

Minutes of Several Conversations

Between the Study of Ministry Commission, Chairs of the Orders and Fellowships of Local Pastors, Boards of Ordained Ministry, various laity and clergy across the connection, and the General Conference of The United Methodist Church

The Study of Ministry Commission is composed of fourteen lay and clergy persons from the jurisdictions in the United States and from central conferences in Europe and Africa, and three bishops, as well as eleven staff persons from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, the General Board of Discipleship, and the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns. The chair is William Willimon, bishop of the Birmingham Area (Alabama, USA).

The 2004 General Conference authorized the Commission and referred to it several petitions that in its wisdom the Conference thought should receive more research and discussion than would be possible at General Conference. The expenses of meeting and of producing a report are being borne mainly by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

The Commission adopted this statement of its mission:

The Study of Ministry Commission will explore and articulate scriptural, theological, ecclesial, and practical groundings that define our distinct ministries within our common Christian relationship through baptism. The goal is to provoke a conversation within the whole church about lay, licensed, and ordained ministry in order to gain clarity about our shared life together for the sake of God's transformational mission in the world and the vital importance and challenges of leadership today. A report will be made back to the 2008 General Conference, including necessary legislation.

The Commission took up the following questions.*

Part I—Why a Conversation?

Q.1. Study commissions usually issue reports. Is this document called “minutes of several conversations” because the Commission’s goal is “to provoke a conversation”?
A. Yes. This is a longstanding Methodist tradition. The original records of Methodist conferences in eighteenth-century England were called “The Large Minutes” (hereafter

* All paragraph or page number references in parentheses refer to the *Book of Discipline—2004* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004). All references to LM refer to John Wesley’s Large Minutes, in *The Works of John Wesley*, Jackson Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1892), vol. 8.

LM) and were presented in a question-and-answer format. John Wesley published them regularly.

Q.2. But that document takes up forty pages in a volume of *Wesley's Works*. Was that all one conversation?

A. No, it was a compendium of the major points of conversation that took place in conferences from 1744 into the 1780s. This Commission's "Minutes of Several Conversations" likewise is a compendium of major questions and responses from many different discussions.

Q.3. Why stay with a Q and A format? Why not just produce a straight prose document with proposals?

A. Because the flow of Q and A helps show the logic of thinking things through. It gives voice to objections or queries that arise as a topic is explored. It records the give and take of varied perspectives, and shows how the participants in a conversation found their way to the conclusion they reached. The minutes of conversations convey not only ideas and concepts but also the process and practice of arriving at them. They are fluid and flexible, responsive to new inquiries, and not set in stone as final language. So the reader learns not just what to think, but how to think; not just what to do, but how to decide what to do; not just answers, but the critical importance of asking good questions.

Q.4. What is this Wesleyan, and now United Methodist, fascination with "conversation"?

A. It signals some characteristic features of our heritage:

(1.) A conversation is a free and open space for many voices, and every voice is welcome—women and men, persons of all backgrounds ethnically and culturally, United Methodists of every land where the church is active. Today's church is inclusive and welcoming—this is written into our Constitution.

(2.) With so many different voices, the conversation has to remain open. New people and new circumstances bring new needs and new insights. As the conversation continues, we can be responsive to what God is calling us to do in the world.

Q.5. That sounds good, but "conversation" is kind of buzz word right now anyway, isn't it?

A. Yes, it is a buzzword in many organizations—any place in which many voices are at the table. Certainly conversation is essential to ecumenical relationships and characterizes the dialogues between Christian traditions. But it has been a distinctive feature of Methodism for over 250 years.

Q.6. What have people in the Wesleyan and Methodist heritage learned about conversation?

A. We have learned that it is extremely challenging but that it is better than any alternative. We agreed long ago to continue making all our decisions in conference—that is, in conversation with one another. So in this case, with our flexible and multilayered understanding of ministry in United Methodism, we are committed to working out our definitions, rituals, and procedures together, in conference, in a continuously unfolding conversation—without any executive body telling the whole church what to do.

Q.7. But a conversation with so many different voices takes a lot of time, doesn't it—especially with a complicated subject like ministry?

A. Yes, conversation can be painstakingly slow. The early Methodists in their Large Minutes lamented:

Q.2. Have our conferences been as useful as they might have been? A. No, we have been continually straitened for time. Hence, scarce anything has been searched to the bottom.

That's why General Conference, which meets for only ten days, has authorized a commission to study the ministry and bring back a report almost every quadrennium of the past fifty years.

Q.8. Then what is the role of General Conference?

A. The General Conference has “full legislative power over all matters distinctively connectional” (*Book of Discipline*, ¶16) and is the only body that can change the words in our *Book of Discipline*. But General Conference is also a conversation—a really big conversation with about 1,000 delegates from annual conferences who together constitute the General Conference. When it adjourns, the General Conference no longer exists. The conversation there is over. But it continues in many other forums as authorized by General Conference—forums such as this Commission.

Q.9. So if General Conference is a conversation and writes the *Discipline*, then why isn't the *Discipline* in Q and A format?

A. Actually, it was for many years, and some of that tradition continues. Most relevant for these Minutes, the reports of boards of ordained ministry to their respective annual conferences still follow the Q and A format. For example, the eighteenth-century Minutes asked, “What Preachers are admitted? How are the Preachers stationed this year?” (LM, Q52). Similar questions continue in revised form today: “Who are elected elder?” “Who are elected deacon?” And so on.

Q.10. Did John Wesley have this high a view of conversation?

A. Yes, indeed Wesley argued that Christian conversation is a means of grace—a practice in which we can trust that God's grace will be made known to us. In the Large Minutes he listed “Christian conference,” or conversation, as one of five “instituted” means of grace, by which he meant practices constitutive of the Methodist rule of life and basic to shaping a Christian life. “Do you converse seriously, usefully, and closely? Are you convinced how important and how difficult it is to ‘order your conversation right’?” (LM, Q48). Wesley truly believed that if we speak freely, knowing our own hearts and earnestly seeking God's presence, that God's grace moves among us and leads us in the directions we need to go. He introduced the Large Minutes with these words, which the Commission takes as its own for this particular conversation: “It is desired, that all things be considered as in the immediate presence of God; that every person speak freely whatever is in his heart.” This is the collective spirit in which the Holy Spirit is welcomed, and the conversation flourishes.

Q.11. How do we know that what we bring to the conversation is indeed faithful?

A. A basic framework for conversation is outlined in the United Methodist foundation document “Our Theological Task” (*Book of Discipline*, ¶104). We seek God’s graceful wisdom and direction first through *Scripture*.

Q.12. Then why doesn’t the Commission just go to *Scripture* to explain and make proposals about ministry in United Methodism? Aren’t the first churches in the Bible a model for ministry?

A. The gifts and callings of ministry presented in *Scripture* are compelling and provide a foundation and a language for everything we want to say. The actual forms for organizing ministry, though, are not as clear. No Christian groups have ever fully agreed on one certain and distinct model of New Testament ministry. What we do agree on is that God’s purposes in the world, revealed in the ministry of the servant Christ, are proclaimed and illustrated in *Scripture*. And we believe that the heart of all ministry is “Christ’s ministry of outreaching love” (*Book of Discipline*, ¶125). Each generation must struggle with how to live out in contemporary forms our witness to God in ministry.

Q.13. If the Bible doesn’t provide a single definite model, then how do we proceed?

A. (1.) First, we turn to the *traditions* of the Christian communities that developed and faced new challenges in the centuries after the books and letters of *Scripture* had been compiled. As the Christian movement grew, distinct offices for ministry began to emerge. What we call ordination today is grounded in the emergence of these offices in the early centuries.

(2.) We can also draw upon our own *experience*—individual and communal, contemporary and historical—to grasp what challenges and ways of organizing for ministry God is calling us to today.

(3.) And to all our conversation we bring our God-given *reason*, seeking to ask good questions, to think clearly and responsibly, and to test the congruence of our witness with the witnesses of *Scripture* and tradition.

Part II—What Makes Ministry Worth such a Conversation Today? Shouldn’t the Church just be about its Mission?

Q.14. What makes ministry a topic worthy of conversation? Isn’t it just more inward-focused church talk? Aren’t there much more pressing issues that need attention in the world?

A. Yes, the world is scarred by suffering and injustice today. Many people, even people relatively prosperous in material things, lack hope and community. Humanity is very far from the fullness of abundant life that Jesus offers. And that is exactly why we need ministry—and leadership in ministry—more than ever.

Q.15. One could make a very long list of crises and inequities that demand our attention. But why are United Methodists particularly concerned with such problems?

A. From the first visits of John Wesley and his friends to the prisons and poorhouses of England, and the regular offerings and almsgiving of the class meetings, to the passion

for helping the homeless and poor today, Methodist people have shown compassionate responses to suffering.

Q.16. Wasn't Methodism originally focused on holiness?

A. Yes, the first statement of the mission of the Methodist movement was “to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land” (LM, Q3). This meant inviting everyone into a personal journey of growth in the knowledge and love of God, expressed through holy living in the world. Holiness was exhibited through love of God and neighbor. As the General Rules of 1743 had it (still a foundation document of our church), all Methodists “should continue to evidence their desire of salvation . . . by doing good . . . by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison” as well as by caring for the souls of our neighbors by inviting them into the same journey of holiness (*Book of Discipline*, p. 73).

Q.17. Is spreading scriptural holiness still the mission of The United Methodist Church?

A. Certainly, though the 1996 General Conference put it in more contemporary language: “The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ” (*Book of Discipline*, ¶120). This is our response to God’s grace—to proclaim the good news of God’s salvation and to call everyone “to love God and neighbor, thus seeking the fulfillment of God’s reign and realm in the world” (¶121). Making disciples means inviting people from all backgrounds and walks of life into the Christian life, nurturing people in faith, and sending everyone out in mission in the world (¶122).

Q.18. A great response, but what does it have to do with ministry?

A. Ministry is the way we focus, organize, and lead our mission of making disciples for the transformation of the world. We envision that every local church congregation will have a passion for helping others and for being visible witnesses to Christ’s love in the world. Fulfillment of this vision requires that all Christians be in ministry and that they be prepared and organized for their ministries by those set apart for leadership in ministry.

Q.19. Isn't The United Methodist Church a long way from such a vision? The latest statistics show continued decline in membership and attendance. Doesn't this show a lack of passion for mission?

A. In The United Methodist Church we have always added up all our numbers, just as John Wesley always asked, “What numbers are in the society?” (LM, Q52). The total numbers do indeed show a decline, but only in United States membership. United Methodism continues to grow especially in Africa. We believe it is very important to look within the big numbers to see what is really going on. Where is United Methodism effective in ministry? How are people’s lives being transformed? What is the witness of United Methodist people in each place?

Q.20. Don't such questions just evade the issues of declining numbers?

A. No, they help us see the current realities of the church and name the resources we have to help new ministries flourish. Here are some examples from the United States:

(1.) There are 35,000 United Methodist local churches in the United States organized into 26,000 pastoral charges. Over 95 percent of the counties in the United States—territorial

governments within states—have a United Methodist congregation. We have an incredible opportunity to reach the broad range of the American populace with the gospel.

(2.) More than 10,000 of the 35,000 local churches in the United States have 35 or fewer people present for worship on a typical Sunday. The vast majority of these churches were built to serve the population as it was 100 years ago when 40 percent of Americans made their living by farming. Churches were planned and built in dispersal across the countryside to accommodate people coming to church by foot or horse-drawn carriage. Today, most Americans live in cities and many rural counties have experienced drastic losses of population. Yet United Methodist churches remain open to provide places of worship and service where people will continue to grow in the Christian life. And many rural and small-town settlements have experienced growth and rebirth in recent years as new kinds of economic development and housing bring a new wave of population. We can be glad that virtually everywhere in the United States there is a United Methodist church to greet them—if the members have a passion for mission and a welcome for the stranger. And that requires leadership in ministry.

(3.) Nearly one-third of United Methodist local churches in the United States are stable or growing in attendance, and many are growing significantly. There are many United Methodist congregations all over the United States thriving in responsiveness to their communities and ready to rise to new challenges. They need leadership to help them see the challenge and organize to meet it.

(4.) Many annual conferences in the United States have developed a strategy to spin new congregations out of existing ones, so that the resources of an established local church can support the start of a new one. Many local churches are already sponsoring new congregations. Many of the new churches are organized to respond to new immigrant populations arriving in the United States. Much more can be done, especially if we call and support leaders from within immigrant communities.

Q.21. So is the mission of The United Methodist Church focused primarily on local church congregations?

A. (1.) Yes, in the sense that “local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs” (*Book of Discipline*, ¶120). The community of faith of a local church is where people receive the sacraments, are formed in Christian faith, and discover the gifts of the Holy Spirit for their ministries as baptized persons.

(2.) But our United Methodist connection enables us to marshal the resources of all our local churches to support a much wider fulfillment of our mission than could be accomplished by any local church on its own. “The annual conference is the basic body in the Church,” according to our Constitution (*Book of Discipline*, ¶33). Annual conference is the place where we elect the delegates who constitute General Conference, which extends United Methodism’s mission around the world. And at annual conference we elect and ordain the persons who will lead the ministries of the whole people of God in their witness and service in the world.

(3.) Moreover, if our mission is to be witnesses of God’s reign and catalysts for God’s transformation of the world in love and justice, then we know that our mission must take us wherever the Spirit leads. Our *first question* is always: Where is God calling us to go in order to continue Christ’s ministry of standing with the poor and the outcast and

announcing God’s good news of salvation? Where can our human and material resources be most effectively deployed in mission? Thus our first question is *not* about meeting the needs of existing local churches; we want to build up the work of local churches only because they are the critical support system for something even more important: our service of God’s mission in the world.

Part III—How Do Our Ministries Enable Us to Fulfill Our Mission?

Q.22. The church has an audacious mission, and obviously needs ministry in order to carry it out. What is the beginning point or foundation of ministry?

A. (1.) United Methodism shares with the church ecumenical a foundational conviction that every baptized Christian is in ministry. “There is but one ministry in Christ,” and that ministry is a gift of God’s grace (*Book of Discipline*, ¶129). “All Christians are called through their baptism to this ministry of servanthood” (¶125). In the broadest sense, all Christians share one calling or vocation, just as we share one baptism (Ephesians 4). We are all called to the ministry of witness and service in Christ’s name. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, all Christians receive gifts, or *charisms*, for ministry. Of course, these gifts are wonderfully varied and come to fulfillment in many different vocations in the community of faith. A significant task of the local church is helping members identify and build up their distinct gifts for ministry, training, organizing, and sending people out to use their gifts in church and world.

