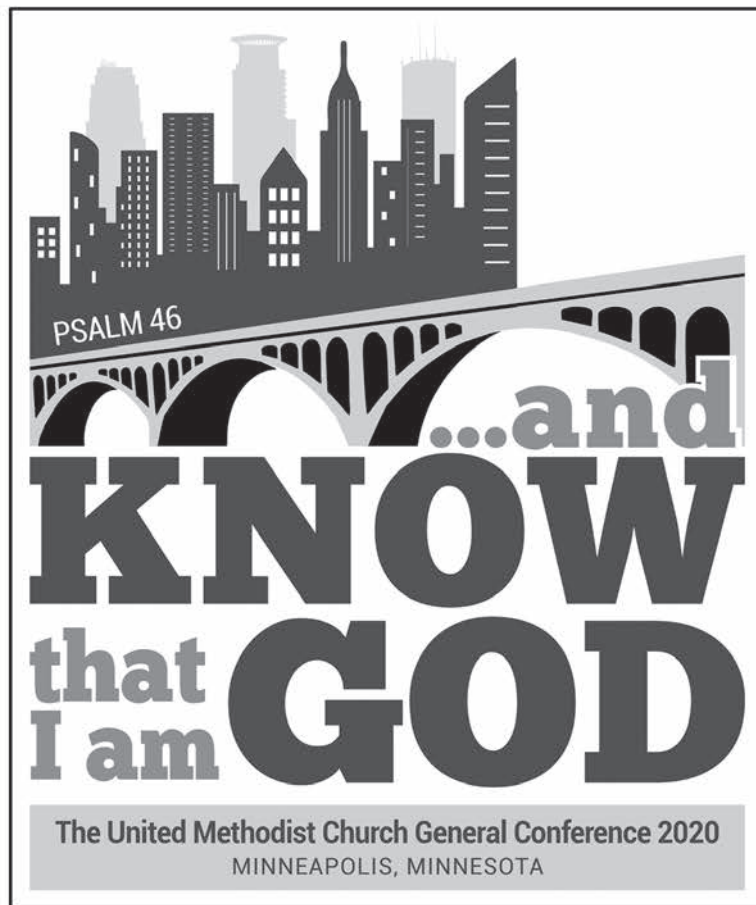


Daily Christian Advocate



Volume 2, Section 2 Reports and Proposed Legislation

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Ordained Ministry

THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Volume 2

Nashville, Tennessee

Report of the 2017-2020 Study of Ministry Commission Report

The Charge to the 2017-2020 Study of Ministry Commission

The 2016 General Conference authorized the 2017-2020 Study of Ministry Commission to undertake its work based on the charge stated in Petition 60506-MH-NonDis, which proposed the following issues for further exploration by the commission:

1. Articulate a theology of ordained ministry for The United Methodist Church in consultation with the Committee on Faith and Order;
 2. Explore and clarify the relationship between the ministry structures in the 2016 *Book of Discipline* and a possible *General Book of Discipline*. The commission should provide guidance and language in the development of text for the *General Book of Discipline*, Chapter Two—“The Ministry of the Ordained”—and Chapter Three—“The Superintendency.” Members of the commission shall be on the writing committee for the *General Book of Discipline*;
 3. Further examine the formation and education of clergy, working toward a systemic model that embraces both Master of Divinity and Course of Study work and continues into provisional membership and the early years of ministry. The commission should also reflect on the possibility of allowing annual conference Boards of Ordained Ministry to consider persons for ordination who have completed advanced degrees (beyond the bachelor’s degree) in fields related to ministry when those degrees are integrated with basic graduate theological studies at an approved seminary;
 4. Examine funding sources and patterns for theological and ministry education and formation;
 5. Explore student debt accumulated by United Methodist seminary graduates and ways to reduce costs.
- a. The commission, in consultation with the Committee on Faith and Order, submits the study document entitled *A Sacred Trust: A Theological Framework for Ordained Ministry in The United Methodist Church*. This document is included below in this report.
 - b. Previous commissions and General Conferences have determined that our current approach to licensing, ordination, and conference membership does not align well with our history, polity, and theology of ordained ministry—and as a result, our sacred work was hindered.
 - c. In answering this call, through this offering, the commission intends the following:
 - Dialogue—initiate a churchwide conversation about the meaning of ordination;
 - Educate—Explore the deep historical and theological texture embedded in our tradition and our current practice of ministry;
 - Lead—Offer a pathway forward by wrestling with present and past conceptions of ordained and licensed ministry and present legislation to the 2024 General Conference that will bring the church’s polity related to licensed and ordained clergy into alignment with the church’s understanding of a theology of ordained ministry.
 - d. By carefully examining and courageously expressing the scriptural, ecclesial, practical, and theological groundings of ordained ministry, the church claims and celebrates the best of our Wesleyan tradition.
2. Explore and clarify the relationship between the ministry structures in the 2016 *Book of Discipline* and a possible *General Book of Discipline*. The commission should provide guidance and language in the development of text for the *General Book of Discipline*, Chapter Two—“The Ministry of the Ordained”—and Chapter Three—“The Superintendency.” Members of the commission shall be on the writing committee for the *General Book of Discipline*.
 - a. At its first two meetings, the commission provided input for chapters two and three.

Organized by the 2016 resolution and pursuing this charge, the commission is pleased to offer this report.

Observations and Analysis

1. Articulate a theology of ordained ministry for The United Methodist Church in consultation with the Committee on Faith and Order.

- b. A team representing the commission attended working sessions preceding each meeting of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters (SCCCM) in collaboration with the Committee on Faith and Order to continue the work on drafting the *General Book of Discipline* as mandated by General Conference.
 - c. Through consultation with and concurrence by the commission, the SCCCM recommends to General Conference to defer until 2024 to present a draft of the *General Book of Discipline*.
 - d. Legislation submitted by the SCCCM for 2020 includes the commission as a part of the *General Book of Discipline* work for the 2021-2024 quadrennium. Future intent is to continue this partnership and consultation with the SCCCM. Both the SCCCM and the commission are submitting legislation to continue the commission's consultation to the *General Book of Discipline*, should the commission be approved for the 2021-2024 quadrennium.
3. Further examine the formation and education of clergy, working toward a systemic model that embraces both Master of Divinity and Course of Study work and continues into provisional membership and the early years of ministry. The commission should also reflect on the possibility of allowing annual conference Boards of Ordained Ministry to consider persons for ordination who have completed advanced degrees (beyond the bachelor's degree) in fields relevant to ministry when those degrees are integrated with basic graduate theological studies at an approved seminary.
 - a. The commission's work on articulating a theology of ordained ministry must precede decisions about what the church requires for the education of clergy. The commission's further examination of the formation and education of clergy is inherent in the *A Sacred Trust* document, which is part of the commission's full report.
 4. Examine funding sources and patterns for theological and ministry education and formation.
 - a. The commission recommends adoption of petition #20206 (ADCA p. 514), which states: "All United Methodist annual conferences receiving Ministerial Education Fund allocations shall submit annual reports to the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry detailing how the Ministerial Education Fund allocations were spent."
 5. Explore student debt accumulated by United Methodist seminary graduates and ways to reduce cost.
 - a. Through a partnership and grant funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc., the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and Wespeth Benefits and Investments are doing extensive work on financial literacy and clergy debt. A grant team has been created to monitor the levels of financial literacy for clergy and the level of clergy debt that impacts clergy on a regular basis. Through this grant, numerous projects and educational opportunities have been developed to assist clergy in strengthening their skills in the area of financial leadership and alleviating clergy debt.
 - b. One project developed through this grant that has had great impact is the Excellence in Clergy Leadership Scholarship. Five hundred twenty-one students have been awarded funds over the last three years. Students who received scholarships in the first year reported collectively avoiding \$760,338 in additional debt.
 - c. Because of the extensive work this grant team is doing, the commission chose to focus their efforts on other issues that were more in line with the capacity and expertise of commission members. The grant team is covering the question of clergy financial literacy and debt using far more resources and expertise than are available to the commission for this area of work.
 - d. For a more complete report of this project, please see the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry's report.
 - b. This directive should continue to be considered by the 2021-2024 commission as the theology of ministry document continues to develop.

