

Chapter 21

Order of Deacons, Order of Elders and Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members

“There shall be in each Annual Conference an Order of Deacons and an Order of Elders. ... An order is a covenant community within the church to mutually support, care for and hold accountable its members for the sake of the life and mission of the church.” (§306)

“[The Board of Ordained Ministry shall] work with and support the Order of Deacon, the Order of Elder and the Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members (see §323), including receiving reports, offering financial support and coordinating these groups’ activities with the continuing formation offerings of the board. The board may delegate continuing formation responsibility of the groups by mutual agreement, with final approval, evaluation and budgeting remaining with the board.” (§635.2p)

Order of Deacons and Order of Elders

- The orders were established in 1996.
- They are covenant communities that provide mutual support, care and accountability for their members, in this case for the sake of the life and mission of the church.
- Every ordained deacon becomes a member of the conference Order of Deacons upon election to full membership and every ordained elder becomes a member of the conference Order of Elders upon election to full membership.
- Acceptance of the status of full membership entails a commitment to regular participation in the life of the Order.

Functions of the Orders (§307)

- Provide theological and biblical reflection and study of the issues facing the church and society for regular gatherings that offer continuing spiritual and vocational development.
- Assist in plans for individual study and retreats
- Develop a bond of unity and commitment to the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church and the Annual Conference
- Build trusting and supportive relationships among members
- Hold members accountable to these purposes

Organization of the Orders ¶308

- The bishop shall convene and provide continuing support for each Order. This does not limit meetings to only when the bishop is available. However, the bishop might consider an annual meeting with the Orders (collectively or separately).
- The BOM is to provide financial support for the Orders' activities through its budget and other appropriate sources.
- Each quadrennium, the BOM nominates and the Orders elect from its members a chairperson. The chairs coordinate the Orders' activities and are voting members of the BOM executive committee. The chairs are members of the BOM Executive Committee. (¶635.1a)

Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members ¶323

- All local pastors and associate members shall be members of and participate in the conference Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members.
- The Fellowship's purpose is to provide mutual support for its members for the sake of the life and mission of the church.

Functions of the Fellowship

- Provides theological and biblical reflection and study of the issues facing the church and society for regular gatherings that offer continuing spiritual and vocational development.
- Encourages associate members and local pastors in continuing education beyond Course of Study
- Develops a bond of unity and commitment to the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church and the Annual Conference
- Builds trusting and supportive relationships among members

Organization of the Fellowship

- The bishop convenes the Fellowship. As with the Orders, this does not limit the Fellowship to meeting only when the bishop is available. The bishop might consider convening an annual meeting with the Fellowship or a combined meeting with the Orders and the Fellowship.
- The BOM nominates and the Fellowship elects from its members a chairperson, who leads the Fellowship and reports its activities to the BOM. The chair is a member of the BOM executive committee. (¶635.1a)

Activity and Covenant Groups

- These groups should have as their purpose spiritual and vocational development, as well as building bonds of trust, support and accountability. Conferences should avoid impressing other agendas upon these groups. Confidentiality, trust, respect

and honesty should be part of their agreed-upon rule. Experience in well-organized covenant groups should help newer clergy interact well in ongoing clergy small groups.

- Given the comparative sizes of the Order of Deacons and Order of Elders in most Annual Conferences, it is often easier for the smaller Order of Deacons to organize and meet with some regularity.
- Given the itineracy of elders, those groups will need to adjust themselves to changing membership.
- Beginning in 2017, the BOM through the Orders and Fellowship, is to provide spiritual enrichment opportunities and covenant groups for deacons, elders and local pastors. (§350)

Additional Considerations

- ***Elders serving in extension ministry and deacons serving appointments beyond the local church*** – Consider the needs of deacons appointed beyond the local church and elders appointed to extension ministry when offering Orders’ meetings and activities. Work schedules are often different than for those who are serving in local churches. Be creative in finding ways to pray for and include these members in the life of the Order (retreats, meeting times, conference calls, etc.).
- ***Long distance and small numbers*** – Conferences and districts whose clergy are located several miles apart may consider using distance meeting technology to conduct small-group meetings. In some conferences, the number of deacons is so small that there is no real “Order” for them. The BOM should support these small numbers of deacons by helping them to connect with larger Orders who are eager to provide support and relationships for isolated deacons in other conferences. Contact the GBHEM Director of Deacon Ministry Support (deacons@gbhem.org) for help in making those connections.
- ***Annual gathering*** – A number of BOMs hold annual gatherings of Orders with the bishop. The Order chairs may work with the bishop on an agenda. The best use of this time might be relationship-building, inspiration and renewal. Time for the Orders to meet together (to build deacon/elder collaboration) and separately, as well as time to hear from the bishop, could be built into the agenda. It is appropriate to include the Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members in such gatherings.
- ***Continuing education requirement*** – All appointed clergy are now required (§350) to take continuing education and spiritual growth leave at least one week each year and are encouraged to take at least one month during one year of every quadrennium. The Orders can help suggest locations or plans for such leaves and hold their members accountable for taking these leaves. The BOM might develop goals for its clergy continuing education and spiritual formation and recommend resources and opportunities that support these goals.

Changing Orders

- Full members in good standing who wish to transition Orders follow the steps listed in §309. Provisional members wishing to change their ordination track may apply for transition following the steps listed in §326.4.
- During the transition period, ordained clergy retain their credentials and full membership while provisional members receive the appropriate license for ministry and retain their provisional membership.
- The BOM may approve the clergyperson for ordination to the other Order after the clergyperson completes the disciplinary requirements to the BOM’s satisfaction. Upon ordination to the other Order, the transitioning clergyperson retains their membership certificate and surrenders to the conference secretary the ordination credentials of the Order from which they are leaving.