(2.) Each member’s “entrance into and acceptance of ministry begin in a local church” (¶127), among the community of faith with which he or she is in a covenant of shared ministry. When a person joins a local church, he or she is becoming part of a local community of faith to serve in ministry together. He or she is “bound in sacred covenant” with others to share in all the joys and sorrows of the life of discipleship. “Faithful discipleship includes the obligation to participate in the corporate life of the congregation” (*Book of Discipline*, ¶219).

(3.) At the same time “the impulse to minister always moves one beyond the congregation toward the whole human community” (*Book of Discipline*, ¶127). So United Methodist people are always looking beyond their local churches to be “a servant of Christ on mission in the local and worldwide community”—servanthood carried out in every aspect of daily life and work (¶220). A member of a local United Methodist church is also becoming “a member of the global United Methodist connection” with a share in the witness of the whole church (¶215.4). Connectional units such as boards or teams of annual conferences offer many opportunities for training, organize work projects, and pool resources for mission.

(4.) But the vocation to service that comes through baptism can hardly be contained in the ministries of local churches or connectional programs. God calls faithful people to make a difference in this world: to stand with the poor, to decry injustice, to help those who suffer—in short, to go wherever the Spirit leads. The baptized are in the front line of witness to God’s transformation of the world, and are called to live that witness wherever it may take them.

Q.23. Is this understanding of the ministry of all Christians new in United Methodism?

A. No, it has a rich history. (1.) John Wesley organized the Methodist societies in the first

place in order to assist people in growing in the knowledge and love of God (LM, Q11) so that they could lead new lives of witness and service in the world. The General Rules of the societies laid out a rule of life for Christians—a guide to practices that would nurture their growth and encourage their ministry.

(2.) The paragraphs of the *Discipline* describing the ministry of the baptized today were adopted in 1976 to explain more fully the sacrament of Baptism as a call and gifting for ministry. The *Discipline*'s wording is particularly eloquent. "The people of God, who are the church made visible in the world, must convince the world of the reality of the gospel or leave it unconvinced. There can be no evasion or delegation of this responsibility" (§128).

Q.24. This description sounds like Methodism was a lay movement—a society of ordinary Christians trying to live faithful lives. Is that accurate?

A. In this sense, yes, Methodism was a lay movement. It functioned originally as a voluntary society or mission organization within the national Church of England. Methodist people were encouraged to attend worship and receive the sacrament of Holy Communion in their parish churches and also participate in weekly gatherings of a class meeting organized by the Methodist society. These were groups usually of no more than twelve people, convened and led by a layperson, gathering in a neighborhood to read Scripture, to talk about the joys and challenges of life in Christ, and to pray together.

Q.25. Did the class leaders get training somewhere?

A. That's where the connection came in. Methodism was a connectional society. The class meetings were all expressions of the same rule of life first recorded in the General Rules. There the class leader's basic duties were outlined, such as visiting each class member at least once a week—"to inquire how every soul in his class prospers; not only how each person observes the Rules, but how he grows in the knowledge and love of God" (LM, Q11). Class leaders collected whatever offering the class could give to support the Methodist society and help the poor. They then brought that offering, along with a report of the class meeting's progress, to the steward of the society in the town or region. Even more searching questions were the usual format for meetings of the "band-societies" (classes of those more experienced in Christian disciplines): "What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?" or, "What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?" and the like ("Rules of the Band-Societies," 1738). These questions grew out of years of conversation as Methodists reflected on their experiences and tried to grow more fully in Christian practices. And, of course, John Wesley was a prolific writer and continually provided the class leaders with sermons and tracts to help them be more effective in their work.

Q.26. Is this history really relevant? Most United Methodist churches don't even have class meetings any more, do they?

A. Actually, class meetings are a vital part of United Methodist life in many parts of the global connection and in various branches of the Wesleyan and Methodist traditions. Many Sunday school classes have a spirit of collective study, prayer, and mutual accountability and support resonant with the early class meetings. And there are more small groups for study, prayer, and action—such as DISCIPLE Bible studies and mission

teams—in many local churches than ever before. As in early Methodism, most of these groups are led by laypersons.

Q.27. With a term like *class leader*, it sounds like Methodism was focused on leadership from the beginning. Everybody from business to government to non-governmental organizations talks about “leadership.” Do Wesleyan and Methodist traditions have something distinct to say about leadership today?

A. United Methodism today has a lot to teach about leadership. We hope and trust that our own leaders will exemplify what we have learned.

(1.) Leadership is a *discipline*. Methodist leaders have always been expected to be faithful to a rule of life so that they could lead others in that rule, embracing practices such as study of Scripture, prayer, worship, fasting, Holy Communion, and giving to others—especially to the poor. Methodist conferences have held leaders to a particular discipline of self-examination and renewal. This is evident in questions of the Large Minutes such as “Why are the people under our care no better?” and “Why is our preaching not effective?” (LM, Q31, Q34). Hence the name of the church’s book of order—*Discipline*; and every United Methodist leader is expected to have a *Book of Discipline* at hand for study, guidance, and inspiration.

(2.) Leadership is *service*. A leader in the church is called to serve as Jesus Christ served, to “embody the teachings of Jesus in servant ministries” by giving his or her life to witness of the reign of God and service to God’s mission in the world (*Book of Discipline*, ¶131).

(3.) Leadership is *communal*. No individual can grow in the Christian life alone; only through the “social holiness” of life together in a community seeking God can anyone become a fruitful disciple. Likewise, leadership is not a solitary role but a dynamic process within a community of faith. Leadership expresses and guides the visions and intentions of a community as, together, its people bear witness to God’s love and justice and serve God’s reign. “The ministry of all Christians is complementary . . . All United Methodists are summoned and sent by Christ to live and work together in mutual interdependence” (*Book of Discipline*, ¶129).

(4.) Leadership is *connectional*. The point of Christian leadership is not the success of one congregation or the popularity of an individual pastor. Leadership is shared across a whole connection of local churches and conferences that hold a common discipline and work toward a common mission. Leadership is affirmed and authorized connectionally, and it is expressed connectionally as United Methodist leaders work together to build up our witness and service. Leadership is more fruitful and effective when it is sustained in a web of relationships and common commitments.

(5.) In sum, leadership is a *covenant*. It is a connectional covenant, grounded in a common life of discipline and service and supported by the work of churches and conferences in many places. It is a holy covenant, affirmed in the collective voices of United Methodist leaders in conference, repeating words composed for a covenant service by John Wesley: “I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt.” These are five dimensions of leadership about which United Methodists have learned a lot over the years. They would be of great benefit to other organizations, too.

Q.28. But where does leadership come from? How do people realize that they could or should be leaders in the church?

A. John Wesley was a devout Christian, educated in Scripture and the Christian classics, and even ordained as a priest in the Church of England. But he was no leader until he found his calling. Then, through disciplined searching and Christian conversation with others in his community of faith, he realized what God was asking him to do. He began to preach outdoors, to travel all over his country, to write tirelessly, and to organize a connectional society. Wesley's search for what God was calling him to do has been an inspiration ever since.

Q.29. So leadership is also a *calling*?

A. Yes—a calling and *many* callings. In the Spirit's wisdom people may be called to many different forms of leadership based on their particular gifts.

Q.30. But how do baptized Christians know that they are called to any particular form of leadership, or even that they are called to leadership at all?

A. We believe the vocation of leadership is both individual and communal. That is, the *individual*, after much disciplined searching and prayer, knows an "inward call" from God. And that call is fully discerned and affirmed only in *community* with others—the "outward call" of the church. In conversation with a community of faith, what the individual has discerned as a movement of the Spirit is tested, confirmed, modified, or sent back for further discernment by a fellowship of others in this common life. This balance—the conversation of inward and outward call—is essential in the discernment of leadership.

Q.31. Where do conversations about a vocation to leadership take place?

A. The distinctive charism of The United Methodist Church is that we ground all forms of leadership in the connection: the interwoven witness of conferences and the ministries United Methodists authorize, that all together constitute the United Methodist mission in today's world. No congregation stands alone and no form of ministry is autonomous. We are all connected, and in every place of service—the community of a local church, the region of a district, the wider territory of an annual conference, the sweep of jurisdictional and central conferences embracing various states or nations, and the global reach of General Conference—we meet in conference to extend our ministry and mission as a connection.

Q.32. But don't local churches have annual meetings in which they set their own congregation's goals for mission in the coming year?

A. True, every local church does have "a definite evangelistic, nurture, and witness responsibility for its members and the surrounding area and a missional outreach responsibility to the local and global community" (*Book of Discipline*, ¶204). And the plans for extending that mission are endorsed in a charge conference that meets at least once a year and includes all church officers.

Q.33. How is that different from an annual meeting of a congregation?

A. The charge conference is called and presided over by an officer of the connection, a district superintendent appointed to represent the connection in each local church in his or her district. The charge conference is not a self-constituted congregational meeting. It is part of the interlocking web of conferences that expresses the connectional mission in every place. It is the “connecting link” between the local and the general church (*Book of Discipline*, ¶247.1). In many places the charge conference includes more than one local church—two or more churches on a circuit served by the same pastor. That makes even more vivid the declaration in the *Discipline* that the local church is “a connectional society . . . gather[ed] . . . in fellowship [and] an inherent part of the church universal” (¶203).

Q.34. What is the role of charge conference in calling people to leadership in ministry?

A. All forms of leadership of the people of God in ministry begin with the authorization, prayers, and support of a charge conference—the connectional conference in each place. The major lay officers of a local church or charge are nominated by a committee on lay leadership and elected by the charge conference. The committee on pastor-parish relations (PPRC) (called in many churches the committee on staff-parish relations—SPRC), its members also elected by the charge conference, has among its primary duties “to enlist, interview, evaluate, review, and recommend annually to the charge conference lay preachers and persons for candidacy for ordained ministry” and “to enlist and refer to the General Board of Global Ministries persons for candidacy for missionary service” (*Book of Discipline*, ¶259.2.g [9]). By this process of recruitment, evaluation, and commendation by the PPRC (or SPRC) to the charge conference, for instance, lay persons with particular gifts for speaking, teaching, care giving, or organizing may be recommended as lay speakers by a charge conference. Moreover, candidates for licensed pastoral ministry or for the ordained ministries of deacon and elder can only become candidates with the recommendation—by written ballot, no less—of the charge conference of the local church in which they are members. That recommendation has to be renewed every year. Thus, the charge conferences, and lay leadership and pastor-parish relations committees in particular, have a fundamental and essential role in leadership development for the church.

Q.35. What happens after these charge conference actions? There must be more to connectionalism than just that conference.

A. Yes, there is much more, appropriate to the form of leadership. Officers of the charge or local church have many opportunities for training and support from district and annual conference units of the connection. Lay speakers are recognized and their certification renewed annually by a district or conference committee on lay speaking. Some lay speakers or other trained lay leaders may be certified as lay missionaries or lay ministers, joining in ministry teams with clergy mentors to provide leadership in organizing new churches, conducting worship, and developing programs of formation and service. Candidates for ordained ministries come under the care of a district committee on ordained ministry, and as they proceed toward orders they increasingly relate to the annual conference and its board of ordained ministry. In short, all forms of ministry in United Methodism are connectional in nature. And any persons authorized for forms of

leadership in ministry beyond their own charge conference are essentially under the care of the connection.

Part IV—What Is United Methodism’s Heritage of Ordained Ministries within the Ministry of the Baptized?

Q.36. Most people would say that the calling for which the Methodists have always been best known is the call to preach. How does that influence today’s understandings of licensed and ordained ministry?

A. Many of our assumptions and practices of ministry in United Methodism are shaped by this heritage of preaching.

(1.) Preaching has always been a *defining feature* of Methodism, the companion to the class meetings that encouraged growth in the Christian life. Preachers went to the market centers and churchyards, chapels and open fields, proclaiming the gospel of God’s grace and love and calling people to repentance and new life. To support this *metanoia*, or new mind and new life, they invited them into the discipline of class meetings and a rule of life that would guide them to perfection in love. Proclaiming such words of promise and challenge is as urgent today as ever. And by the power of the Spirit, many persons today receive the “call to preach.”

(2.) Preaching in Methodism has always been a calling fulfilled by both *lay and ordained* persons. Most preachers in Wesley’s day were laymen (women being restricted by social custom to proclaiming the gospel in private settings). Wesley took great pains to justify lay preaching, arguing that many preachers in the Bible were not priests or pastors, and that preaching could be an “extra-ordinary” call—a special ministry beyond the ordained orders of the priesthood—if God needed the work to be done and sent the Holy Spirit to inspire it (LM, Q24). Most of the early American Methodist preachers similarly were laymen, and today nearly one-third of United Methodist charges in the United States have pastors who are not ordained as elders. After American Methodists began ordaining, many preachers were ordained as elders. Together, lay and ordained preachers carried on the evangelistic call of spreading the Good News and scriptural holiness over the lands.

(3.) Preaching in Methodism has always been *connectional* in nature. The first preachers were “in connexion” with Mr. Wesley, meaning that they were authorized by him and met regularly with him in conference. They shared a common disciplined life of prayer, reading, and conversation, so that they would be in harmony about “what to teach, how to teach, and what to do” (“Minutes of Some Late Conversations”). As American Methodism grew, annual conferences became the authorizing bodies and gathering places for preachers to encourage one another in the work.

(4.) Preaching in Methodism is a *sent* ministry. Just as John Wesley tested and approved his preachers and assigned them their circuits, so today preachers continue to be licensed and authorized by annual conferences and appointed to their places by the bishop. Preachers are not called to a place by a local congregation. They are sent by the bishop acting on behalf of the connection. This is one of the essential ways in which United Methodism expresses its continuing nature as a mission movement—the sending of preachers (and many others in varied forms of ministry) to their places of service.

Q.37. What about the historic expression “traveling preacher”? Did all preachers travel?

A. Some preachers were local, appointed to a preaching place or circuit where they lived. Often they did other work, such as farming. But many preachers did indeed travel, in two senses. They traveled in their daily ministry, preaching, teaching, and providing pastoral care in multiple places along a circuit. And they traveled in a second sense—itinerating (the Latin-based word for travel) or moving from place to place as appointed by the bishop. Many preachers moved to a new place every year or every other year, and later at least every four years. And every appointment was and still is in effect only from one annual conference to the next. These traveling preachers were in covenant with one another, like a missionary order under vows. Each preacher entered into a traveling ministry as a way of life. Each received an appointment as a member of the itinerant order and agreed to go where sent.