Conclusion and Request for Further Study

Focused and sustained conversation throughout The United Methodist Church will be needed in the next quadrennium as the church responds to the study document for *A Sacred Trust: A Theological Framework for Ordained Ministry in The United Methodist Church*. This document immediately follows below after the commission's recommendation for further study.

The 2017-2020 commission requests renewal for the 2021-2024 quadrennium. The resolution to renew the commission includes details related to the charge to the commission, the scope of its task, and its funding (see ADCA p. 1061, Petition # 20661, Ordained Ministry – Non-Disciplinary Resolution).

A Sacred Trust

A Theological Framework for Ordained Ministry in The United Methodist Church

Study of Ministry Commission, July 2019

Summary

Tasked by the 2016 General Conference “to articulate a theology of ordained ministry for The United Methodist Church,” the 2017-2020 Study of Ministry Commission (SMC) seeks to stimulate a conversation that deepens the church’s theological self-understanding in realizing God’s mission for a transformed world. Previous commissions and General Conferences have determined that our current approach to licensing, ordination, and conference membership does not align well with our history, polity, and theology of ordained ministry—and as a result, our sacred work is hindered. As resurrection people, we yearn for revival of the Wesleyan movement, and we offer this articulation in prayerful hope for the renewal of the church amidst the current denominational crisis.

The Study of Ministry Commission affirms the sacramental, incarnational, and prophetic nature of ordained ministry in The United Methodist Church. Rooted in a Wesleyan understanding of grace and holiness, we view ordained ministry as an embodied posture of service and an enfolded participation in the sublime movement of Spirit—in pursuit of a transformed world. The SMC has defined *ordination* as follows:

Ordination is a visible and outward sign of the sacred trust of clergy leadership. It is a gift of God, given to Christ’s church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Ordination is a holy act of the church universal that empowers clergy, who manifest an inward and spiritual grace, to represent the divine initiative at work in the community through the life of apostolic ministry. As a sacramental offering, rooted in our common baptism and one Table, ordination bears witness to the mission of God at work in the world.

In this light, we offer three key claims for dialogue, analysis, and implementation: (1) Ordination initiates elders and deacons into a posture of service and rule of life known as “order”; (2) Because of the sacramental nature of ordination, both deacons and elders bear responsibility for nurturing and leading the sacramental life of the church; (3) By ordaining rather than licensing clergy, the church reclaims its historical and theological position in relation to the ecumenical church.

We recognize that none of these represent the current practice of ministry in The United Methodist Church. The church’s mission will be well-served by the decoupling of ordination and conference membership and recovering the distinctive ministry of “traveling” and “local” ordained ministers (deacons and elders). We are convinced that, through deep theological engagement with one another, we can discover a new future together filled with the hope and promise of the apostolic tradition that we have inherited. At the end of this paper, we will offer questions that can guide the church’s conversation to discover together how our history and theology can push us into an imaginative rethinking of our posture and practice of ministry in relationship to the missional exigencies of the world in which we live today.

Preface

We inherit a beautiful and complicated tradition, gracefully broken and always experiencing renewal. Birthed in a lay-driven movement, The United Methodist Church constantly seeks the Spirit’s refreshing to become more relevant, vibrant, and dynamic. While we do not always exhibit the best of who we yearn to be; through conferencing, councils, and commissions, the church strives to be the people of God, a baptized community, the body of Christ. In pursuit of this vision, Study of Ministry Commissions have been charged by General Conferences to wrestle with our Wesleyan way of ordained, licensed, and lay ministry. For decades, these commissions have prayerfully examined the identity, shape, and scope of United Methodist ministry in order to more faithfully steward God’s mission for the church. Through constant reflection, the church strives for Christian perfection.

For the sake of renewed mission and ministry, the 2016 General Conference has directed this commission “to articulate a theology of ordained ministry for The United Methodist Church.” We have been called to make more deliberate and visible the embedded and hidden principles presently at work. Over the centuries, the practice of ordained ministry in Methodism has changed, morphed, and evolved in an organic manner that does not always systematically integrate our rich theology, history, and polity. However well-reasoned these changes have been—many times emerging from urgent missional necessity—they

have not been altogether cohesive, coordinated, and comprehensive; sometimes they have had unanticipated downstream consequences.

For example, the expansion of *licensing* has fundamentally altered the meaning of the sacraments and the sacramental nature of ordination, conference membership, and the orders. Licensing local pastors, who are not ordained, once was an exception to ensure that sacraments are available to all Christians. Over time, as congregations have increasingly expected clergy leadership to minister to the membership of the local parish rather than the mission field of a circuit, and as the cost of providing adequate compensation to elders has increased, this exception has increasingly become the norm. In effect, licensing has become a functional response to a missional challenge. This response, however, is not the only available option: For instance, elders could travel in circuits with responsibility for sacramental administration for a cluster of congregations. Such a practice, which has historical precedent, addresses a missional need while honoring more fully an apostolic understanding of the sacraments. In recent years, instead of deploying elders, the church has licensed pastors.

As one reads *A Sacred Trust: A Theological Framework for Ordained Ministry in The United Methodist Church*, one will observe the absence of theological discussion of licensing. This omission is not accidental. We maintain that licensing does not emerge from the theological and historical texture of our Wesleyan heritage. It is our intent here, in pursuit of traditioned innovation, to further the mission of The United Methodist Church that emerges from our historic commitment to advanced theological education and mutual accountability.

With that being said, local pastors are gifts to the church who offer the “means of grace.” We celebrate the faithful ministry that local pastors offer to the church every day. They are called and bear fruit. In fact, in some conferences, local pastors are *not* truly “local”; they are included in the pool of itinerant ministers (without the guarantee of an appointment) that the cabinet considers when making appointments through the conference. Moreover, we particularly honor the ministry of local pastors in racial/ethnic congregations and rural churches, who have driven transformational ministry in the face of extraordinary odds.

Observing the misalignment between our history, polity, and theology of ordained ministry, the General Conference called for an intervention to correct this misalignment. In answering this call, through this offering, this Study of Ministry Commission intends to:

1. **Dialogue**—initiate a theological conversation about the meaning of ordination;
2. **Educate**—explore the deep historical and theological texture embedded in our tradition and our current practice of ministry;
3. **Lead**—offer a pathway forward by wrestling with present and past conceptions of ordained and licensed ministry.

By carefully examining and courageously expressing the scriptural, ecclesial, practical, and theological groundings of ordained ministry, we claim and celebrate the best of our Wesleyan tradition.

True to both our spiritual and intellectual heritage, it is our prayerful hope that this document, *A Sacred Trust: A Theological Framework for Ordained Ministry in The United Methodist Church* (2019), will evolve and eventually come alongside *By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism* (2008) and *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion* (2004) as teaching resources for deeper formation. To some extent, it completes the threefold model set out in the pivotal ecumenical text, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper 111, 1982).

A Sacred Trust emerges from decades of Study of Ministry commissions and countless conversations, meetings, dialogues, and papers. Although our work here is descriptive, critical, and constructive, we are neither *creating* a theology of ordination nor revamping the ordination process. In articulating a theology of ordained ministry, we seek to give voice to what is already happening in our midst as we participate in the *Missio Dei* (mission of God). Toward this end, in this conversational document, we will engage the following questions:

- What is ordination and how do we define it?
- What is our theology of ordination? And why does it matter?
- What are the major historical insights that contribute to theological affirmations?
- What do we observe as the key challenges to our theology and practice of ordination?
- How might we proceed and offer constructive proposals for change?

Believing that transformational Christian leaders play a key role in the church’s renewal, here we flesh out historical and contemporary implications of Methodism’s theological orientation to ordained Christian leadership.

First, by way of introduction, we provide a *definition* of ordination in the Wesleyan way. In the second section, we unpack this definition and probe “The Meaning of

Ordination.” Next, in the third section, we explore “The Action of Ordination” and what it accomplishes in the life of the ordinand and the life of the church. Then, in the fourth section, we examine “The Nature of Ordained Ministry” as a process of calling, equipping, forming, and sending. The fifth section harkens back to our past in view of what lies ahead, considering “How Our History Informs Our Theology and Future Polity.” Finally, in section six, we offer some concluding remarks and pose some questions that might further advance the conversation.

