 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 advocates for the MEF and reports to the BOM.
  - An advocacy committee comprised of BOM and nonboard members should be appointed and funded to carry out this task.
- **Suggestions for Promotion of the MEF**
  - Regularly and publicly acknowledge and thank congregations that support the MEF
  - Distribute MEF promotional 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
  - Develop a listing of continuing education opportunities supported by the MEF
  - Publish articles for conference e-newsletters and publications that tell the story of seminary students from the conference who have benefitted from the conference’s MEF support

- 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 and scholarships
- 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
- **Coordinator Responsibilities**
  - Understand the history and purpose of the MEF
  - Track the use and 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 support of the MEF
    - Ask seminary students to encourage their home church to contribute to the MEF as a way of supporting them and underwriting their expenses for theological education
  - Develop materials specifically for the Annual Conference
  - Involve lay leadership in promoting the fund
  - Become familiar with UM seminaries, particularly those in the area and those where students from their annual conference attend