Q.38. So how much of this heritage of preaching and itinerancy continues today?

A. There are some startling similarities across two hundred years. United Methodism has over 6,500 non-ordained local pastors and 2,100 associate members (full-time local pastors with advanced standing as conference members) appointed to charges in the United States by the bishop of their area. Two-thirds of the local pastors are part time and many hold jobs in addition to being a pastor. The *General Minutes* show that central conferences in total have slightly more local pastors than ordained elders and deacons. Of course, many full-time local pastors across the connection have served under appointment for years and have been appointed to a variety of charges, just as if they were itinerant. But they are not part of the itinerancy covenant, so they do not have to receive—or accept—an appointment. Meanwhile, the itinerant preachers, numbering over 20,000, are still in a mutual covenant, agreeing to go where sent. Of course, some of the itinerant pastors today stay in one place for a decade or more, and if they and their congregations are well suited, their long tenure can make for a more effective ministry. Ironically, some local pastors look more itinerant than the traveling ones, and some itinerant pastors look more local than the local ones.

Q.39. So are local and traveling preachers related to the annual conference in the same way?

A. (1.) Historically their relationship was quite different. Only the traveling preachers in the covenant of itinerancy were members of annual conference. Collectively the itinerant preachers constituted the connection, which for the practicalities of travel was divided into annual conferences. Here the preachers met annually to build up one another in their widely scattered work and to receive their appointments from the bishops. Local preachers continued to be essential to the mission of the church in each place, and were members of the quarterly (charge) conference. But in a sense they extended Wesley’s rationale of the “extra-ordinary” call of preaching, because they were lay persons outside the itinerating order of preachers yet often showed more zeal for spreading the gospel and getting people into disciplined fellowship than the itinerating preachers did.

(2.) Only in 1980 were full-time local pastors granted clergy membership in annual conferences, twelve years after the associate member category was created. In 1996 clergy membership was extended to part-time local pastors. So local pastors and associate members have voice and vote in conference about essential issues of mission and money.

But they still are not in “full connection” with the conference, that is, they do not participate in the constitutional powers that originally belonged to the itinerating preachers: acting on matters of clergy relations with annual conference, electing ordained delegates to constitute the General (and jurisdictional or central) Conference, and voting on constitutional amendments.

Q.40. If local pastors are not ordained, how can they be eligible to be clergy members of annual conference? Aren't “clergy” by definition ordained?

A. Not in United Methodism. In our denomination the term *clergy* has come to embrace any form of licensed or ordained ministry. It functions as a kind of legal term to convey certain rights and duties in the church. It also communicates certain legal standing in civil society, such as the power to sign a state marriage license or to declare a housing allowance under income tax laws.

Q.41. Well, then, how broad is the term *pastor*? If all local pastors are clergy, are all clergy pastors?

A. In United Methodism, definitely not. While all local pastors serve as pastors of local churches or charges, many other clergy are not pastors. For example, ordained deacons are not normally appointed as pastors in charge. Over 3,000 ordained elders are appointed to ministries other than local church pastorates that extend the mission of the annual conference and the connection. These include vital ministries such as teaching in colleges and seminaries, chaplaincy in hospitals, homes, and prisons, and superintendency of the connection. Elders in the context of their extension ministries regularly do what pastors do, such as preach, celebrate the sacraments, or provide pastoral care, but they usually do not serve simultaneously as pastors.

Q.42. So, all local pastors are pastors and all are clergy, but they are not in full connection with an annual conference. What does “full connection” mean?

A. Historically, to be in full connection meant that a preacher had been voted into the covenant order of itinerant missionary preachers whose lives and work were fully connected with one another in the annual conference (LM, Q51). Until the late nineteenth century, the preachers in full connection constituted the annual conference as its only members, and logically, then, elected from among themselves the delegates who constituted the General Conference. Since the constitution and discipline of Methodism in the United States had been established originally by the traveling preachers in full connection, they were the ones who voted on amendments. And as a self-governing conference body the traveling preachers decided who should be admitted to full connection, granted retirement, or other changes in conference relations.

Q.43. Does full connection still carry the same rights and responsibilities?

A. In many ways, it does. The constitutional functions remain, but they have also been expanded and extended in various ways:

(1.) Laity became members of annual conference in the Methodist Episcopal churches gradually over a period of one hundred years, beginning with a lay conference meeting in parallel with the members in full connection, and later on the basis of one lay member for each pastoral charge, and finally, in 1976, with additional at-large members to equal the

number of clergy members. Over time the lay members, too, began voting on constitutional amendments and electing their own delegates to constitute General Conference. In 1996 lay membership in the board of ordained ministry was established, and those members can now vote on conference relations of clergy.

(2.) In 1996 the deacon became an order of clergy in full connection as well. For many years, persons who gave a lifetime of service to the church through ministries such as education, music, and mission had little formal standing in the annual conference or authorization for their ministries. From 1976–1996, such persons could be consecrated as diaconal ministers holding lay membership status in the conference. In 1996 the call of such persons to Word and Service became an ordained office. While deacons locate their own placements and bishops are under no obligation to find places for them, deacons do have to be appointed by the bishop and they constitute an order in full connection with the annual conference. So they have the same full constitutional rights and responsibilities as elders.

(3.) The standing of local pastors as clergy members has been further established through a constitutional amendment adopted in 2005 that specifically designates them as clergy members of annual conference (2004 Amendment VII, new ¶32 of Constitution).

Q.44. How was full connection related to being ordained?

A. Membership in the conference came first, because a traveling preacher in full connection was making a lifetime commitment to the covenant order of itinerants. Election as a member in full connection was sealed by ordination as an elder. As the bishop laid on hands and pronounced the words, “Take authority . . .” the conference authorized the ministry of an elder in parallel with the ordained ministries of priests and pastors in other traditions. This basic logic—election to membership in full connection first, followed by ordination as an elder—is still in place. The same logic now extends to deacons, though the qualifications and covenants of the two orders are distinct.

Q.45. Local pastors are not in full connection, then, and are not ordained, either. Are they still considered fully pastors?

A. (1.) Local pastors “share with the elders the responsibilities and duties of a pastor” and carry a pastoral authority “derived from the authority given in ordination” as elder (*Book of Discipline*, ¶340). They can administer the sacraments in the charge to which they are appointed.

(2.) But local pastors do not have pastoral authority outside of the charges to which they are appointed, while elders can administer the sacraments anywhere they are called to do so. Local pastors are not members of the order of elders, who have been tested and accepted into covenant together for a lifetime of service in mutual accountability. Local pastors have not attained the same substantive academic preparation, received the same intensity of mentoring, or been subject to the same degree of examination of their readiness or practice of ministry. Elders who have been affirmed through this rigorous process become members of an order of mutual commitment, support, and accountability. Membership in this order is now essential to their identity and life purpose, as they give their lifetime to the ministry of an elder. They subject themselves to the appointive authority of a bishop acting on behalf of the connection and in a sense as head of the order. Elders agree to be sent in ministry to fulfill the mission of the connection.

Q.46. The authorization of local pastors sounds derivative from the elders in full connection. Is there any ritual that marks the authority of their ministry?

A. Branches of Methodism that eventually formed The United Methodist Church at one time did provide for ordination as a local elder, so that this work would not have solely a derivative authority. At present, though, local pastors are licensed but not ordained, commissioned, consecrated, anointed, or through any consistent ritual act authorized and sent to their ministries by annual conferences.

Q.47. What do other Christian traditions think of United Methodism's practice of authorizing persons not ordained as elders to celebrate the sacraments?

A. The extent of this practice in The United Methodist Church—with about one-third of pastoral charges in the United States being served by pastors not ordained as elders—is exceptional in the church ecumenical. It is a hindrance to mutual recognition of ministries among communions and traditions with whom United Methodism is in dialogue. Local churches of a more congregational polity, such as Baptists, normally ordain their own pastors to sacramental authority. Churches of a more organic traditional polity, such as Anglicans and Catholics, ordain priests to sacramental authority through an episcopal diocese. In neither ecclesial wing is administration of the sacraments by persons not ordained as priests, presbyters, or elders acceptable.

Q.48. Is our current practice of authorizing persons not ordained as elders to celebrate the sacraments in keeping with our Wesleyan and Methodist heritage?

A. No. John Wesley commenced his ordinations in 1784 under what he considered exigent circumstances of the need of the American Methodist people for a priest to administer the sacraments. In distress over the flight of Anglican priests from the American colonies during the war of independence, and the failure of the Church of England to ordain his preachers as priests for service in America, Wesley sought exceptional justification in the practices of the early church to support his authority to ordain them himself. Only what he called “a very uncommon train of providences” in which the United States became free of England and hence of “legal jurisdiction” by either the English church or state spurred Wesley to this action. And he did it because administration of the sacraments without the authority of ordination was not even imaginable to him. He would never have contemplated persons administering the sacraments who were not ordained as elder.

Q.49. So how does The United Methodist Church justify this practice?

A.(1.) The church has not been explicit in providing ecclesiological grounds for the sacramental authority of pastors not ordained as elders. The overarching rationale commonly repeated is the missional exigency of providing the sacraments in every local church even if ordained elders are not available. The mission of the church to make disciples of Jesus Christ, this common argument goes, is hindered when the sacrament of Holy Baptism is not provided for bringing new Christians into the family of God, and when the sacrament of Holy Communion is not celebrated to sustain the life of the faithful. Therefore the church should insure that the sacraments are available in every

place of worship. This rationale echoes Wesley’s sense of urgency—but without Wesley’s ecclesiology of authority for administering the sacraments.

(2.) United Methodism is not explicit about the ecclesiological source of this “missional” sacramental authority. In the *Book of Discipline*, the “license for pastoral ministry” is described functionally as a requirement for “all persons not ordained as elders who are appointed to preach and conduct divine worship” (§315). The board of ordained ministry must approve all such persons (§§315.5.b and 634.2.g) and bring their names before the clergy session of the annual conference for affirmation. On these grounds the authority of the local pastor could be said to derive from the clergy in full connection of the annual conference, particular the elders whose ministry the local pastors share. Local pastors could be said to be extending the ministry of the ordained elders collectively, into places where no ordained elder is available.

(3.) A second possible source of sacramental authority is episcopal. Local pastors are appointed by the bishop, who is acting to further the mission of the connection. Sacramental authority could be said to derive from this appointment, and hence from the authority of the bishop. But in United Methodism bishops are elders, not a separate order, and the church has been reluctant to attribute forms of authority to bishops that do not derive directly from conferences and the order of elder.

(4.) In any case, the current *Book of Discipline* does not provide explicit justification for the sacramental authority of local pastors, and to say that it is a missional exception that simply extends from the ordination of elders or from the authority of the annual conference or the bishop is not adequate in a church in which a third of the pastors are not ordained as elders.

Part V—What is the Particular Ministry of the Ordained?

Q.50. Ordination obviously is critical to our understanding of ministry. What is United Methodism’s understanding of ordination?

A. (1.) Ordination is the *work of the Holy Spirit* through the church. The *Discipline* affirms that “ordination to this ministry is a gift from God to the church. In ordination, the church affirms and continues the apostolic ministry through persons empowered by the Holy Spirit” (§303). The United Methodist ritual for ordination, in continuity with Christian ordination rituals reaching back to the early church, affirms the essential role of the Holy Spirit. When the bishop lays on hands, the accompanying words are: “Almighty Father/God, pour upon *Name* the Holy Spirit for the office and work of a deacon/an elder in Christ’s holy church.” As the Holy Spirit through baptism bestows gifts for ministry on the whole people of God, so the Holy Spirit through ordination provides the gifts necessary to fulfill the offices of ordained ministry.

(2.) Ordination is a *particular calling* within the ministry of the whole people of God. All baptized Christians are called into ministry in Christ’s name and receive gifts of the Holy Spirit to carry out their ministries. Within that one vocation of all Christians, some are called to “specialized ministries” (*Book of Discipline*, §137) intended to bring “focus, direction, and continuity” to the ministries of the whole people of God (§303.4). When the inward call of individuals to these ministries on behalf of the whole Christian community has been confirmed by the outward call of the community, the persons so called are “set apart” (§302) for special responsibilities of building up the ministries of all

Christians. This calling is not above or beyond the common vocation of all baptized Christians but a ministry within the common ministry, carried out in “mutual interdependence” with all the gifts for ministry in the community of faith (§129).

(3.) Ordination is an *office* in the church. From the earliest centuries the church has ordered its common life so that the community of faith could be more consistent and effective in its worship, teaching, and witness. Persons in whom the community perceives certain gifts of the Spirit are ordained to particular offices and authorized by the community to carry out ministries particular to their order. These offices have had recognizable consistency across nearly two millennia. Elders (*presbyteros*, or priest) have administered the sacraments, preached and interpreted Scripture, and exercised oversight of the ministries of the congregation. Deacons (*diakonos*) have extended the community’s ministries to those unable to participate in the congregation, and generally to people in need, as well as assisted in worship and sacrament. Bishops (*episkopos*, or superintendent) have had oversight of the Christian communities in a region, and have represented the unity of the church that binds diverse communities of faith into one vocation and one witness.

(4.) Collectively the persons ordained to a certain office constitute an *order* of particular shared vocation within the people of God. Those ordained to an order are in covenant with one another. They share a disciplined common rule of life in study, prayer, conversation, and service. They support and care for one another in their individual ministries. They hold one another accountable for continued growth in knowledge and faith and for fulfilling their common vocation.

(5.) Ordination is deeply *personal* and profoundly shapes the ordinand’s *identity* in the life of the church. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the ordained person gives her or his life to the ministries of the Christian community and is called by the community to essential roles of building up the people of God in faith and witness. The United Methodist Church makes provision for ordained persons to withdraw from their ministerial office and return the certificate of their order and conference membership. This marks a change in function, but does not mean that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer effective in such persons’ lives.

(6.) Ordination is *communal*. Historically the churches have understood ordained offices to be critical to the wellbeing, flourishing, and good order of the Christian community. The churches have found that without these continuing offices, Christian communities dissipate into disputing factions and contests over power and authority. Ironically, practices of ordination have hardly prevented conflict and schism in the churches, and in fact have been the source of many disputes. Nonetheless, through the constancy of ordination The United Methodist Church trusts that local churches and the connection as a whole have a fuller possibility of being blessed with orderly and inspired worship and sacrament, conscientious pastoral care, thoughtful teaching, dynamic and well-organized mission, and many other ministries that call out and build up the ministries of all the people of God. Thus laity and clergy of the church recommend candidates for ordination, assent to the ordination of candidates in the ordination ritual, and may assist in the laying on of hands.