To be sure, as we articulate a theology of ordination for The United Methodist Church—through the Wesleyan lens of Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason—new practical considerations with ecclesiastical and organizational implications will emerge. While noting that theology and practice are “always already” intertwined, it is not our intent to settle the organizational implications with immediate legislative changes. Instead, through an iterative and collaborative process, we hope the ensuing conversation will point toward a clear pathway for the 2024 General Conference.

Theology enlivens the church by providing language to the sublime mystery of God that we experience in Christian community. When we give voice to Spirit work, we issue a summons to participate in this divine gift. Because ordination is an extension of baptism, ordained ministry deepens the Christian call to world-transforming mission. In this vein, the theology of ordained ministry articulated herein expresses our hope for a church that has a clear self-understanding, and that is both well-positioned and actively engaged in relevant, significant mission. The church entrusts ordained ministers, who live in a clergy covenant of trust and mutual accountability, to lead this task—indeed it is a “sacred trust.”

I. Introduction

Ordination is a visible and outward sign of the sacred trust of clergy leadership. It is a gift of God, given to Christ’s church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Ordination is a holy act of the church universal that empowers clergy, who manifest an inward and spiritual grace, to represent the divine initiative at work in the community through the life of apostolic ministry. As a sacramental offering, rooted in our common baptism and one Table, ordination bears witness to the mission of God at work in the world.

When United Methodists gather for *revival* at annual conference, the service of ordination inspires the church. A fresh wind of Spirit blows, and God breathes life upon the communion of saints during divine worship. The joyous festival of song, dance, examination, and Word all

point toward that moment when the presiding bishop utters the collective prayer of the people: “Almighty God, pour out your Holy Spirit.” Profound hope resides in this simple petition. Through words that remember the baptismal and Communion invocations, as the gathered assembly of laity and clergy empowers its ordinands for the office and work of deacons and elders, the church creates itself anew.

The church yearns for transformation. Christians in the Wesleyan tradition seek always to experience a change of heart and life that ushers both the church and world more into the likeness of God. Ordained clergy offer unique leadership that stewards this transformation. During the annual conference, the service of ordination ritually marks the importance of this work, and the trust and expectations the church places in its clergy. As such, ordination is a defining moment in this worship service, the life of the church, and the life of the ordinand—mysterious, sacred, sublime—and still, very ordinary. Yes, it is in the everyday, the quotidian, that this mystery is inhabited. The Spirit comes close and unites the called, the community, and the holy One who calls each of us by name.

The church participates boldly and humbly in God’s mission in the world. This mission is not ours to create. Rather, we are called into the gift and the work, and our prayer is sung: “Finish, then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be” (Charles Wesley, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” 1747). Our task is to serve as means of grace—even to mirror the grace of Jesus Christ—so that the entire creation might know itself as beloved of God. All Christians are sent, as the other Wesley preached, “to spread scriptural holiness over the land” (John Wesley, “Scriptural Christianity,” 1744). On the job, in our families, and throughout the world, followers of Christ bear witness to the extravagant love of God.

“The people” constitute the church as the community of the baptized. Every Christian is called to ministry by virtue of baptism. (The word *laity* is derived from *laos*, meaning “the people.”) *By Water and the Spirit* explains: “This ministry, in which we participate both individually and corporately, is the activity of discipleship . . . grounded upon the awareness that we have been called into a new relationship not only with God, but also with the world. . . . This is the universal priesthood of all believers” (§56). This community of the baptized is regularly renewed and nourished at the Table as it seeks to fulfill God’s mission in the world.

The church exists for the sake of the world’s transformation, and as such does not stand apart from the world. Laity, in particular, live in this intersection of the world and church, and in so doing they lead and participate in ministry through the church’s “common life of

gratitude and devotion, witness and service, celebration and discipleship” (2016 *Book of Discipline* [BOD], ¶ 126). Their “Christ-like examples of everyday living as well as the sharing of their own faith experiences of the gospel” demonstrate how “all Christians are called to minister wherever Christ would have them serve and witness” (¶¶ 127, 128). As such, the “people called Methodists” have maintained that the church cannot exist without the ministry of the laity. The rapid growth of the Methodist movement, at its origins and in the present day, occurs in large part because the church is lay-driven and Christ-inspired.

From the laity, some are called to ordained ministry as clergy. While laity and clergy alike participate in the church’s ministry, ordained ministers are called to a new relationship to the church and a new manifestation of lifelong leadership. Ordained clergy are baptized Christians who surrender themselves to a “rule of life,” known as an order, which frames their service to the church. In fact, the word *ordination* itself comes from the root word for “order” (*ordo*). At its best, this service imitates the humility and downward mobility modeled in the ancient Christian hymn recorded in Philippians 2:6-11. Shaped by the church, ordained clergy help to shape the church’s contemporary mission and ministry. Initiated into this rule of life and a mode of accountability known as conference membership, the ordained serve God by engaging in an ongoing process of spiritual formation as they steward the renewal of the church through the ministries of Word, Sacrament, Order, Love, and Justice.¹

Complicated Concepts and Terminology

In The United Methodist Church, although both deacons and elders are ordained into orders, elders uniquely bear responsibility for the ministry of order, which is often reduced to the administration of a congregation’s life. This duplication of terms, in some ways, muddles a concept that carries layers of meaning, and unwittingly conflates identity and function.

Historically, the “order” emerged in the monastic traditions of the first millennium of the church. Those persons who belonged to a particular order followed a unique organization of their lives in an intentional community that defined an essential purpose for its existence in a unique way; defense of the faith, solidarity with the poor, evangelism, and education are examples. The orders provided distinctive lenses through which its members understood their relationship to the church and the world; preached the gospel of Jesus; and ensured, sustained, and extended the apostolic mission and sacraments through-

out the world as “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries” (1 Corinthians 4:1 ESV).

To be ordained into an order today connects elders and deacons with an ancient tradition that extends into contemporary communities that share a common lens and way of life. While elders shepherd the temporal and spiritual life of a local church, both deacons and elders—as initiands in a rule of life grounded in the apostolic tradition—order the ministry of the denomination. Through their unique identities, both elders and deacons order the *whole* life of the church to ensure that the work of the Holy Spirit animates the life of the church and that Jesus Christ is presented over and over again through its work within and beyond its doors. This understanding of order, therefore, cuts across all parts of ministry.

Not only is the term *order* charged with mixed meanings, but also the concept of *clergy* has evolved over time and in different contexts—and now carries sometimes confusing and even contradictory historical traces. For example, during the decades between 1940 and 1968, The Methodist Church eliminated the positions of “local elder” and “local deacon.” These persons had completed their education and were ordained, but because they did not “travel,” their membership was held in the quarterly or district conference. After 1968, the status of “lay pastor” was established, only to be quickly replaced by the “licensed local pastor”: nonordained persons who have the responsibility to celebrate sacraments in their appointments and have conference membership (with only a very few specific limitations), even when their first year of education in the Course of Study has not yet been completed.

To compound our confusion even further, the term *pastor* has morphed from a historic *role* that was carried out by both clergy and laypersons who led churches into an official *clergy status* in the annual conference. Historically, the ordained were called “preachers” and “ministers,” not “pastors.” Exhorters preached in local settings, and stewards cared for congregations, while preachers itinerated, celebrated sacraments, and performed weddings. It is into this rich, and even winding, tradition that this paper intervenes. The conversation continues—hopefully with added clarity and insight.

In deciphering our rich past, we call attention to two historical focal points: the eighteenth-century separation of the Methodist movement in the Americas from the Church of England, and twentieth-century mergers that have given rise to the present-day United Methodist Church. We trace the complex relationship of *licensing*, which originated as a function of the nation-state, to *ordi-*

1. The 2016 *Book of Discipline* includes “Service” as a function of both elders’ and deacons’ ministries. We believe *service* is a posture of ministry rather than a function of it (see below).

nation, which has always been an ecclesial act. As Methodism has evolved from a frontier movement to a conglomeration of denominations, our understandings of *clergy*, *traveling*, and *local* have reshaped the practice of ministry.