(7.) Ordination is *leadership* of the connection, its local churches and its mission. Since 1996 the *Discipline* has been explicit that ordained persons are set apart to lead. The primary form of this leadership is “the forming of Christian disciples in the covenant

community of the congregation” so that they may grow and be effective in “their witness to Jesus Christ in the world through acts of worship, devotion, compassion, and justice under the guidance of the Holy Spirit” (§136). Persons called to “lead in service and to equip others for this ministry” are ordained *deacon* (§303.2). Persons called to lead through preaching, administering the sacraments, and ordering the church’s life for mission and service through following the guidance of the *Discipline* are ordained *elder*. Bishops are called to lead through oversight of the connection, and “particularly to lead the Church in its mission of witness and service in the world” (§414.1).

Q.51. The term *leadership* in American culture is often synonymous with individual achievement and success that brings popularity and acclaim. How does The United Methodist Church understand the leadership of the ordained?

A. In The United Methodist Church leadership is always understood as “servant leadership.” The leader serves the wellbeing of the Christian community, inspired by the servant ministry of Jesus Christ who came not to be served, but to serve (*Book of Discipline*, §131). The United Methodist Church does not intend by this for its leaders to be subservient, however, submitting to the will of the most powerful or influential groups or persons in a local church or in the connection. Like all Christians, leaders are subservient to Christ and in following the teaching and example of Christ must exhort and challenge the local church or other place of ministry to be true to its calling of discipleship. The church exists as a witness to God’s transformation of the world, and often its leaders must point the way in speaking against evils such as violence and injustice, abuse and suffering, both within the Christian community and in the communities and societies in which the churches witness and serve. Faithfulness and integrity, not popularity and success, are the marks of servant leadership.

Q.52. If United Methodism understands the servanthood of its leaders as modeled on Christ, does it also believe in the continuity of its ordination from Christ and the apostles?

A. United Methodist ordination is indeed *apostolic*. The United Methodist Church, Wesleyan traditions, and Wesley himself have never taught the necessity or probability of an unbroken, tangible chain of ordination by the laying on of hands from the apostles to the present. But The United Methodist Church does believe that its ordinations, in carrying forward the ministries inspired and gifted by the Holy Spirit from the beginnings of the church, are in spiritual continuity with the church ecumenical across the ages. Thus in the ordination ritual we invoke the Holy Spirit with the laying on of hands, led by a bishop acting as shepherd of the household of God and as symbol of its unity.

Q.53. How is ordination in continuity with Christ’s ministry?

A. (1.) “Christian ministry is the expression of the mind and mission of Christ by a community of Christians” (*Book of Discipline*, §125). All baptized Christians carry out this ministry of servanthood in the world. The New Testament Greek term *diakonia* can be translated into English as either “ministry” or “service.” They are the same word and the same practice. Ministry in Christ’s name is the ministry of a servant whose life is given in witness to God’s mercy, love, and justice in the world.

(2.) The church ecumenical has achieved wide consensus in understanding the servant ministry of Christ to be expressed in three offices: prophetic, priestly, and kingly. Christ

proclaimed the gospel of the reign of God. Christ *presided* over the Table, breaking bread and sharing the cup as signs of his presence—his body and blood—in the world. Christ told parables and performed signs of a *new order* in which the blind see, the deaf hear, and the poor have good news preached to them (Luke 4). These offices now belong to the ministry of the whole people of God. Through their words and deeds, they *proclaim* the good news of salvation. Through their acts of hospitality, reconciliation, and peace in the world, they are *signs* of Christ's presence. Through their practices of justice and their care for the suffering and poor, they anticipate God's *new order* of creation.

(3.) Ordination brings this servanthood and these offices to explicit focus within the community of faith. Ordination exemplifies the ministry of the Word—the *prophetic* office—in teaching and preaching, and in leadership of the people in the common ministry of proclamation. Ordination exemplifies the ministry of sacrament—the *priestly* office—in presidency over the Table and in leadership of the people in remembering the gifts of God and bearing those gifts in the world. Ordination exemplifies the ministry of order—the *kingly* office—in administration of the church for its service and mission and in preparation of laypersons for leadership and action. To exemplify and to lead—these are the key mandates for the ordained.

Q.54. But all the ordained do not share all the same offices, right?

A. That's correct. United Methodism recognizes two orders with distinct offices in the church.

(1.) Deacons lead in service and equip others for this ministry. They teach, lead worship, assist in the sacraments, and proclaim the Word. Their particular charism is to relate the gathered service of worship with the congregation's service in the world, and "to embody, articulate, and lead" the people in their mission in the world (*Book of Discipline*, ¶328). Thus, deacons are ordained to Word and Service.

(2.) Elders also lead in service, though as a general foundation for their responsibilities in leading the people in worship and proclaiming the Word, in administering the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, and in ordering, guiding, and equipping the ministry and mission of the community of faith. Their particular charism is pastoral oversight and presidency in the common ministry of the people of God. They are ordained to Service, Word, Sacrament, and Order.

Q.55. These definitions certainly show the aspirations of United Methodists for ordered ministry. But as definitions they hardly meet a logical standard of establishing what belongs exclusively to one office or another. For example, if all Christians are called to service, how can the offices of deacon and elder both be defined by service?

A. Ministry belongs to the whole people of God as disciples of Jesus Christ. All carry forward Christ's servanthood and Christ's offices. The ordained are not set apart for ministry from which others are excluded. Rather, the ordained are set apart to exemplify and embody the ministry of the whole people and to lead them in its fulfillment. What the ordained actually do—their functions in the community of faith—should not diminish or subtract but multiply the ministries of the people. Their functions of leadership are what distinguish their ministries. Just as the features that make a person distinctive may also be found in other persons, and the characteristics that make a congregation distinctive may also be found in other congregations, so the functions distinct to each order are shared by

the people but are particularly visible and effective in the ordained on behalf of the whole community. The ministries of the ordained are not professionalized substitutes for the ministry of all, but generative of the multiple and varied ministries for which the community of faith is gifted by the Spirit. That is what we mean by the church looking to the ordained for leadership. The empowerment of the Spirit for ministry is not restricted or hoarded by the ordination of leaders, as if gifts were scarce and there were only so much Spirit to go around. The power of the Spirit circulates abundantly through the community of faith bringing ever-new and unrealized gifts to expression. The ordained help call out, equip, and organize these charisms for greater effectiveness.

Q.56. So both deacons and elders are set apart as exemplars of service to which all baptized persons are called. But service doesn't have quite the same meaning for each order?

A. No, it doesn't, because the church expresses service in its corporate life in various ways. For deacons, service is the characteristic ministry and distinctive identity of the order. Deacons are called and ordained by the church to lead the people in bridging and integrating the service of worship and service in the world. They devote their lives and ministries to creating effective ways for the people to live out God's compassion for the hurts and injustices of the world, and to carry forward Christ's ministry of reconciliation in the face of conflict and violence within communities and among nations. Deacons embody and lead the whole community of faith in undertaking the Christian task of bearing what we say and do in the sanctuary, gathered around pulpit and Table, into the neighborhoods and communities in which we live. For elders, service is foundational and sets the tone and purpose of all the offices of Christ in which they are called to lead. Their characteristic ministry and distinctive identity lie in integrating their ministries of Word, Sacrament, and Order and carrying them out as practices of witness to the servanthood of Christ.

Q.57. How about ordination to Word—is that also different for deacons and elders? Does Word have the same meaning for both orders?

A. In the broadest sense, Word has the same meaning. All ordained ministry is meant to set apart certain persons to exemplify the witness of the people of God: a witness to the saving grace and loving justice of God manifested in the Word of God, and particularly in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. At the same time, for the sake of the building up of the community of faith, deacons exemplify this witness of the Word in a manner distinct from that of elders. Deacons preach, but it is not a normative expectation of deacons as it is of elders. Rather, deacons proclaim, through words, programs, classes, and mission work—in sum, through their service—the saving grace of Christ. Deacons are not required to complete the same theological education that elders normally do (though some deacons do). But the specialized knowledge that many deacons attain—in social sciences or health sciences, for example—will give them a rich sense of the situations in community and world in which the church's witness of the Word must be expressed. For elders, the Word proclaimed in preaching is a normative expectation and central to their identity, especially in the Wesleyan tradition of preaching as a distinctive mark of the movement. Elders are expected to prepare themselves for effective preaching and

interpretation of the Word, even if they do not exercise a regular preaching ministry in a particular appointment.

Q.58. In what way are the elder's other offices—Sacrament and Order—understood?

A. The elder's offices are understood in integration with one another. All are grounded in the servanthood of Jesus Christ as a witness to Christ's ministry of self-giving love.

(1.) The elder presides over the ritual acts that *constitute the church*: Holy Baptism that initiates persons into the household of faith and Holy Communion that gathers and sustains the community of faith at the table of Christ. Through ordination, the community of faith names, sets apart, and authorizes persons for this presidency.

(2.) The elder presides for the sake of the good order of the community in its constitutive practices of baptizing into the Lord and communing with the Lord. That same presidency for the good order of the community is then extended into the elder's *administration* of the whole life of the congregation, following the disciplined rule of life through which we are in covenant with one another as United Methodists.

(3.) This balanced integration of Sacrament and Order *exemplifies* the ministries of the whole people of God. The people gather around the Font and the Table, where God's grace is promised and known in the sacraments. Fed at the Table and gifted by the Spirit, they go out to serve, their ministries ordered for the up-building of the community of faith and the effectiveness of the church's witness and service in the world.

Q.59. Deacons extend the church's ministries into the world. Wouldn't it make sense for deacons to be able to baptize and to preside at the table of Holy Communion especially as needed outside the walls of the church, and thereby extend the sacraments to persons unable to be present with a gathered congregation?

A. The church indeed does need to extend the sacraments beyond its walls. However, the authority to preside at the Font and the Table is integral to pastoral oversight and administration of the order and discipline of the church. Deacons are not called and set apart to be pastors and normally do not receive a license for pastoral ministry. Were they to serve as pastors with sacramental authority, the church would be sending one of two contradictory messages: either that all ministry is basically service and therefore no ordination for sacramental authority in addition to service is really necessary or that deacons and elders hold essentially the same office, in which case the two separate orders are redundant.

Q.60. But isn't it unfair that deacons cannot celebrate Baptism and Holy Communion? Doesn't this create inequality and a pecking order of status with the elder holding a "higher" office?

A. To say that two orders have different offices is hardly to say that they are unequal. Deacons will offer many gifts to the church that are not possible for elders, and vice versa. Deacons often have specialized education and experience, including master's degrees in fields other than the Master of Divinity, which enable deacons to offer unique and effective leadership in the church. Both orders exemplify and lead the ministries of the whole people of God, but in different forms. The church needs deacons to lead in service and elders to lead in presidency and pastoral oversight. That's why the two orders exist.

Q.61. Many people wonder if it isn't just common sense that deacons should have the right to celebrate the sacraments. Isn't that in the end a fair conclusion to all this discussion?

A. No. The question is not "who has the right" to celebrate. Ordination as an office of the church is not a right but a form of *authority* from the community of faith. *Access* to ordination is by all means a matter of rights, in that all persons who discern a call to ordained ministry should have the right to pursue the process of candidacy and examination for their readiness and the church's affirmation of their call. But ordination as an office is a matter of authority. Ordination is the form through which the community of faith authorizes persons to carry out certain offices for the sake of the good order, wellbeing, and fulfillment of the mission of the church. In the ordination ritual we seek the blessing of the Holy Spirit to pour out on those to whom we grant such authority the gifts they need to fulfill the office for which the church has authorized them.

Part VI—What Are the Challenges for Ordained Ministry Today?

Q.62. Ordination is a distinct and challenging vocation in the church. But the statistics about leadership in ministry are not very promising. The data show a sharp decline in the number of persons on probation to become elders and notably fewer people under age 35 seeking to enter ordained ministry. Isn't this a critical problem?

A. The United Methodist Church shares with most Christian traditions in the United States a struggle to call and encourage younger people to go into ordained ministry. Twenty years ago, over 3,200 elders were under age 35 (15 percent of the total). Today, about 850 are under age 35 (a little less than 5 percent). In addition, the total number of elders has decreased over those 20 years by about 15 percent. Every year many annual conferences celebrate more retirements of elders than ordinations. For the past several years, the number of probationary elders in the United States has remained static at about 2,200. Meanwhile, the number of probationary deacons has doubled to nearly 250. But a similar percentage of deacons are under age 35—about 5 percent of the 1,200 deacons in the United States.

Q.63. Why are these trends so prevalent in the United States?

A. We believe there are many factors that work together to create the current picture.

(1.) The United States, along with European societies, has enjoyed a level of material prosperity and economic growth in the past fifty years that is unprecedented in human history. We do not argue that this has made the people who enjoy its benefits less generous and caring human beings. But prosperity can cast a shadow on forms of work that bring low salaries and an ethic of altruism. Many young people today give of their time and resources to help others in rebuilding communities destroyed by natural disasters or in myriad other forms of volunteer work. These ministries are usually short term. Committing one's life to ordained ministry is a different challenge.

(2.) Ordained leadership of congregations in particular is more challenging than ever, under conditions that may lack sufficient compensations in a prosperous era. Persons appointed as pastors in charge often find themselves thrown into controversies over worship and music, triangulated between factions seeking control of congregational

governance, or marginalized from the relational networks of longtime members accustomed to making all the decisions. Meanwhile, church activities compete for time and attention with mass-media entertainment, shopping, and the general frenetic pace of people's lives.

(3.) The most public, visible models of ordained pastoral leadership in the United States today are heavily ideological, emphasizing rapid growth of very large congregations around the charismatic qualities of a single pastor and preacher—almost always male. While few of the churches attaining enormous publicity for their multimillion dollar facilities and full-service programs have experienced a pastoral succession yet, they are touted as models even for churches that have a continuous history for over two hundred years. This one-way road of modeling and learning, suggesting that local churches and denominations with long histories and connectional relationships are irrelevant and have nothing to teach in an age of religious entrepreneurialism, is a demoralizing path for ministry candidates who do not have a call to megachurch ministry.

(4.) Too many persons become ordained pastors only to become disheartened or drawn to other vocations. Retention is a problem no doubt because of the factors listed above, as well as the persistence of debts from educational expenses without adequate means of paying them. But retention is an especially critical issue for female clergy. United Methodism has marked fifty years of ordaining women as elders and deacons. But while women predominate among deacons, they struggle along as a minority among elders. In many parts of the United Methodist connection women are discouraged from becoming pastors at all, or find themselves appointed to a succession of local churches that reject or fail to respond to their leadership. Few women in the United States serve as pastors of local churches with one thousand members or more.

Q.64. Are conditions more favorable to ordained ministry in regions other than the United States?

A. The appeal of Christian love and justice is even more compelling in regions of acute suffering and poverty around the world. But a lack of resources makes the nurture and support of ordained ministry more difficult—in the very regions that most need leadership. For example, The United Methodist Church in sub-Saharan Africa is growing rapidly. Yet a lack of basic forms of communication that help knit a congregation together, such as telephones or email, together with constant social upheavals in many regions, make the church situation volatile. The churches have difficulty retaining young people long enough to nurture them in the faith, and thus have trouble identifying and calling young persons to ordained ministry. Once serving in ministry, pastors and other leaders work under conditions that try the soul: from simple lack of gasoline to fuel a car for traveling a circuit of local churches to widespread suffering from AIDS that decimates families and communities to failed land reform that exacerbates poverty to cycles of violence between governments and rebel groups. So growth in membership and in a desire to learn about Christian faith outstrip the development of trained leadership in preaching, teaching, and care; yet local churches do continue to call and mentor leaders who can become effective pastors.

Q.65. There seems to be many reasons for persons to be discouraged from entering ordained ministerial leadership. Why would anyone want to answer this call?

A. (1.) People answer the call out of a passion to proclaim God’s grace and salvation, to serve in Christ’s name, and to respond to the world’s needs. This work has its own rewards in seeing the transformation of lives touched by the gospel. In fact, a recent survey of clergy in various denominations in the United States reflected a high level of satisfaction with pastoral ministry as a life’s work. Despite all the challenges—or perhaps because of them—most pastoral leaders remain deeply committed to the ministry to which they were called.

(2.) These committed pastors and their congregations need to be more outspoken about the joys and possibilities of ordained leadership in the churches. The same study found that half of the congregations and parishes surveyed had sent no one into ordained leadership in the past five years. The churches must focus more deliberately on growing their own leaders and giving them the support and encouragement they need to follow their call.

(3.) Bishops and district superintendents, annual conferences, and local churches need to be more intentional about celebrating the gifts and commitments of ordained ministers. The United Methodist Church would benefit immensely from a broad and growing spirit of gratitude—thanksgiving for the amazing variety of elders and deacons and their accompanying gifts of the Spirit that offer leadership to our churches and institutions. Because out of gratitude comes generosity: a spirit of giving that inspires more and more people to give their lives to “Christ’s ministry of outreaching love” (*Book of Discipline*, ¶125).

Q. 66. Is the current *Book of Discipline*, in format, style, and content, encouraging to persons considering a call to ordained ministry?

A. We think not. The present paragraphs on ordained ministry read too much like a rule book of regulations and requirements that must be met if an annual conference is even to consider a person’s candidacy. The *Discipline* paragraphs, especially Section I on the meaning of ordination (¶¶301-304), do not invite people to consider whether God is calling them to ordained ministry. The paragraphs lack vibrant advocacy of the shared vocation for ministry of the whole people of God, the process of discernment through which a community of faith calls and encourages its leaders, and the formation and nurture of gifts for ordained ministry that develop over time, in community with others.

Q. 67. So what should be added?

A. A new paragraph on the “Vocation of Ordained Ministry” should describe the unique joys and challenges of ordained ministry, the process of discernment for both the individual and the community of faith, and the characteristics the church is seeking in candidates. The paragraph could be constructed from material in these Conversations: the discernment of vocation—character, gifts, and fruitfulness (Q73 below); what the church means by leadership as discipline and service that is communal and connectional, grounded in covenant and calling (Q27-29 above); and the basic features of ordination as a particular calling, an office and order that is deeply communal and personal as a form of leadership within the ministries of all the baptized (Q50 above).

Q.68. Is The United Methodist Church responding effectively to trends in candidacy for ordained ministry?

A. We have not responded as we should.

(1.) Many local churches and annual conferences have reduced programs and funding for ministries that draw younger people into the life of the church, such as youth programs, camping, and campus ministries. While good reasons may be offered for consolidating programs or reorganizing budgets, the compelling test should be this: is the church gaining or losing opportunities to form young people in Christian faith and practice and to challenge them with the call to leadership in ministry?

(2.) Over the past twenty years we have made the process of candidacy and probation for ordained ministry even more arduous than in the past. For example, a probationary deacon or elder must serve full time under appointment for three years before being considered for election to full connection and ordination. A young person graduating from college at age twenty-two would attend seminary until age twenty-five and be at least twenty-eight before being ordained—assuming that every part of the timetable worked efficiently. A person of about forty years of age working to support a family while in school and spreading a theology degree over four years would be nearly fifty before being ordained.

(3.) We have a long tradition of preparing an educated ministry, because we believe that the kinds of leadership we expect of ordained ministers are stimulated and formed through an excellent education. Thus we require a bachelor's degree, which most often gives a graduate a strong foundation in the liberal arts—the breadth of the humanities and the natural and social sciences. We normally require a three-year professional master's degree or, in the case of deacons, alternatively a professional or academic master's degree that normally takes two years to complete. These are standards that since 1956 we have considered the norm, as a minimum educational preparation to provide leadership in societies that have made prodigious advances in educational standards in the past fifty years. But we have not as a denomination or as local churches been willing to pay for the realistic costs of providing such an education. For lack of scholarship aid, many of our students preparing for ordained ministry graduate with significant debt in student loans. Many other potential candidates are put off by the prospective costs and will not risk indebtedness.

(4.) We have not been nimble in responding to the leadership needs of new immigrant groups or local churches in which completion of high school, technical school, or other form of education is the norm. We have been so focused on the higher education standard that we have not created alternative ways to call, form, and support leaders. Our educational norm and its associated costs make it too difficult for new churches in communities of new immigrants or with lesser economic resources, particularly, to have ordained ministerial leadership.

Q.69. Is the process of preparation and examination for ordained ministry worth retaining?

A. Yes, insofar as the process encourages candidates with energy and creativity and moves them into places of ministry in which they can use their talents to the fullest.

(1.) The ordination process seems to discourage or eliminate candidates who do not fit often-unspoken assumptions about style and manner. Our “admissions” process has become too narrow and conformist. The United Methodist Church needs some apostles

and prophets who may be “outside the box” of normal expectations, so that we can spark innovative ministries among people we do not currently serve, or serve well.

(2.) The United Methodist Church adopted a mission statement in 1996 “to make disciples.” Zeal for this great purpose—which could have led The United Methodist Church to start radically new kinds of ministries around the world—has been domesticated into current forms of denominational life. “Making disciples” too often is reduced to a campaign to build up the membership numbers of our currently existing local churches. Pastors who are successful at this, as reflected in their quarterly reports, are lauded or promoted. Pastors who do not increase numbers of church members are stigmatized as failures, regardless of context or dynamism of ministries not reflected in statistics. This creates a denomination that looks and acts like a demoralized business corporation—narrowly focused on numbers and the corporate conformity of pastors who can produce them, speaking a language of approved slogans. A church truly captivated by discipleship will instead seek every means of sparking creativity and drawing on the immense diversity of gifts for ministry poured out by the Holy Spirit on United Methodist people.

(3.) Ministry candidates under age 35 are looking for flexible and varied ways to be in ministry, to make a difference wherever they can. They want a sense of common effort with others, to enjoy relationships of mentoring and support, and to be part of a community of commitment. But many do not want to give themselves to sustaining existing institutionalized forms of ministry. The church needs to find ways to welcome them and support their vocations.

Q.70. Is the educational standard for ordination requiring a bachelor’s and master’s degree—a minimum of six or seven years of education after high school—too demanding?

A. The Wesleyan movement has always had two passions about preparation for ordained ministry: the call of the Spirit and the discipline of a well-informed ministry. Preachers burning with the power of the Holy Spirit and swaying the hearts and minds of their hearers with the proclamation of God’s grace and salvation have always been at the heart of the movement. At the same time, preachers proclaiming doctrines other than the primacy of grace so essential to Wesleyan teaching or failing to help people grow in the Christian life were disciplined and challenged to learn. Wesley lauded the spirit of his preachers. He also told them to read constantly, every day without fail. “But I have no taste for reading” and other excuses were not acceptable to Wesley. “Contract a taste for it by use, or return to your trade,” was his response (LM, Q32). This creative tension of Spirit and order, inspiration and study is at the root of preaching and teaching in the Wesleyan heritage.

(1.) We should further note that local churches in the United States and in many other regions have many participants with higher-education degrees or with aspirations for themselves or their children to obtain them. People around the world have faith in education to deliver them from poverty, ignorance, naiveté about the world and human behavior, and injustices and abuses of power. *Education is liberation*. When people with this faith and these aspirations come to church they expect to be led by educated clergy.

(2.) Education, whether in degree programs or other forms of disciplined study, enables people to grow in knowledge and perspective. In an era of wildly varied religious

teachings, distorted and uninformed interpretations of Christian Scripture, and demagoguery that ties religious beliefs to political power, we need leaders who are sophisticated and well informed, who can show others the distinctiveness of Christian *teaching*—particularly the Wesleyan distinctives of grace and service—and who are eager to keep learning all their lives.

(3.) *Every ordained minister must be a teacher*—this imperative is more critical than ever today. People are hungry for spiritual depth and faithful knowledge. They want to know what the discoveries in natural sciences, political events and crises in the world, and rapid changes in technology and information mean in the light of Christian faith. They want to know how to interpret their world in companionship with Christ. They want to know what the Wesleyan tradition in particular has to offer in understanding Christian faith and life. For this they need teachers who are thoroughly prepared, constant in their discipline of study, and effective in their ability to communicate and to help others learn.

Q.71. That is a compelling case, but seven years of education after high school is just too much to expect in some cases. Shouldn't The United Methodist Church offer alternatives?

A. A course of study is already offered for pastors who do not pursue a theological degree. But it can lead to ordination only if the pastor completes a bachelor's degree and serves full time as a local pastor. Clearly, with such growing numbers of local pastors, full time and part time, the Course of Study needs strengthening to be an even more rigorous program of preparation. We also need more specialized institutes and seminars that prepare people for ministry with populations not reached before, such as new immigrant or refugee groups.

Q.72. Has the creation of the deacon as an ordained office of Word and Service complicated the ordination process?

A. Certainly the order of deacon has added a layer of necessary process to the work of local church pastor-parish relations committees, district committees on ministry, and conference boards of ordained ministry. But the really pressing problem is that the vision of the order of deacons, like the larger mission of making disciples, has been too much absorbed into current forms of denominational life—at least in this first decade of the “deacon in full connection.”

(1.) The vast majority of deacons are serving as educators or musicians in local-church congregations in the United States, mainly in larger suburban churches. About 60 percent are in the Southeast and South Central Jurisdictions. Deacons are called to bridge between congregational life and the communities and societies in which we minister. But even those with a passion to find creative and effective ways of fulfilling this call can be stifled by maintenance of the everyday business of large congregations.

(2.) Too few deacons have been ordained for service ministries of community and society on the edge of existing institutions and programs. If the vision of the order of deacon were fulfilled, The United Methodist Church would be sponsoring all kinds of new, innovative ministries of witness and service that would carry us well beyond the established pattern of multiple-staff ministries funded by large local churches. We need to find ways to nurture and support this kind of innovation and remove barriers to it in our ordination process for the rising generation of deacons.

Q.73. What should The United Methodist Church look for in a candidate for ordained ministry?

A. Wesley's Minutes recorded several questions that shaped the examination of prospective preachers in early Methodism. These questions are still an integral part of the process of examining "candidates for licensed or ordained ministry . . . regarding the authenticity of their call by God to ordered ministry" (*Book of Discipline*, ¶310, based on Large Minutes, Q50). Too often these questions have been dismissed as archaic because they do not use contemporary American English terminology. But they actually convey significant features of what The United Methodist Church now seeks in licensed and ordained ministers.

(1.) First come questions of *character*. What kind of person is this? Are this person's life, manner, and disposition shaped by the love of God? In United Methodism we do not ask first what a person believes or professes, testing to see whether she or he speaks the correct words of doctrinal propositions. We inquire as to who he is, how she interacts with others, what he cares passionately about, and whether her dispositions—her outlook on life and her characteristic way of relating to the world—exhibit a life with God. The character we seek comes in many varieties because it is formed in the Spirit of a creating God. We expect to see not uniformity but diversity in the persons we examine and look there for manifestations of God's love.

(2.) Recognizing the creativity of the Spirit, we look secondly for the person's *gifts*—his or her particular *charisms* for leadership in ministry. These will vary greatly, for the good of the community. Again, this variety of gifts is made coherent by basic gifts of character. Does the person have "clear, sound understanding; a right judgment in the things of God"? Will the person be able to use his or her gifts in a way that responds effectively to new situations, unexpected changes, and unforeseen challenges? Does the person exhibit sound understanding and judgment in interpreting and expressing Christian faith in unfolding circumstances of everyday life? The test of United Methodist ordained ministry is not conformity to rules of behavior or action but signs of wise understanding and good judgment that meet the practicalities of life with the mind of Christ.

(3.) "Have they fruit?" Are candidates able to use their gifts in a way that "edifie[s]" or builds up the ministries of the community of faith? Are they converting others to God, drawing others into the disciplines of Christian life by word and example? All Christians by virtue of their baptism receive whatever gifts of the Spirit they need to carry out the ministries to which they are called. But ordained ministers of Christian communities especially must be able to express their gifts in ways that *build up the ministries of others*. This is most centrally what we mean when we say we are looking to these persons for "servant leadership." We expect to see in them a particular gift of equipping the gifts of others. Many people are "gifted" and may find individual ways to express their gift, but only those who can draw others into Christian faith and life, enable others to recognize their own gifts, and equip others to use their gifts in ministry are gifted and called for leadership in the church.

Q.74. This sounds really wide open. How do we know—on a pastor-parish relations committee or a board of ordained ministry—that a person has these gifts?

A. We too must pray for sound understanding and wise judgment as we look for “evidence of God’s grace, and promise of future usefulness for the mission of the Church” in the people we examine (*Book of Discipline*, ¶304.5).