However malleable and obscured our theological articulation has been, today **we affirm the sacramental, incarnational, and prophetic nature of ordained ministry in The United Methodist Church.** Rooted in a Wesleyan understanding of grace and holiness, we confirm that ordained ministry is an embodied and enfleshed participation in the sacred and sublime movement of Spirit in pursuit of a transformed world. Just as God brought order to chaos in Creation, through ordination, God's Spirit orders the church, invites the baptized community into renewed and relevant ministry, initiates ministers into a "rule of life," and propels us all into the new creation. Out of the significance of this gift of Spirit, we make three constructive theological assertions:

1. Ordination initiates elders and deacons into a posture of service and rule of life known as "order";
2. Because of the sacramental nature of ordination, both deacons and elders bear responsibility for nurturing and leading the sacramental life of the church;
3. By ordaining rather than licensing clergy, the church reclaims its historical and theological position in relation to the ecumenical church.

Ordination matters because, through clergy leadership, the church strives for transformation as a sacramental community. Deeply rooted in its ancient and apostolic nature, the church has established ordination as essential to its identity as a community grounded in Word and Sacrament. As Christians, we envision a new day that is already dawning but not yet fully among us. Ordained clergy, through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, guide the church in living into this future.

II. The Meaning of Ordination

Ordination Is a Visible and Outward Sign of Sacred Trust

John Wesley, following his Anglican heritage, believed that the sacraments are an "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace" (*The Book of Common Prayer*). In the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, the outward signs of water, bread, and wine, signify (or point to) another spiritual reality that is manifested through their celebration among the assembly of the faithful. Ordination, though not a sacrament for United Methodists, is sacramental. It is an outward sign that points to a new, spiritual reality. Ordination is an effective

sign of the Holy Spirit's action empowering the ordained for an office and work of ministry in the church. Said another way, ordination is a means of grace. Because God is faithful and responds to the prayer of the church that has surrounded, supported, and formed a candidate over time, ordination confers the grace it signifies.

Ordination establishes a sacred trust between the holy Trinity, the church, and the ordained. The church entrusts the ordained to be stewards of the Word, of the sacraments, and of the apostolic tradition. The act of ordaining confers on the one being ordained this sacred trust, initiated by the Holy Spirit through call and confirmed by the church through a thorough formational process. The call to ordained ministry is a call to a particular kind of life, given over to the ways of God lived out through the ministries of the church. Ordination establishes a new identity and way of being in which the ordained assumes a new posture among the baptized, a posture of service that is shaped by the order into which one is ordained.

The sacred trust of ordination is shaped throughout the process leading up to ordination, formed through the historic examination of candidates before the annual conference, and established by the covenant between the ordained and the church in the general examination of the ordination liturgy. After the candidates for ordination are presented, the assembled people of God declare their assent and pledge on behalf of the whole church to "uphold them in their ministry" (*2017-2020 Ordinal*, 19).

The ordained are identified as "coworkers with all the people of God" and reminded that they are "called to serve rather than to be served." They are asked to affirm faith in the triune God and confidence in the holy Scriptures. They are charged to be faithful in prayer and in the spiritual disciplines as a way of patterning their lives after the teachings of Christ and leading the people of God to "seek peace, justice, and freedom for all people." They are asked to pledge loyalty to The United Methodist Church, "accepting and upholding its order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline," and submitting to mutual accountability with peers and supervisors alike, with the reciprocal expectation that they will be sustained and built up "in prayer, study, worship and service under the rule of life" of the order into which they are ordained (*Ordinal*, 19-20).

The laity and the ordained are thus bound to one another in this covenant of sacred trust; in the prayer of ordination, God blesses and affirms that covenant as the bishop, on behalf of the whole people of God, asks the Almighty to "pour upon the *candidate* the Holy Spirit for the office and work of a deacon [or elder] in Christ's holy church" (*Ordinal*, 25, 28).

Ordination Is a Gift of God to Christ's Holy Church Through the Power of the Holy Spirit

As a church, we believe that God hears our prayers and responds. In every age and time, the people of God need faithful leadership to navigate the tension between the reign of God announced by Christ and the petty fiefdoms of this world in which human will and desire still hold sway. The church in every age prays to ask God for leadership in such a time as this. God provides this leadership by calling forth candidates for ordained ministry, who are then formed, equipped, ordained, and sent to lead the church in bearing witness to the reign of God in the midst of a world so desperately needing to experience Christ's saving grace. In the ordination service, the people of God recognize and receive this gift. The prayer of ordination is the people's prayer, led by the bishop, who lays hands on the head of the ordained and calls upon the power of the Holy Spirit. While the sign-act of ordination is led by the bishop, the action of ordaining is God's work, the fulfillment of a call prayerfully discerned by both candidate and church over time (*Ordinal*, 6).

Ordination makes known some of the many ways the Holy Spirit has already been acting and continues to act in an ongoing way through the life of both the ordained and the church, signifying, not only our utter dependence upon God for the outcome of the church's prayer, but also our trust that the Holy Spirit can and will do things "far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20 ESV). Ordination represents an outpouring of the trinitarian life through the church to the ordained who are equipped to lead and guide the church in the shared apostolic ministry of being taken, blessed, broken, and given for the life of the world.

Ordination Is a Holy Act of the Church Universal

As United Methodists, we believe that the grace of God is at work in us long before we become aware. By God's initiative, revealed most fully through Christ, grace frees us from the power of sin and leads us to live a life ever more fully reflective of God's loving intention. Because ordination is an outward and visible sign, it signifies an inward and spiritual grace. This grace is exhibited through a divine call, discerned mutually by both an individual and the church, and manifested through ministries that bear the fruit of the Spirit as the ordained continue to grow into a fuller expression of God's loving intention, being "made perfect in love" (2016 *BOD*, Wesley's Historic Questions, ¶ 336.3). Through grace, the ordained are formed in the ways of God to live a disciplined spiritual life in communion with all the faithful, and in ordi-

nation are sent to bear the fruit of the vine in which they abide (John 15:5).

As part of the church universal, The United Methodist Church shares a sacramental life with other communions and expressions of Christ's body, mutually recognizing God's work in baptism and Christ's presence in Holy Communion through one another's ministries. Similarly, the orders of ministry in The United Methodist Church are ecumenically recognizable, with distinctive roles for deacons, elders, and bishops, which is an important value in our ecumenical relationships and mutual ministry agreements, including those that honor and recognize that we are in full communion. Ecumenically, the ordained serve as ambassadors who represent "the divine initiative and expresses the connection of the local community with other local communities of the universal Church" (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry [BEM]*, "Eucharist," §29). What ties us together ecumenically also unites us in the global mission and witness of the church whose expressions may vary, but whose sacramental life is unified by the Spirit at work through our common apostolic ministry.

Ordination Empowers Clergy to Represent the Divine Initiative at Work in the Community Through the Life of Apostolic Ministry

To be apostolic is to be connected by faith and history with the witness of the apostles. The apostolic witness of the church stands in continuity with the good news of God revealed in the person and presence of Jesus the Christ (Mark 1:15) and made known by the power of the Holy Spirit at work through those whom Christ formed, equipped, and sent to be his witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8 NIV). Following the trajectory of the apostles' ministries, the church's apostolic witness is relentlessly missional. The church itself is a sent community on the move, called to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" (2016 *BOD*, ¶ 120). As *Sent in Love (SIL)* states it:

Maintaining the apostolicity of the church requires that a concern for continuity in the essentials of faith and practice be matched by an equal concern for an outward reaching missional perspective. From this perspective we are mindful that encountering the world with the gospel calls the church to ongoing reform and renewal of its life, a "traditioned innovation" that allows the church to express the life-giving truth of the gospel in fresh ways as the faithful encounter new people in new places (¶ 56).