Q.75. When candidates for ordained ministry have been certified and have completed part of their educational requirements, they are eligible to apply for approval as probationary members of an annual conference. What does that mean?

A. From the beginning Methodists have sought a means of testing the vocation and gifts of preachers or ministers by continuing them “on trial” for a period of time (LM, Q51). By observing their work and providing mentors and guides for their continued growth, the church hopes to discern whether they are ready for a lifetime of ordained ministry.

Q.76. What should happen with probationary members during their probationary period?

A. This is a period of transition from seminary and/or graduate education into full-time ministry. Probationers need encouragement and support; they need mentoring with more experienced deacons and elders; they need to continue their learning as they enter into new circumstances and ask new questions. In many conferences the probationary members are well organized in groups of learning and support and develop helpful relationships with mentors. Studies of the probationary period have shown conclusively that these opportunities not only help them grow in ministry but also encourage them to stay in ministry for a lifetime.

Q.77. What happens to these opportunities after the probationary period?

A. All too often, in many conferences, full-time ordained deacons and elders in full connection lack coherent structures for collegiality and learning. But the day of the “lone ranger” pastor is over. In rapidly changing communities and societies, with the multiple challenges of Christian ministry today, no clergy person should have to “go it alone” without continuous encouragement and shared reflection. Organized forms of clergy support and education are critically important for the future. We are a community of faith; we are a connection of ministries. As an effective connection, we have the resources and the opportunities to offer mutual encouragement and continued learning. If we really mean that ordination indicates a *lifetime* of ministry, then we must view the vocation of ministry as a life—a vocation that grows, changes, develops, and thrives in different ways at different stages of life and in various circumstances.

Q.78. So what should conferences offer for ordained deacons and elders?

A. There are countless possibilities—we need to try a variety of approaches. What if every pastor being moved from a small-membership church to a medium- or large-membership church joined a short-term study group to learn approaches to ministry appropriate for the new setting? What if deacons and elders in an annual conference order were reviewed by a group of peers in every fifth year under appointment? Peer review is a common practice in the professions, such as teaching in colleges and universities. The review is not related to terms of employment but rather to encouraging and assisting peers in continued professional growth. Wouldn’t peer review conducted in a collegial spirit offer encouragement, connectedness, and inspiration for continuing ministry? The possibilities are limitless; we need to do more creative work in every conference.

Q.79. What else would support continuous leadership development?

A. The Order of Deacons and Order of Elders in each conference should assign their respective members to covenant groups for continuing collegial support and learning.

Q.80. Is this already being done in annual conferences?

A. In some annual conferences, yes. A few conferences have organized to provide for “continuing education and spiritual growth” (*Book of Discipline*, ¶351.2) through self-selected peer groups of deacons or elders who design their own plans for learning. The Commission believes that covenant groups should become a standard model for continuing discipline and formation in ministry within the Order of Deacons and the Order of Elders. What if every deacon or elder were in a learning group with a small start-up fund for devising and underwriting the group’s learning goals and plans? This could make continuous learning and formation a reality in every conference.

Q.81. But isn’t this all the job of seminaries? The church puts most of its funding for clergy education into support of its seminaries and scholarships for ministry students. Why isn’t this enough?

A.(1.) Theological education does indeed build the foundation of preparation for ordained ministry. It is a foundation, and for many students, their first full exposure to the basic building blocks of Scripture, tradition, theology, and practices of ministry in complex social and personal situations. The learnings are invaluable. But it is a *foundation*—the basis and beginning point for a lifetime of learning and growth. The church must encourage the continued development of its leaders over time if they are to gain the perspectives and skills needed for effective ministry in changing societies.

(2.) The church must think systemically about its process of leadership development and invest generously in funding this system at every point. Candidates for ministry arise from among the baptized, sharing the baptismal vocation while also hearing a call to leadership. They pursue an inquiry into their own readiness. They are then tested and affirmed by a charge conference and encouraged to pursue educational and other forms of preparation. Upon further testing, approval, appointment to ministry, and ordination, they continue to learn, to expand their understanding and skills, and in some cases to accept a call to superintendency or other offices of administration. At every step of this process, the church must invest in the development of effective and fruitful leaders—whose primary task is to build up the ministries of all the baptized based in the shared vocation that laid the groundwork for the leaders to hear a call to a ministry of leadership in the first place.

(3.) Boards of ordained ministry, district committees on ordained ministry, orders of deacon and elder, cabinets and bishops, as well as charge conferences have roles to play at each step of leadership development. They must work together deliberately and creatively to nurture persons along the way: from vocational discernment to education and formation to examination to ordination to continuous learning to supervision to assessment of effectiveness.

Q.82. Thinking in terms of leadership development certainly opens up creative approaches to enhancing local church ministries. In what ways could this same creativity be extended in other areas of the church’s mission?

A. In many ways. For example:

(1.) Elders often are asked to serve as district superintendents or even are elected bishops without adequate background in organizational management and visionary leadership. The church needs to be more intentional about preparing persons for the work of superintendency.

(2.) Elders, deacons, and laity serve as heads of agencies or directors and presidents of church institutions. They need both theological and organizational expertise and wisdom. The church needs to provide more opportunities for such persons to obtain the training they need (such as joint certificates or degrees in theology and business) to lead organizations that extend the mission of the church.

(3.) Scholars who are called to teach in theological schools must complete a doctoral degree. Many boards of ordained ministry have failed to see this rigorous preparation and the subsequent practice of teaching and research as a vocation to ordained ministry. They have insisted that a probationary period as a pastor is the only legitimate path to elder’s orders, which forces teachers to choose between ordination or the critical early years of scholarly work. Thus, United Methodist theological schools have increasing difficulty in identifying faculty candidates who are ordained in The United Methodist Church. The church must recognize that a teaching ministry in a school preparing persons for ordained ministry is an appropriate extension of the ordained ministry of elder and encourage new scholars to seek ordination.

Q.83. The *Book of Discipline* names certain “professional responsibilities” of a deacon in ¶329 and an elder in ¶334.2, including “growth in vocational competence and effectiveness” and participation in annual processes of evaluation. Is the church rigorous enough in its evaluation of clergy?

A. No. Many annual conferences have failed to develop rigorous standards of evaluation, and few conferences and bishops have consistently upheld such standards. The Commission urges that every annual conference test and refine certain *marks of effectiveness* appropriate to the various offices of ordered ministry. For elders under appointment as pastors, for example, we suggest these marks:

- Faithfulness to the ordinances of the church (the means of grace)
- Participation in ministries of justice and compassion with the poor
- Participation in connectional ministries, in particular the record of paying apportionments
- Participation in a covenant peer group
- Fulfillment of requirements for continuous learning and formation
- Numbers of professions of faith
- Trends in average worship attendance in the local church and charge

Every annual conference should develop and advocate standards describing the attributes of character, competence, and contribution that the church expects of ordained persons as leaders in the church. Such open and explicit standards provide the basis for candid evaluations of ordained ministers, conducted with respect, fairness, and encouragement.

Q.84. What should the church do about ordained persons who fail to meet such marks of effectiveness or standards of evaluation?

A.(1.) The questions of character, gifts, and fruit proposed in the Large Minutes and discussed above (Q73) are pertinent here again. Often persons who are ineffective in their work are not fulfilling their ordained ministry because it has not proved to be their appropriate calling in the church. Thus they are not bearing fruit; people are not edified by their ministry. Continually appointing them to places of ministry is a detriment not only to the churches, but to the persons themselves as they face a growing sense of failure and futility. The Holy Spirit bestows gifts on all the baptized, and the central stewardship task of church leaders is to help persons find the appropriate place to use their gifts. This is as true of the ordained as it is of all the baptized.

(2.) The *Book of Discipline* affirms that “all elders in full connection who are in good standing in an annual conference shall be continued under appointment” (§337.1). This statement is often described as a “guarantee” of appointment, as if it were an entitlement for which one achieves permanent eligibility or an insurance policy on which one has paid the premium. The *Discipline*’s affirmation of continuous appointment should be read, rather, within the context of the elder’s order of mutual support and accountability, which commits its members mutually to a rigorous program of covenant group participation, lifelong learning, and professional growth. *Continuous appointment means continuous practice of the disciplines of the order*, for the sake of fulfilling the ministries to which elders are called.

(3.) The *Book of Discipline* provides a process for further assessment of the competence of ordained persons. “Allegations of incompetence, ineffectiveness, or unwillingness or inability to perform ministerial duties” are to be referred to the board of ordained ministry for consideration. A fair and just process of review is described and a variety of “remedial actions” are listed (§362). The Commission urges bishops, district superintendents, and boards of ordained ministry to use these processes to address the performance of persons who do not meet the conference’s professional standards, and to help such persons find an appropriate place of ministry among the many ministries of the whole people of God.

Q.85. Doesn’t all this conversation suggest that the church must develop a more systemic approach to leadership development in ordained ministry?

A. Yes. As the Commission has stated above in Q81, The United Methodist Church must adopt a more intentional, concerted, and systemic approach to the cultivation of ordained leadership for the church. We need to consider the whole process by which people come into ordained ministry and carry it out over a lifetime. A planned, conscientious approach to this process will help raise awareness of the call to ordained ministry and enable the church better to marshal its resources for supporting ministry at every stage.

Q.86. Don’t certain church bodies carry responsibility for different stages of ministry?

A. Yes, but they are not well coordinated and resources are not well distributed to support every stage of ministry. As we have considered this issue, we have noted a variety of bodies that have distinct powers and duties related to our system of ordained ministry:

- Vocational discernment and call to ministry

Candidacy process, local church or charge pastor-parish relations committee and charge conference

- Education and formation
District committee on ordained ministry, annual conference board of ordained ministry
- Examination of gifts and qualifications for ordination
Board of ordained ministry, upon recommendation of district committee
- Continuous learning and formation
Order of Deacons and Order of Elders, board of ordained ministry
- Supervision
Cabinet and bishop, board of ordained ministry
- Evaluation and assessment
Pastor-parish relations committee, standards developed by board of ordained ministry, cabinet and bishop
- Preparation for retirement
Orders

The Commission questions whether all these bodies are sufficiently coordinated in sustaining a candidate for ordained ministry continuously through the whole process of a lifetime of ministry. We also believe that the efforts of general boards and commissions could be more effectively marshaled into a collaborative enterprise that would sustain processes of discernment, formation, and evaluation along the critical points of this system.

Part VII—What Does the Commission Propose in Response to Current Challenges in Lay and Ordained Ministry?

Q.87. Given the conversation to this point, did the Commission reach a consensus on what to propose to help the church gain clarity about lay, licensed, and ordained ministry?

A. The Commission reached broad consensus that the ordering of ministry in The United Methodist Church requires significant clarification. And like the wider church, the Commission has a variety of views on what actions would bring clarity and what actions would only confuse matters further. The Commission agreed to put forward a basic vision and road map for the future, to be widely disseminated across the church in order to provoke further structured conversation. **Our intent is that the 2008 General Conference authorize a Commission for the 2009-2012 quadrennium to assess the themes of that further conversation and develop legislation intended to advance the church's ministries, for consideration at the 2012 General Conference.**

Q.88. If the Commission had consensus, why not submit a legislative proposal now?

A. (1.) We believe that every annual conference should have an opportunity to study the vision and road map. Since United Methodism has no executive or hierarchical body authorized to make decisions about the orders of ministry, we as a connectional church must seek to become as informed as possible about the questions before us. We hope that

a stronger consensus about basic directions will emerge and be the basis for decisions at the 2012 General Conference.

(2.) The Commission itself was not of one mind about what vision to put forward. Some members argue that the proposed road map is a departure from United Methodism's heritage. Some argue that it does not address the most pressing issues. So the Commission is a reasonably accurate reflection of the nature of debate across the church and the desirability of further conversation.

Q.89. How does the Commission propose to proceed with this process?

A. The Commission submits the following resolution to the 2008 General Conference:

**STUDY OF MINISTRY COMMISSION
RESOLUTION
2008 GENERAL CONFERENCE**

Continuation of a Study of Ministry Commission

Whereas, the 2004 General Conference established a four-year commission for the study of ministry, the purpose of which was to theologically discuss and clearly define the ordering of ministry in The United Methodist Church;

Whereas, the Study of Ministry Commission has sought to fulfill its purpose by provoking conversations within the whole church through an exploration of the scriptural, theological, ecclesial, and practical groundings that define our distinct ministries within our common Christian relationship through baptism;

Whereas, an examination of the results of these conversations within central and annual conferences, boards of ordained ministry, focus groups, gatherings of the orders of deacons and elders, and the fellowships of local pastors has revealed diversity of opinion and conflicting views on the ordering of ministry;

Whereas, the theological foundations and the consequent practices of ministry within The United Methodist Church reflect fundamental differences in the ecclesiologies of our predecessor denominations that are Anglican, Catholic, Reformed, Pietist, and Evangelical in heritage, and these differences have not been adequately addressed through the processes of merger and union;

Whereas, the need for ongoing study and dialogue has become increasingly apparent in order to fully include in these ministry conversations voices from the central conferences, the ecumenical church, and the cultural and ethnic communities that make up The United Methodist Church;

Whereas, the four year life cycle of the commissions that have been established by General Conference to address the unfinished agenda for the ordering of ministry in The United Methodist Church have proven to be insufficient for the completion of a task of such significance;

Whereas, the Commission has prepared a study document on ministry in The United Methodist Church that includes a vision for an ordering of ministry that addresses historical and contemporary issues related to ecclesiology, ordination, and conference membership;

Therefore, be it resolved, that the 2008 General Conference affirm the work of the Study of Ministry Commission and refer its report to the church for ongoing study and conversation through the 2009-2012 quadrennium for the purpose of clarifying the vision and building consensus for the ordering of ministry in The United Methodist Church;

Be it further resolved, that the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, in consultation with the General Board of Discipleship, the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, and the Council of Bishops establish a Study of Ministry Commission for the 2009-2012 quadrennium with broad representation from the central conferences, ethnic and cultural constituencies, deacons, elders, local pastors, laity, and the current Study of Ministry Commission;

Be it further resolved, that the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, the General Board of Discipleship and the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns prepare a study guide for ongoing study and dialogue based on the Commission's report and recommended vision, which will provide a process that will engage the lay members of the church, the orders of deacons and elders, the fellowships of local pastors, the bishops and cabinets, the boards of ordained ministry, the central conferences, and the ethnic constituencies in conversations on the ordering of ministry in The United Methodist Church;

Be it finally resolved, that the General Conference authorize the expenditure of \$150,000 for the work of this commission, and that it refer all petitions that will affect the ordering of ministry to the Study of Ministry Commission to develop comprehensive legislation for the implementation of an ordering of ministry based on conversations across the church to be presented to the 2012 General Conference.

Q.90. So what is the Commission's vision?

A. The Commission envisions a church growing and thriving from its roots in these common assumptions, given life and fruitfulness by the Holy Spirit:

- All ministry is grounded in baptism, and all the baptized are gifted and called for some form of ministry in the name of Christ (see Q.22 above).
- All ministries of leadership in the church grow out of and are authorized by the community of the baptized in order to advance the witness and service of the church in the world (see Q.27-30 above).
- Ordained ministries are a gift of the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the community of faith. Persons set apart by ordination are called from among the baptized to exemplify and lead the ministries of the whole people of God (see Q.50 above).

- The offices of deacon and elder are the two orders recognized by The United Methodist Church, and the office of bishop, while remaining part of the order of elder, is the essential office of oversight of the whole connection. The deacon is ordained to Word and Service, and the elder is ordained to Service, Word, Sacrament, and Order.
- Sacramental authority is vested in ordination and sacramental presidency is granted to those who are ordained elder (see Q.58 above).

Q.91. What does the Commission believe should follow from these basic assumptions?

A. The Commission proposes the following *road map* to set basic directions for clarifying our understanding and practice of ordained ministry:

- While conference membership and ordination have always been linked in United Methodism and predecessor denominations, they have been understood in that order—election to conference membership first, with ordination following as a kind of seal of membership (see Q.44 above). We propose that the church is better served by separating ordination and conference membership. Ordination will come first as the authority for ministry affirmed by the community of the baptized. Full conference membership, including continuous appointment for elders, will come a few years later based on a person’s preparation and formation for ordained ministry developed over a sustained period of probation and residency.
- The theology and practice of commissioning, an innovation approved by General Conference in 1996, has not proven to be substantive or well understood in the church. Commissioning does not make sense as a first step toward orders, and leaves commissioned ministers uncertain about their relationship to their prospective order since they are not ordained to anything. We propose that the church simply ordain deacons or elders at the point when candidates have met certain basic qualifications, rather than continuing a poorly developed intermediate step.
- Associate membership is another intermediate category of persons set apart for pastoral leadership that has created much confusion, particularly since many associate members have been ordained deacon under the *Disciplines* of 1992 and before. We call for all current associate members to be eligible for ordination as elder and conference membership in full connection. The category of associate member will then be discontinued.
- Many pastors—nearly a third of all pastoral appointments in the United States—are presiding over the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion without any ordination at all (see Q.38, 47-48 above). The Commission finds the extent of this practice unacceptable, out of keeping with our Anglican heritage and with the church ecumenical. Therefore we propose to expand the range of persons qualified for ordination as elder.
- Even with this expansion, exceptions must be made under circumstances that demand—to borrow Wesley’s term—extra-ordinary ministry. So the Commission proposes that, for the sake of the ministry and mission of the church, bishops may grant local sacramental authority in the place of appointment to persons who are

not ordained elder but who are approved by the board of ordained ministry and appointed by the bishop.

- The process for entry into ordained ministry and full conference membership needs to be more timely and efficient, more encouraging and motivating, and particularly more relevant to life experience (see Q.68-71 above). In response, the Commission road map calls for the following:
 1. Certified candidates may be admitted to *provisional membership* in an annual conference at the point of either:
 - Completion of licensing school and receiving an appointment. These persons are titled “licensed local pastor in provisional membership.”
 - OR**
 - Enrollment in a graduate educational program that meets ordination requirements. These persons are titled “student in provisional membership.”

Provisional members are expected to continue their studies, either through the Course of Study or through a graduate degree program, in a timely and regular manner.
 2. Upon completion of one half of the prescribed Course of Study (12 courses), the licensed local pastor in provisional membership may be ordained elder in provisional membership. He or she may continue in this relationship indefinitely upon annual recommendation or may be elected to probationary membership at the completion of 60 hours of undergraduate work and the Course of Study. Following the completion of undergraduate work and Advanced Course of Study, provisional elders will be eligible for full membership after they complete a two-year residency program under the supervision of the board of ordained ministry and the cabinet.
 3. Candidates in provisional membership may be ordained as either deacon or elder at the point of completing one-half of educational requirements and will then become deacons or elders in probationary membership.
 4. Following ordination as either deacon or elder in provisional membership, candidates must complete all educational requirements, then serve for two years under appointment *in residence* under the supervision of the board of ordained ministry and the cabinet before becoming eligible for full conference membership.
 5. In sum, the Commission proposes that the following categories of annual conference membership define persons in various stages of preparing for or exercising their ordination:
 - licensed local pastor in provisional connection
 - student in provisional connection
 - elder in provisional connection
 - deacon or elder in probationary connection

- deacon or elder in full connection
- The process for evaluation of elders in full connection, and when necessary, for moving elders out of full conference membership and continuous appointment into other forms of ministry of the baptized, needs to be more timely and efficient, more encouraging and redemptive, while maintaining due process, justice, and fairness. The Commission has engaged in extensive conversation on this matter (see Q.83-84 above), and looks forward to General Conference discussion of the proposal coming from the Council of Bishops in 2008.

Q.92. What does the term “educational requirements” mean in Q.91 above?

A. Requirements vary for distinct offices of the church and for different paths into those offices. This is part of what makes our ministry system so complex.

(1.) The Commission’s road map proposes two paths into ordination as *deacon*.

(a.) A certified candidate who is enrolled in a graduate program (a Master of Divinity or other appropriate master’s degree) may apply to become a student in provisional membership in the annual conference. Upon completion of one-half of the graduate program including one-half of the required basic graduate theological studies (BGTS), the student in provisional membership may be ordained as deacon and elected to probationary membership in the annual conference. Upon completion of graduate studies, the probationary member then serves a two-year residency under appointment with active supervision and mentoring before being eligible for election into membership in full connection in the annual conference.

(b.) A certified candidate who is enrolled in professional certification studies and is in the process of taking courses in BGTS may apply to become a student in provisional membership in the annual conference. Upon completion of one-half of the professional certification studies and one-half of BGTS, the student in provisional membership may be ordained deacon and elected to probationary membership in the annual conference. Upon completion of professional certification studies and BGTS, the probationary member then serves a two-year residency under appointment with active supervision and mentoring before being eligible for election into membership in full connection in the annual conference.

(2.) The Commission’s road map also proposes two paths into ordination as *elder*.

(a.) A certified candidate who is enrolled in a graduate program (normally a Master of Divinity) may apply to become a student in provisional membership in the annual conference. Upon completion of one-half of the M. Div., the student in provisional membership may be ordained elder and elected to probationary membership in the annual conference. Upon completion of the Master of Divinity degree, the probationary member then serves a two-year residency under appointment before being eligible for election into membership in full connection in the annual conference.

(b.) A certified candidate who has completed licensing school and has received an appointment may apply to become a licensed local pastor in provisional membership in the annual conference. Upon completion of one-half of the Course of Study (12 courses), the local pastor in provisional membership may be ordained elder. Upon completion of the Course of Study and a minimum of sixty semester hours toward the Bachelor of Arts or an equivalent degree, the elder provisional member may apply for and be elected to probationary membership in the annual conference. A licensed local pastor who has been

ordained an elder in provisional membership but who does NOT want to pursue eventual membership in full connection may continue indefinitely in provisional membership upon annual recommendation. The elder provisional member who is elected to probationary membership may be eligible for full membership after completion of the undergraduate degree, an Advanced Course of Study, and a two-year residency under appointment with active supervision and mentoring

(3.) In all these paths, the system of examination and support—testing the spirits and affirming gifts for ministry—sustained by pastor-parish relations committees, district committees on ordained ministry, boards of ordained ministry, district superintendents, bishops, mentors, and methods of formation, is critical to the shaping of new generations of leadership in ordained ministry. And of course, educational requirements are only part of the process of preparation and examination spelled out in the *Book of Discipline* (§324), which will be continued under this road map.

Q.93. The road map introduces some new terminology. Why?

A. The Commission proposes “provisional membership” as a way of bringing candidates into formal relationship with the annual conference. This may help move both candidates and conference procedures along in a more timely fashion by giving candidates a formal status as a platform for beginning their education for ministry and in some cases their first appointments. Some Commission members have also argued strongly that the United Methodist terminology of “probation” in use for many years has negative connotations for the current generation of younger candidates. Under our road map the term “provisional” actually could be extended to the point of completion of educational requirements, with the term “probation” limited to the period of residency in ministry under supervision. The term “in residence” or “residency” is also put forward as a way to demonstrate the intentional nature of the first two years under appointment, during which the prospective deacon or elder is working intensively with a mentor and in other settings to prepare for a lifetime of ordained ministry. “Residency” is intended to indicate the substantive and critical formation of that period, in parallel with other professions such as medicine.

Q.94. To what problems is this road map an answer?

A. The Commission believes that the road map is a way forward. Conversations across the church will bring to the surface many questions yet to be answered and problems to be resolved in putting such a road map into practice. First, though, we as a church must find out if we have enough consensus to begin moving along these lines. Many Commission members are excited about this road map as a genuine possibility for the church’s ministries.

(1.) The road map greatly expands the number of persons who are authorized by the community of the baptized through ordination to administer the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Ordination as elder at the half-way point of educational requirements will reduce by at least half the number of pastors serving under appointment without ordination as elder, and will encourage candidates to proceed through their educational requirements with dispatch.

(2.) The road map separates ordination and conference membership in ways intended to heighten the meaning of both. Ordination now clearly becomes authorization by the

community of the baptized for certain offices in the church. The role of the orders in each annual conference becomes even more critical, in supporting, challenging, forming, and reforming members of the order as they pursue a lifetime of ministry. Meanwhile, conference membership now becomes the locus of rigorous preparation for connectional ministry, with full connection indicating that one is ready now to be a mentor for others and to play other roles of connectional leadership. For elders, full connection will indicate readiness to serve in continuous appointment through the covenant of itinerancy.

(3.) The road map encourages younger people to see that they can become active in ministry and enjoy a connectional relationship with others in ordained ministry more quickly than at present. We believe that The United Methodist Church must take the initiative to frame its appeal for ministry vocations and the process of formation for ordained ministry in ways that resonate with the lives of men and women under age 35 (see Q.66-69 above).

(4.) The road map opens and affirms alternative pathways into ordained ministry and membership in full connection in the annual conference. This is a more realistic system for preparing deacons and elders for the enormous variety of ministries needed today, and in particular encourages more strategic mission such as pastoral and social justice ministries among smaller and often poorer constituencies of The United Methodist Church.

Q.95. But with regard to (1.) and (2.) in Q.94 above, isn't the Commission advocating a very "low" or minimal definition of ordination in this proposal? For example, once an elder is ordained, can she or he simply not be an elder any more if she or he does not become a member in full connection and continuously receive an appointment?

A. We hold that ordination is an act of profound significance and import for the community of faith as well as for the individual, for through ordination the community names, authorizes, and sets apart persons for the leadership of presidency in the sacraments that constitute the church. Ordination becomes part of the identity of the ordained, and they are publicly recognized by the community of faith as ordained persons. But we also recognize that ordained offices belong to the church, that the office can be bestowed on various persons in appropriate times and places, and that ordination "travels with the connection" as an office that orders and advances the church's ministry and mission in the world, as authorized through the annual conference and the bishop. The effectiveness of ordination is directly connected to serving under appointment.

Q.96. Many United Methodists argue that local pastors and deacons should have the right to celebrate the sacraments in the charge or local church of their appointment. This sounds like the Commission is trying to change the question—this is not about who has the "right" to celebrate but who has the "authority." Is the Commission trying to change the terms of discussion?

A. Yes. The Commission believes that the time is far past for the church to address the question of *sacramental authority* and the sources of that authority. The church cannot go on simply appointing pastors to local ministries, sending them out to act like ordained elders and asking congregations to accept them as pastors with sacramental authority, when in fact they are not ordained. Accordingly, the Commission has wrestled with a number of models for addressing specific questions of authority such as the "local elder"

proposal that was outlined in our first public draft document. Our present road map is a result of these continuing conversations, taking account of comment from across the church on that first draft.

Q.97. Won't this road map deprive some local church congregations of the sacraments?

A. A number of local churches in the United States, probably less than a thousand, will have pastors appointed who are not authorized to preside over the sacraments (unless the bishop specifically authorizes them in order to advance the church's mission). We acknowledge that many local churches have become accustomed to their appointed pastors administering Baptism or Holy Communion simply as part of their role as pastors, without concern for ordination. Many pastors have become accustomed to administering the sacraments without ordination. But this practice is not in keeping with our heritage, our ecumenical relationships, or our ecclesiology. We hold that a minimum of preparation and formation—as provided by the Course of Study, mentoring, and participation in the fellowship of local pastors and associate members—is necessary for a person to fulfill the presiding role of set-apart ministry in the community of faith. We encourage local churches to support their pastors in completing the necessary work in the Course of Study or other theological education, so that they may qualify for ordination as an elder. We urge bishops and cabinets to provide for the sacraments in all local churches as extensively as possible through the services of visiting elders.

Q.98. Are the Order of Deacons and the Order of Elders in the annual conferences functioning effectively enough to sustain the model proposed in this road map?

A. In some conferences the orders have been slow to organize under the *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶305-309. But where the ordained have had energetic and focused peer leadership and enjoyed the active support of the bishop, the orders have thrived. The biennial gatherings of chairs of the orders of the U.S. annual conferences demonstrate much creativity in achieving the purpose of the orders, including opportunities for continuous growth and mutual support in attaining the full expression of ordered ministry.

Q.99. The word *order* seems to have multiple meanings. Isn't that confusing to many in the church?

A. Yes. The term *order* refers to the office of the church to which one is ordained; ordination to an order grants one the authority and responsibility that attends that office. The term also extends to the collective group of peers ordained to the same office who gather regularly within an annual conference. And the term *order* is also used to designate a particular aspect of the office of elder, namely, the authority to preside over and administer the life of the community of faith.

Q.100. Are United Methodist orders parallel to orders in Roman Catholicism—a community of shared charism to which one takes a vow of lifetime commitment under a shared discipline?

A. There are some similarities that are only beginning to be creatively explored in The United Methodist Church. The elements of a shared rule of life, in obedience to which one is in mutual covenant with a community of peers, including a lifetime commitment to

a particular office of ministry, are plainly evident in British Methodism and in the longer Wesleyan heritage. United Methodism would gain much by continuing movement toward a sense of the orders as communities of covenant and a shared rule of life.