Led by the Holy Spirit, the ordained help the church articulate and embody the apostolic witness of the present availability of the kingdom of God, which Jesus announced through incarnational, life-changing relationships and prophetic, world-shaping missional engagement.

Just as the church is called out of the world (the Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, meaning “to be called out”) to be formed in Christlike living, so the ordained are called out of the church to be formed with a unique identity among the people of God. In order to represent the good news of the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed at work in the world, the ordained serve as a sign representing Christ’s persistent presence and promise both in the church, and through the church in the world. To re-present is to present Jesus Christ again in the world in all aspects of one’s work and life.

The work of laity and clergy together is a mutually shared expression of Christ’s ministry for the life of the world. The spiritual gifts identified in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4 are clearly named as being given to the church “for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12 NRSV). They are given to be formational, to draw the church into a unity of faith and knowledge, to spur it into a greater maturity expressed as “the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13 NRSV). From the scriptural witness, it is clear that the spiritual gifts, including proclamation, evangelism, prophecy, teaching, exhortation, generosity, and leadership are given to the laity, the people of God. Any member of the body may, therefore, share in preaching, teaching, leadership, and ordering the life of the church; and every member has a share in the sacramental life of the church. While the tasks of ministry are shared and are not exercised exclusively by the ordained, ordained clergy lead these ministries in a representative way.

From within this general ministry of all believers, God calls, and the Church authorizes some persons for the task of representative ministry. . . . The vocation of those in representative ministry includes focusing, modeling, supervising, shepherding, enabling, and empowering the general ministry of the Church. Their ordination . . . is grounded in the same baptism that commissions the general priesthood of all believers (*By Water and the Spirit*, ¶ 57).

Just as an individual disciple may represent Christ through everyday life and witness, so the ordained also are given a distinctive representative ministry by God’s loving initiative. The ordained humbly offer themselves to serve as a focal point through whom Christ chooses to represent himself in ways that reveal his grace at work

in the life of the baptized and that transform the assembly into his body, empowered to represent his ministry in the world. This sense of representation is deeply consonant with our theology of the Table in *This Holy Mystery* (THM), “It [Holy Communion] is a re-presentation, not a repetition, of the sacrifice of Christ. . . . Nourished by sacramental grace, we strive to be formed into the image of Christ and to be made instruments for transformation in the world” (THM, 8-9).

After the Resurrection, Jesus told his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21-22 NRSV). Apostolic authority comes from our participation in the mission of Christ, to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19 NRSV). The ordained are given authority by the church to represent Christ at Table and Font, to help the church see and know Christ who presides over every baptism and eucharistic feast, and who relentlessly leads the church out through ministries of compassion and justice in the world. The authority conferred by the church to administer the sacraments and to lead the church in its ministries is not to be understood as power over anyone or anything, but rather as the holy privilege of one carrying out the apostolic ministry of leading the people of God in becoming who they are by the grace of God.

As a Sacramental Offering, Rooted in Our Common Baptism and One Table, Ordination Bears Witness to the Mission of God at Work in the World

Together with all the people of God, the ordained are formed by the life of Christ made known at the Table. It is there that we “offer ourselves with praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ’s offering for us,” and there we pray that the Holy Spirit may be poured down upon us, and upon the gifts of bread and wine. “Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood” (UMH, 10). Every time the assembly gathers to celebrate the Eucharist, we offer ourselves to God with Christ and pray for the Holy Spirit to make us Christ’s body, an offering to the world in which we live (THM, 9). When ordained elders and deacons lead the peoples’ prayer together at the Table, they represent this dual movement of offering ourselves to God, who then offers us back to the world, the transformed ones who become agents of transformation. Together, the two orders appropriately and helpfully lead the people in the eucharistic movement of turning toward God in worship and turning toward the world in service.

The church, transformed by the life of Christ made known in the sacraments, itself becomes the bearer of the mission of God at work in the world. We believe that, “the life of the church is a sharing in the love of the triune God. The mission of the church is to communicate that possibility to a world ravaged by sin and in need of salvation” (*SIL* 17, ¶ 40).

It is God’s mission in the world, that both calls the church into being and makes it into a transformed instrument of transformation. The laity and the clergy together are the priesthood of the faithful who embody this mission, each with distinctive roles in carrying out the mission of the church. Reflecting on the marks of the church affirmed by the second ecumenical council in the fourth century CE, *Sent in Love* (¶ 16) identifies four convictions regarding God’s saving love that give life to our United Methodist sense of what it means to be God’s holy church in the world.

1. The saving love of God empowers a missional community (called to be apostolic).
2. The saving love of God is meant for all people (called to be catholic).
3. The saving love of God is transformative (called to be holy).
4. The saving love of God creates community (called to be one).

This fourfold movement helps us see the mission of God through the church’s confession and suggests that the work of the clergy and laity together can be seen in its trajectory. So, we can say that: United Methodist clergy are called to be sent, to lead the church to embody its apostolic witness to the reign of God breaking forth in the world. United Methodist clergy are called to be inclusive, leading the church to welcome all people into a loving, life-changing relationship with the living God. United Methodist clergy are called to a life of personal and social holiness, pilgrims on a grace-filled journey to be made perfect in love in order to lead the church in becoming a grace-filled agent of transformation in the world. United Methodist clergy are called as part of a community of love and forgiveness to lead the church to embody Jesus’ prayer that “they may be one, as we are one” so that the world may come to believe (John 17:21-22 NRSV).

Ordination bears witness to the mission of God at work in the world. The two orders of clergy offer complementary and distinctive gifts that can help the church embody the mission of Christ for the life of the world in ways that enable the church to be transformed even as it is serving as an agent of transformation in the world.

The authority given to deacons and elders should never be exercised as “power over” anyone or anything. It is always held in common with the church. Throughout his ministry, and expressly at his Last Supper, Jesus adopted the posture of one who serves (Luke 22:27), washing his disciples’ feet and setting an example (John 13:15) of service for them and for us. At ordination, deacons and elders are given a yoke of obedience, represented by the stole, that identifies their ministries as ministries of service. Service, while a posture assumed by all disciples of Jesus Christ, is expressed distinctively by the ordained according to the rule of life that orders their ministries as elders or deacons. Service, therefore, cannot be a function of either order of ministry but is rather the posture by which the ordained exercise their leadership in relationship with the *laos*, the people of God, empowering the church to serve the mission of Christ in the world.

III. The Action of Ordination

The goal of discipleship is the formation of a Christ-like character, using all of one’s energy and power to serve God’s will and to be about Christ’s mission on earth. By practicing the spiritual disciplines and being shaped by the means of grace, the baptized learn to trust in God’s ways. This formation in the ways of God is critical for those called to ordination, who willingly give themselves over to the work of God in and through the church.

Through ordination, the Holy Spirit empowers, and the church authorizes. These complementary movements are embodied in the liturgy. There are two sign-acts that accompany ordination. In the first, the bishop lays hands on the ordinand’s head and prays, “Almighty God, pour upon *Name* the Holy Spirit for the office and work of [a deacon/an elder] in Christ’s holy church” (*Ordinal*, 25, 28). By this action and through these words, we trust that the Holy Spirit who has formed, shaped, and equipped the candidate, now acts through the bishop in the company of the faithful. By laying hands on the head of the ordinand, the bishop is participating in the apostolic tradition passed down through the generations of church leadership (2 Timothy 1:6). The practice of laying hands on the head of the ordained is an ancient witness that is understood to bear a gift that empowers the ordained. It is, therefore, an essential part of the act of prayer in ordination (*Ordinal*, 9).

The second sign-act in the ordination service is the laying of the bishop’s hands upon the hands of the ordinand. In this second sign-act, the church authorizes the newly ordained to “take authority” as a deacon or elder. Whereas the first sign-act (the laying of the bishop’s hands upon the head) points to the work of the Holy Spirit in or-

daing, the second sign-act, the laying of hands upon the hands of the ordained, is an act of the church, authorizing the newly ordained to carry out his or her work among the people (*Ordinal*, 8). As such, ordination

confers a new role in the life of the church as well as authority for leadership in specific forms of ministry. The new role . . . is claimed in relation to Christ and his call to leadership and service among the baptized for the life of the world. The authority given is exercised in stewardship of the mysteries of the gospel and of the church's mission to the world. (*Ordinal*, 7)

Ordination Initiates a Person into an Order

As the ordained are given a new role in the life of the church, they are also initiated into a specific way of being, shared by an accountable community known as the "order" into which they are ordained.

The sign of ordination . . . like baptism, should be understood not as a graduation, but as an *initiation* into the way of life of the order into which the candidates are being ordained. That way of life is governed by the vows attending each ordained office. These vows, in turn, specify how these set-apart ministers, together with sisters and brothers in their order, are called and held accountable to live out their baptismal vocation within the life of the church for the sake of the world. (*Ordinal*, 6-7)

The *Ordinal* describes the ministries of deacons and elders as a "rule of life and work." This rule of life serves as a lens that frames the way those ordained to each order see and approach ministry in the church and in the world.

Once initiated into a particular life of ministry, "those who are ordained make a commitment to conscious living of the whole gospel and to the proclamation of that gospel to the end that the world may be saved" (2016 *BOD*, ¶ 303.1). Thus, ordination to the same or equivalent order is not repeatable (2016 *BOD*, ¶ 303.5), and "those who enter into it dedicate their whole lives to the personal and spiritual disciplines it requires" (2016 *BOD*, ¶ 303.3). To be ordained is to be formed in a new identity, giving one's whole life over to serve Christ and his kingdom through a particular relationship with the church recognized through the orders of ministry. The orders of deacons and elders, therefore, have a significant responsibility for both ongoing formation and mutual accountability.

The Order of Deacons

At ordination, deacons are given authority by the church "to proclaim the Word of God and to lead God's people in ministries of compassion and justice" (*Ordinal*, 25). Deacons' ministries serve as a bridge linking the church to the world and the world to the church. The office and work of a deacon is described this way in the bishop's examination of candidates for ordination:

A deacon is called to share in Christ's ministry of servanthood, to relate the life of the community to its service in the world, to lead others into Christian discipleship, to nurture disciples for witness and service, to lead in worship, to teach and proclaim God's Word, to assist elders and appointed local pastors at Holy Baptism and Holy Communion,² to interpret to the church the world's hurts and hopes, to serve all people, particularly the poor, the sick, and the oppressed, and to lead Christ's people in ministries of compassion and justice, liberation and reconciliation, especially in the face of hardship and personal sacrifice. This is the rule of life and work of a deacon. (*Ordinal*, 23-24)

Biblically, the order of deacons arose in Acts chapter 6 to address an expressed need for ministries of compassion and justice, caring for those in need and helping the marginalized encounter the full embrace of Christian community. Seven people were identified and called out, including Stephen. They were said to be "of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3 NRSV). They came before the apostles, "who prayed and laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6 NRSV), thus ordaining them to the office and work of a deacon. In Acts 7, Stephen bore witness to the Holy Spirit's work outside of expected channels, modeling the role of the deacon standing on the edge of the community of faith and, through faithful searching of the Scriptures, calling it to find its larger witness in relationship with the world around. His faithful witness represented the love of Christ in word and deed and stands as a reminder of the vulnerability of those who are called to serve.

Deacons are ordained to a ministry of Word, Compassion, and Justice. Shared in common with elders, the ministry of the Word includes the faithful proclamation and teaching of the Word in a way that enables the church to engage the world with a heart of compassion and a prophetic longing for God's justice to prevail. With a Wesleyan passion for social holiness, deacons help the

2. Given the stated theology of this document and the recommendation we make to return to the Wesleyan and ecumenical standard that pairs sacramental authority with ordination, we believe that the *Ordinal* would require revision. Our theology, as noted below, also makes space for deacons to share full sacramental authority with elders.

church love the world with the compassionate heart of Jesus and confront the powers of the world in a way that brings “good news to the poor, . . . release to the captives, . . . recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18 NRSV; see Isaiah 61:1). Deacons represent Christ’s work among the marginalized and lead the church in ministries that cultivate the life of the Kingdom.

In Greek, *diakonos* indicates the role of a table servant, one who both sets the table and makes room around it for all. The role of deacon is, therefore, sacramental, though distinct from the role of the elder. The current practice of deacons assisting elders in the administration of the sacraments includes extending the church’s sacramental life, making space for all, especially the poor and the marginalized, including those who present themselves in contexts other than the church’s regular assembly. Our theological understanding creates space for deacons, by virtue of their ordination, to administer the sacraments.

The Order of Elders

At ordination, elders are given authority “to preach the Word of God, to administer the Holy Sacraments and to order the life of the Church” (*Ordinal*, 28). The ministry of the elder stands in continuity with the apostolic tradition. The office and work of an elder is described this way in the bishop’s examination of candidates for ordination:

An elder is called to share in the ministry of Christ and of the whole church: to preach and teach the Word of God and faithfully administer the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion; to lead the people of God in worship and prayer; to lead persons to faith in Jesus Christ; to exercise pastoral supervision, to order the life of the congregation and the connection, to counsel the troubled, and declare the forgiveness of sin; to lead the people of God in obedience to Christ’s mission in the world; to seek justice, peace, and freedom for all people; and to take a responsible place in the government of the Church and in service in and to the community. This is the rule of life and work of an elder. (*Ordinal*, 26)

From the very beginning, Jesus called, equipped, and sent disciples to bear witness to the Kingdom life he proclaimed (Matthew 10:1-8). As witnesses of the Lord’s life and resurrection (Acts 1:21-26), the apostles (Greek: those who are sent) led the early believers into a particular kind of shared life devoted to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread together, and prayer (Acts 2:42).

As part of his apostolic ministry, Paul established churches everywhere he went and appointed elders

(Greek: *presbyters*) to continue the apostolic ministries of the churches in his absence (Acts 14:23). As pastors with hearts and lives formed after the heart and life of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd (John 10:11), elders assemble, guide, equip, and send the people of God to embody the Kingdom life “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10 NRSV). The ministry of the elder is to lead the church in becoming more Christlike for the sake of the world he came and died to save.

Elders are ordained to Word, Sacrament, and Order. Shared in common with deacons, the ministry of the Word has historically been understood as a preaching ministry, proclaiming the reality and the presence of the kingdom of God available through Christ and his teaching. Elders carry the responsibility of helping the people of God understand and interpret the Word of God in ways that bear witness to the eternal truths of God revealed in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit in every age and season. With the sacraments serving as central practices of Christian faith and life, forming the identity of both individuals and the assembly as part of the body of Christ, it is the elder who has primary responsibility to help the church embody its sacramental life in a way that forms it as an ongoing witness to Christ’s life-transforming power in the present age. A significant emphasis of the ministry of ordering the life of the church is about creating abundant space so that the work of the Holy Spirit can take place. In ordering the life of the church, the elder is responsible for cultivating a healthy spiritual life among Christian disciples around a Kingdom vision that enables the church to become an agent of transformation in the world.

In the United Methodist tradition, bishops are not ordained to a new order, as they are in many other parts of the ecumenical church. United Methodist bishops are elected from among the elders and consecrated to a new expression of the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order. From apostolic times, leaders have been designated to exercise oversight (*episcopé*) in the wider church (1 Timothy 3). One of the principal gifts offered by episcopal leaders (bishops) is “to express and safeguard the unity of the body” (*BEM*, “Ministry,” §23). In the service of consecration for bishops, the ministry of the newly elected is lifted up this way: “You are called to guard the faith, to seek the unity, and to exercise the discipline of the whole church; and to supervise and support the church’s life, work, and mission throughout the world” (*Ordinal*, 59).

IV. The Nature of Ordained Ministry: Called, Equipped, Formed, Sent

Ordained ministers are persons who respond to the call of God and the church and enter into the vocation

that requires the enhancement and testing of their natural and spiritual gifts, knowledge, and skills for the particular work of ordained ministry, a formation of their Christian identity and character, and their willingness to be sent in mission in and to the world. Ordained ministers are called, equipped, formed, and sent.