Q.101. What would help enhance movement toward a deeper sense of the life of an Order?

A. The Orders should bear much of the responsibility for mentoring newly ordained persons and for creating means of continuous growth through covenant and learning groups, as well as lifelong opportunities for education and formation. Orders should also develop a clearly stated *covenant of accountability* to a shared rule of life, including practices of prayer, searching the scriptures, study, Holy Communion, working with the poor and dispossessed, as well as regular involvement in the programs of the Order. For elders, continuous appointment should be directly related to continuous active participation in the common life of the Order.

Q.102. How does this relate to the role of the annual conference?

A. Annual conferences and boards of ordained ministry include many persons not within the covenant of a particular Order. An Order needs its own *rule of life* as a community that does share the same covenant. So the annual conference properly should continue to elect persons to particular Orders and to conference membership, while the Orders should continue to build up a shared life through which peers can sustain one another for a lifetime of ministry.

Q.103. With regard to (3.) and (4.) in Q.94 above, isn't the Commission opening too many pathways into ordained ministry? Why would a person seeking to be ordained deacon or elder undertake the time and expense of a master's degree if it is not required for ordination?

A. For the same reason that one undertakes any educational degree: in order to be more fully prepared and to have a broader foundation for continuous learning. The Commission believes that many United Methodist local churches, as well as agencies and institutions of the church, will continue to expect that the deacons and elders under appointment with them will exhibit a high and growing level of knowledge of Christian Scriptures and traditions, ways of approaching ethical issues faithfully, and practices of Christian community in worship, education, witness, and service. United Methodism is a passionate advocate of higher education as a means of greater effectiveness in all the ministries of the baptized (see Q.70 above). At the same time, the church must seek continuous improvement in the Course of Study and Advanced Course of Study so that the entire Course can prepare pastors more fully and adequately for the challenges of ministry today.

Q.104. Who is going to pay for all this education? Does The United Methodist Church provide adequate support for the preparation of its ordained ministers?

A. The Commission has not had time to give this question the attention it deserves. In short, though, we believe that the church must invest much greater resources in education and continuous formation if the church is to enjoy the leadership in ministry needed today. Too many students in graduate degree programs accrue debts that are extremely

difficult to pay off. Too few deacons and elders have adequate resources to pursue programs of lifelong learning that will help them deepen or refocus their ministries.

Q.105. What other questions has the Commission not been able to address?

A. There are many, which is why we propose a new study commission (including members from the current study commission) for 2009-2012 to follow up on findings from conversations about this road map across the church. For example, we have not found a way to address questions about how the new category of Certified Lay Minister is functioning in the various annual conferences (*Book of Discipline* ¶272). We have not been able to respond to the advocacy of some in the church for a consecrated lay office such as what was called “diaconal ministry” until its discontinuation in 1996—while we have been acutely aware, of course, that many diaconal ministers continue in service across the church today.

Q.106. Were other proposals referred to the Commission by the 2004 General Conference that the Commission has decided not to put forward?

A. Yes.

(1.) The Commission has not approved any changes in voting rights or General Conference representation for local pastors. We believe that the church should wrestle with the possibilities of the proposed road map before making such changes.

(2.) The Commission believes that the Order of Deacons needs more time to be fully developed and lived out as a distinct order of Word and Service. Therefore, proposals to ordain elders first as deacons, as was the practice before 1996, have been deferred. So have proposals to have deacons ordained to Word, Service, and Sacrament, thereby granting deacons full authority to administer the sacraments. Since the Commission desires in our road map to strengthen sacramental authority as expressed in the Order of Elders (a practice commonly affirmed across the church ecumenical), and since deacons themselves, according to the results of our online survey, are divided over whether sacramental authority should be included in their ordination, given its focus on service, such proposals have been deferred.

Q.107. Obviously the Commission has identified a number of complicated issues in developing this road map. What are some of the potential hazards if the church decides to follow this road map into the future?

A. The church needs more conversation in order to anticipate more accurately some of the consequences of following this road map. Our conversations as a Commission have reflected a critical need to think things through and talk together earnestly, “speaking what is in our hearts.”

(1.) Some Commission members are wary of appearing to reduce the requirements for graduate education as the normal preparation for elder’s orders in particular. If more candidates choose to follow the Course of Study track into ordination and full connection, the result will be fewer clergy with bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Some argue this is exactly the wrong time in the church’s history to be reducing our educational standard, since Christian practices and teachings are so widely misused and misunderstood, and since most constituencies of The United Methodist Church have growing aspirations in education. We need an educated clergy among us more than ever.

(2.) Some Commission members believe that the 1996 decision to remove deacon's orders from the path into elder's orders and the pastorate has cut off The United Methodist Church from its Anglican heritage. This has moved the church away from a connectionalism grounded in the organic unity of an order of preachers who share a common ordination and a common covenant of itinerancy, and toward a connectionalism of association in which local congregations focus on the leadership of their own pastors and associate voluntarily with other congregations for training, resources, and shared mission. Together with the establishment of the deacon's order as an order in full connection but without itinerancy, the church has moved toward a much more local ministry. Those who share this view of the last decade of developments in ordained ministry argue that the road map only marches the church farther down this road. Eventually local ministry of deacons and elders will become the norm, itinerancy will cease, and annual conferences will become regional associations of congregations.

(3.) Some Commission members have argued that the rapid increase in the number of local pastors serving in the United States marks a failure of nerve. The United Methodist Church has too many local churches (over 34,000 in the United States) and is enabling a great many small and often troubled congregations, many of them supported by only one or two extended families, to remain open indefinitely. Bishops and cabinets are not exercising their authority, the argument continues, to refuse to appoint pastors to churches that are not really viable. If more local churches were closed, merged, or yoked together to create sustainable ministries, The United Methodist Church could reduce the number of local pastor appointments and increase the number of appointments that can support an elder in full connection. Those who share this view suspect that the road map will only enable local churches to remain open indefinitely, with limited ministry and mission, and will in fact further legitimize their remaining open because many will now have a pastor who is an elder.

Q.108. What is the primary factor that has made the Commission's task so complex?

A. There are several candidates for this, among them the sheer complexity of the number, qualifications, and procedures related to the already existing offices of ministry in The United Methodist Church. But above all, what we have continually contended with is the immensely complex and eclectic ecclesiology of The United Methodist Church in which our ministries are grounded.

Q.109. What is ecclesiology?

A. Ecclesiology is the theology of the church—it nature, purpose, form, and practice—as it continues the witness and work of Jesus Christ, sustained by the Holy Spirit. The churches and communions of world Christianity express many traditions of ecclesiology. These are grounded in historical communities and practices as varied as Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, the national churches of the Reformation in Europe, Pietist movements in Europe, younger former mission churches—some autonomous and some part of global communions—united churches, free churches in association, independent congregations, Pentecostal movements, and others particular to national and cultural contexts. These traditions produce many different understandings of the church and its ministries.

Q.110. Where does United Methodism fit in this ecclesiological diversity?

A. This is a question to which the church needs to devote more considered focus and attention. We hope that our road map may advance this conversation.

(1.) Methodism's ecclesiology has been deeply shaped by the various contexts of its ministries. Methodism began as a kind of Pietist movement adapted to English culture—a society for spiritual growth and social witness within the national church of England. When it migrated to the new United States, Methodism continued as a movement that took on features of church such as ordination and episcopacy—but for many years sustained the language of “society” and “class meeting” almost in resistance to becoming a church. Only in the twentieth century did Methodism begin to use more language of church. In European nations Methodism has functioned as a kind of small sect outside the sway of national churches, often with a capacity for Christian witness far exceeding its numbers. In nations of Africa, Latin America, and other regions, Methodism has developed as an indigenous movement spreading rapidly among people who have found it a source of sustenance and hope in societies that have regularly suffered crushing economic and political failures.

(2.) In part because of John Wesley's eclectic interests and his passion for stirring up renewal in the church, Methodism adapted into its ecclesiology some features of many different Christian traditions. This is particularly evident in United Methodism's current organization of ministry. Our ministries are Anglican in their forms of ordination and liturgy; Catholic in their emphasis on covenant itinerancy parallel to an order such as Dominicans or Jesuits; Reformed in consecrating—not ordaining—bishops and continuing them as elders, thus making our ordinations presbyteral in nature (ordination by elders); Pietist in stressing the centrality of personal spiritual growth particularly through small groups; Orthodox in teaching the possibility of growth in the Christian life toward perfection in love; and Evangelical in elevating the act of preaching and proclamation of the gospel as our tradition's central mission.

Q.111. What difference has this eclectic ecclesiology made in United Methodism's understanding of ministry in recent years?

A. Many United Methodists, including many members of our Commission, feel that the church has not been sufficiently reflective or critical about the ecclesiology that is at least implied in our structures and practices of ministry.

(1.) For example, in 1996 the General Conference decided to end the practice of ordaining persons as deacons as the foundation for ordaining them as elders. Dual ordination was an inheritance from Anglicanism. The termination of that original Methodist practice therefore appeared to many people to terminate or drastically alter United Methodism's relationship with its Anglican heritage.

(2.) United Methodism, like its predecessor denominations The Methodist Church, The Evangelical United Brethren Church, and the Methodist Protestant Church, no longer has the historic term “Episcopal” in its name. Methodism has gravitated away from the central role of bishops in earlier generations. The functions of *episkopē*—oversight of the church and its ministries long focused in the office of bishop as a symbol of unity—have been dispersed across many councils and boards that are inclusive of laity and clergy. Many people argue that this has left the bishop serving more as a program organizer and personnel director than as the symbol of unity and sacramental order exemplified in

Methodism's Anglican heritage. The resulting lack of clarity about what the church invests in the office of bishop ecclesiology has been the subject of discussion in another General Conference study commission this quadrennium.

(3.) The United Methodist Church in the United States currently has over 8,500 pastors administering the sacraments in their charges without ordination as elder. The sacramental authority of these pastors derives only from their license for pastoral ministry, approval of the board of ordained ministry, and their appointment by the bishop. No other branch of Christendom allows such extensive practice of the sacraments without administration by persons ordained as elders or priests. Yet The United Methodist Church has not discussed or developed an ecclesiology that would be the foundation of sacramental authority for these persons. We plead "missional exigency" without clarifying whether we mean that we are really just a movement for spiritual growth and mission within the larger church, or that we really are a church that occasionally makes exceptions under certain circumstances—though in the latter case we would still have to clarify what kind of church we are. For example, the 2004 General Conference and subsequent annual conferences have approved a Constitutional amendment that defines "clergy members" of annual conference. This definition includes pastors who are not ordained as elder and probationary members who are not ordained anything at present. What other church establishes its clergy *constitutionally* without ordination? This fits nowhere in the ecclesiology of the church ecumenical.

Q.112. Weren't these the kinds of issues that this Commission was supposed to resolve this quadrennium?

A. The Commission was asked to help the church gain clarity about its ministries in relation to each other, particularly to address the standing of local pastors and deacons, among other specific issues. But we have found that our conversations continually force us to confront the lack of coherence in our church's ecclesiology.

Q.113. Does the Commission have any insight on ecclesiology issues that would help the church develop a more coherent theology and practice of ordered ministry?

A. Yes. We have identified *a core ecclesiology that we believe to be in continuity with our Wesleyan heritage*, in which authority for ministry arises from the gifts of the Holy Spirit symbolized in the sacrament of Baptism. The ministry of the baptized is the ground of authority for all ministries. Some ministries are set apart within the ministry of the baptized as forms of servant leadership that exemplify and lead the ministries of the whole people of God. That is, some of the baptized are set apart and authorized by the community of faith for particular historic offices of deacon and elder that lead the community by bringing all its ministries to focus. The bishop is among those set apart, from within the order of elder, for a general ministry of oversight through presiding over the conferences and superintending the ministries of the whole church. This episcopal ministry is a symbol of the unity and apostolicity of the ministries of the whole people of God across the centuries. We believe that this ecclesiology connects us with the living Christian community of the present as well as Christian traditions from apostolic times. On this basis, United Methodism can be prepared to meet the challenges of ministry for the present age.

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Dr. Philip Amerson, Evanston, IL
Rev. Aslam Barkat, Morgantown, WV
Rev. Patricia Barrett, Nashville, TN
Rev. Kenneth Carter, Charlotte, NC
Dr. Jerome King Del Pino, Nashville, TN
Rev. David Dodge, Lakeland, FL
Dr. Holger Eschmann, Reutlingen, Germany
Rev. Delia Estrada, Reston, VA
Rev. Donna Gaither, Nashville, TN
Rev. Karen Greenwaldt, Nashville, TN
Dr. Grant Hagiya, Los Angeles, CA
Rev. Charles Hicks, Ripley, WV
Rev. Robert Hill, Rochester, NY
Mr. George Howard, Worthington, OH
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Rev. Mary Ann Moman, Nashville, TN
Bishop Eben Nhiwatiwa, Harare, Zimbabwe
Dr. Henk Pieterse, Nashville, TN
Rev. Sharon Rubey, Nashville, TN
Rev. Barrie Tritle, Des Moines, IA
Ms. Julia Kuhn Wallace, Nashville, TN
Bishop William Willimon, Birmingham, AL

Ministry Tracks for Ordination and Licensing

This proposed process presumes the completion of all preliminary steps as outlined in the *Book of Discipline*.

Deacon	Elder	Local Pastor
Certified candidate who is enrolled in graduate program	Certified candidate who is enrolled in graduate program	Certified candidate who has completed licensing school, with appointment
May apply for Student in Provisional Membership in the annual conference	May apply for Student in Provisional Membership in the annual conference	May apply for Licensed Local Pastor in Provisional Membership in the annual conference
Completion of one half of graduate studies or professional certification studies, including one half of Basic Graduate Theological Studies	Completion of one half of M. Div., including one half of Basic Graduate Theological Studies	Completion of 12 Classes in Course of Study
May be ordained as a Deacon in Probationary Membership	May be ordained as an Elder in Probationary Membership	May be ordained as an Elder in Provisional Membership
Completion of graduate studies	Completion of M. Div.	Completion of Course of Study and 60 hours undergraduate work; may apply for probationary membership
Two years of residency	Two years of residency	Completion of the Advanced Course of Study and undergraduate work may apply for full membership
		Two years of residency
May be elected to full conference membership	May be elected to full conference membership	May be elected to full conference membership