Called into Ordained Ministry

The Latin word *vocare* means “to call” or “to summon.” A vocation is a form of work for which a person has perceived a sense of calling by God that one feels compelled or driven to fulfill. A call is an internal disposition that pays attention to the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s life. The call of the baptized to general ministry draws a person into a distinctive understanding and practice of life through witness and service, which is formed by a constant commitment to love God, to imitate Jesus, and to live one’s life formed by the gifts one is given through the gospel.

The call of God to ordained ministry is, first, an inward call that asserts that the person is driven by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel and lead communities of faith in the whole ministry of the church. There is no single way in which God calls a person into ordained ministry. Each person who receives a call to ordained ministry will hear or experience God’s affirmation and beckoning differently. According to Wesley, this call of God is confirmed by “marks” that demonstrate one’s love for God, gifts and grace for the work of ministry, and evidence of success in the lives of other people with whom they have ministered (John Wesley, *Address to the Clergy*, 1756).

Second, the call of the church is an outward call that confirms the inward call to the tradition in which the person seeks to live out the inward call. For Wesley, this took place during a “trial” period of at least one year when the candidate was tested while fulfilling work in an appointed circuit (*Address to the Clergy*). Today, confirmation of the outward call of the church occurs through a specific set of steps that move a candidate toward greater clarity about the call to United Methodist ordained ministry. The call to ordained ministry is a call on behalf of and for the whole church; so, on occasion, a candidate will discern that a different conference or even a different denomination may be the best community in which to fulfill her or his call.

A response to a call is only the beginning of a lifelong process of equipping and formation, shaped by the reality of ordination in one’s life. Call may be the motivator into ordained ministry, but equipping and formation are the processes that sustain an ordained minister in what Wesley described as that “incessant labour of love” (*Address to the Clergy*).

Equipped Through Lifelong Learning

As previously stated, gifted leaders are expected to equip “the saints” in order to fulfill the purpose of bringing people and communities to a point of mature faith, this is to say, mature discipleship. Mature disciples would then, according to Ephesians 4:14 (NRSV), have the capacity to discern the “trickery” and “deceitful scheming” of those who would lead them astray, and, most important, participate in building up the body in love.

Both Wesley and Asbury emphasized the importance of equipping preachers and clergy for their work as a fundamental priority. Begun as a list of assigned books to be completed each year, this practice evolved into the Course of Study and then into a seminary education. The underlying presupposition of Methodism’s founders, which has been maintained throughout our tradition, is that clergy require a fundamental understanding of: the world in which they live, the Scriptures, the history and traditions of the church universal, and the practices of ministry. To this end, today’s Course of Study and seminary education offer the minimum necessary to prepare persons for their clergy vocations. The ecclesial expectation is that all clergy will continue to identify areas of growth fulfilled through their commitment to lifelong learning.

Formed Throughout One’s Ministry

In his *Address to the Clergy*, Wesley emphasized the importance of “right intention,” and the ability to love God and neighbor with all one’s soul and strength to such an extent that it “swallow[s one] up, possess[es one] whole, [and] constitute[s one’s] supreme happiness.” The minister is to be an “example of all holy and heavenly tempers, filling the heart so as to shine through the life.” The minister’s life is supposed to be “one incessant labour of love; one continued tract of praising God, and helping [others].”

For the heart to remain full, for ministry to remain “one incessant labour of love,” a person must be sustained by an emotionally and spiritually healthy life. This kind of sustenance requires an ongoing, intentional, lifelong process of formation. Consequently, a person’s call to the vocation of ordained ministry is explored and enhanced, not just during one’s education, but also in the course of spiritual and ecclesiastical formation. This formation takes place during the stages of candidacy and provisional membership prior to being approved for ordination. This takes a significant number of years because the process is designed to assist clergy with learning the information needed to be effective in their appointments, and also forming their identity as an ordained minister, refining their personal and communal spiritual practices,

and integrating what they learn with who they are becoming.

A deep, mature commitment to ministry cannot be sustained without parallel dedications to a life of maturing knowledge and skills, faith and character. It encompasses both an ongoing commitment to intellectual growth and a deeply personal and communal spiritual journey. Both are required to sustain one's call and ministry throughout life. It requires an increasingly full sense of one's connection and accountability to one's order and to the church. It requires a willingness to submit long-term to a deepening, humbling awareness of the presence and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God in one's life of missional service.

Sent in Mission to the Church and the World

Because the church universal exists for the purpose of being an agent of God's apostolic mission in and to the world, United Methodist ordained ministers are, by the very essence of their call, sent out into mission. Elders are both sent out in mission through itineracy and lead the church in mission. Deacons identify the type and location of their ministries and are appointed to and lead missional ministries in both the church and world. This is the key to Methodist itineracy.

Matthew 28 and 2 Corinthians form the biblical basis for this understanding. Jesus sent out the apostles with the mandate to make disciples of all nations. They traveled to parts of the world they had never known with the responsibility of making space for, establishing, and building up the body of Christ. Sent out as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, the apostles itinerated throughout Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia.

Wesley's movement of preachers was predicated on the same basis. So Wesley's preachers traveled in two ways. First, they were sent to different parts of England and Ireland and then reappointed, nearly every year, to new locations. Second, they traveled on circuits within the region to which they had been appointed. In U.S. Methodism, the ordained minister who itinerated was known as the "traveling preacher" and the order of elder as "the missional order" in the *Book of Discipline*.

The United Methodist system of itineracy—that of appointing clergy with specific gifts, graces, and skills to churches and ministries with matching missional needs—is designed to enhance the possibilities of sharing the gospel in effective ways. While the system has evolved throughout our history, it is fundamental to a Methodist understanding of the relationship between apostolic mission and ordination.

V. How Our History Can Inform Our Theology and Future Polity

While this document seeks to articulate a theology of ordained ministry, our intent is to spark a much larger conversation about how to restructure and realign our systems of leadership to be more effective in our mission. The models of ministry we have inherited largely arose in a twentieth-century context and are increasingly unsustainable. We are not without hope, however. We believe our history gives us a ready road map for a revival of United Methodism. We can learn much from the historic adaptability of the Methodist movement that can help the church reimagine itself for the future, creating new structures to support ministries with "traditioned" innovation.

Lay-led, Apostolic Ministries

At its origin, Methodism was largely a lay-led movement. The vast majority of Wesley's preachers in Britain, Ireland, and the American colonies were laypersons (including several women). Over time, we have grown to be more clergy-dependent. For example, the key question we always seem to ask with a new church start is about viability, which means, ultimately, the ability to pay a pastor. Why is the ability to pay a pastor the standard for what it means to be church? Historically, the church depended on lay pastors to further its mission, yet the role of lay pastor was replaced by the idea of "local pastor" in the 1976 *Discipline*. Nevertheless, lay pastors still exist in United Methodism as a missional adaptation in central conferences.

- What can we learn from our history to release laypeople to inhabit their own incarnational ministries?
- In what ways can we imagine a renewed emphasis on lay-led apostolic ministries that remain networked with and connected to a sending church?
- What kinds of pathways can we create to support and encourage experimentation and innovation inside and outside local churches (learning from faith partners like Missional Wisdom or Fresh Expressions)?
- What are the best ways for the ordained to support a vital sacramental life shared between a local church and its apostolic expressions?
- What kind of equipping and formational processes would be helpful to create a distinctive Methodist ethos and identity within highly contextualized lay-led apostolic ministries?
- What kind of accountability should be expected for such lay-led initiatives?
- What can we learn from the central conferences about equipping and deploying lay pastors?

Revitalized Circuit-based Ministries

Circuits were Wesley's original organizational structure for itineracy. Circuits were fully adaptable to the American colonies and the new frontier as well. Lay preachers, and then later, ordained clergy were assigned to a logical pattern of locations that facilitated travel and maximized access to the sacraments.

- How might revitalized circuit-based ministries encourage shared missional initiatives in the communities in which they are set?
- How might ordained clergy be deployed to serve collaboratively with circuits to magnify cooperative ministry opportunities among churches?
- What economic models might be used to support collaborative circuit ministries to make the whole system more sustainable?
- How might revitalized circuits bring a sense of being a connectional church closer to the experience of the local church?
- What possibilities might there be for some smaller churches to become centers of Wesleyan discipleship led by lay class leaders with a vital sacramental life cared for through clergy, appointed to serve the local circuit connection?
- How might ordained clergy appointed to circuits ensure a vital sacramental life for lay-led churches?
- How are circuits being used in central conferences?

Revitalized circuits in the twenty-first century could also become centers for formation, cultivating both lay and clergy leadership.

- How might ordained clergy appointed to circuits serve as mentors and teachers in cooperation with seminaries and Courses of Study for the formation and equipping of student pastors in the ordination process?
- How might circuits become formational communities, cultivating a shared ministry consciousness founded on a sense of interdependence among students and resident clergy in formation?
- How might the principles of apprenticeship benefit those in the formational process?
- How might the curricula of seminaries and Courses of Study take advantage of such formational learning communities as part of their teaching, particularly in relation to equipping students in the disciplines of practical ministry?
- In what ways could clergy gifted in teaching be equipped to serve as extension faculty to facilitate circuit-based contextual learning communities?

- How would clergy formation in circuits impact central conferences?

Licensing, Ordination, and the Authority to Administer the Sacraments

The practice of licensing for ministry began in the late 1600s in England when the government decided they needed to have a way to approve or disapprove of particular nonconformist faith groups (meaning simply, *not* Church of England). This innovation started with the state, not the church, and was tied to the ability to perform weddings on behalf of the state. In the U.S., that standard got flipped so that it became the church that issues a license, which the state then uses to determine who is eligible to perform weddings. The idea of licensing clergy in lieu of ordaining them is a twentieth-century innovation, with extraordinary provision made in the 1939 *Discipline*. It was not until 1976 that the status of "local pastor" was normalized, and local pastors were given the responsibility to administer the sacraments in their appointments.

John Wesley did not agree to non-ordained preachers administering sacraments, and the Church of England did not approve of priests celebrating Communion outside the bounds of the church. Lay preachers were never given permission to celebrate the sacraments, with the notable exception of Robert Strawbridge, the Irish lay preacher who immigrated to Maryland. It seems we have built a rather complex and convoluted polity around an *exception*. When Wesley did ordain Whatcoat and Vasey and sent them to the new United States with Thomas Coke, it was for the purpose of making the sacraments available in America, where the ties to the Church of England were severed. It is worth noting that he did not choose to use the exception of Mr. Strawbridge as his blueprint for making the sacraments available. Instead, he chose to break covenant with the Church of England and take upon himself the authority to ordain. For Wesley, sacramental authority belongs with the ordained.

- What would be the implications of returning to the Wesleyan and ecumenical standard of conferring the authority to administer the sacraments at ordination instead of by licensing?
- How might we reframe our understanding of the respective ministries of deacons and elders?
- What is the nature of the covenant and mutual accountability within an order?
- In what ways might deacons and elders adopt distinctive, yet complementary postures in magnifying the sacramental life of the church?

Recovering the Distinction Between Local and Traveling Clergy

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, local deacons and elders who did not itinerate were being ordained. The term *location*, which we still use, meant that a clergy person left the company of traveling preachers, but could still be appointed to a church. Local elders and deacons completed the same educational requirements as traveling deacons and elders. They were also supervised and managed by presiding elders who were always traveling elders.

The reunification of 1939 saw the continued status of local deacon and local elder. The key distinctions were completion of higher levels of education, itineration, and membership in the annual conference. Local clergy did not travel and were members of the quarterly or district conference. Traveling clergy itinerated and were members of the annual conference. It wasn't until the merger of 1968 that the official distinction between local and traveling clergy disappeared from the church. In 1996, of course, the ordained deacon was added as a category of non-itinerating clergy. For a candidate, the distinction between local and traveling clergy may be discerned as an expression of one's call.

In what ways might recovering the distinction between local and traveling clergy help the church:

- stand in continuity with our Wesleyan roots?
- reconnect with our Methodist heritage?
- create greater continuity with our ecumenical partners?
- resolve the dissonance between our theology and practice?
- create greater flexibility in central and missional conferences?
- provide greater opportunities for part-time and bivocational ministries?

Transitional Issues

Looking forward, if the church were to take seriously the lessons we can learn from our history and our theology, we can anticipate significant transitional questions. Among them, we would ask the church to consider:

- What kinds of systemic change would be needed to transition “licensed local pastors” to “ordained local clergy”?
- When should ordination take place? What should be required educationally and formationally for the status of “local” ordination?
 - MDiv or equivalent
 - COS with bachelor's degree

- Formational experience serving in a circuit under the supervision (apprenticeship?) of extension faculty
- Examination and affirmation of the Board of Ordained Ministry
- How would these requirements be understood in central conferences?
- What implications would there be for the curricula of seminaries and Courses of Study?
- How can we best encourage seminary education while still affirming the value of Course of Study to equip local clergy?
- How would local elders or deacons relate to the annual conference?
 - Could associate membership be a possibility? If so, how might it need to change from its current form?
 - How might local ordination affect clergy with limited itineracy?
- How might local clergy serve?
 - A church within a circuit
 - Entrepreneurial ministries with alternative models of sustainability
 - Ministry partnerships
 - Bivocational or part-time ministries
 - What other ways could we imagine?
- With flexibility in appointment models and an emphasis on alternative models of sustainability, would security of appointment be needed or advantageous for local clergy?
- What kind of process would be needed to help licensed local pastors transition toward ordination?
- What kind of time frame would best allow for such transition for those who choose to pursue ordination?
- What happens to those who choose not to pursue ordination or are denied by the Board of Ordained Ministry?
- How would such a change affect conferences and districts that are currently dependent upon licensed local pastors?
 - Would a shift in emphasis on circuits adequately address the need to provide for the availability of the sacraments?
 - What would be required to make a system of lay-led Wesleyan class-based “churches” sustainable in relation to a circuit?
- How would such a change impact central conferences?

In relation to traveling clergy, we would ask:

- What are the expectations of traveling clergy and how are they different from local clergy?

- What kind of ritual (if any) should accompany election to full membership?
- Should security of appointment be attached to full membership?
- Should full members be expected to be fully itinerant?
- What kind of transitional process should be required for “local” (associate member) clergy to transition to full membership, including the appointive status of “traveling” clergy?
 - Advanced Course of Study (for those without an MDiv or equivalent)
 - Examination and affirmation by the Board of Ordained Ministry
 - Historic examination (Wesleyan questions) by the bishop
 - Election by the clergy session
 - Other requirements?
- How might residency processes assist in this transition?
 - What is the best approach for residency programs? Should they focus more on additional equipping (over and above seminary and Course of Study) or on formation for ministry?
 - To extend the medical metaphor, would there be benefits to identifying “attending” clergy using apprenticeship models?
- Should a security-of-appointment guarantee be given to clergy in residency and actively pursuing full membership?
- Can traveling clergy choose to serve a “local” appointment (i.e., bivocational or less than full time) while remaining a full member?
- Under what conditions might a full member clergy transition to associate membership to serve a “local” appointment with no effect on ordination credentials?
 - Eight-year review
 - Peer review
 - Episcopal and superintendent’s review
 - Status and location
 - Other means?
- How would a shift in the understanding of ordination and full membership impact central conferences?

VI. Conclusion

Methodists have historically prioritized the mission field as a most essential element in arriving at our polity (way of being in practice). This has ultimately resulted in non-ordained local pastors who operate under a license, having been granted sacramental responsibility, while ordained deacons have only provisional sacramental authority. In so doing, The United Methodist Church has diverged from the apostolic tradition with respect to sacramental authority. Moreover, we have diverged from our own founder’s theological vision. John Wesley freely deployed laymen and laywomen to serve preaching ministries, which he understood as being distinct from the priestly ministry of administering the sacraments. Ironically, it was this very theological conviction that led him to the exceptional act of performing extraordinary ordinations himself. Our questions for the church have sought to help us uphold the link between ordination and our sacramental life while, at the same time, reshaping the church to meet the mission of tomorrow.

Toward this end, along with the need to realign our polity with a sound theology of ordination, is the question of how we reorder the work of ministry for the church to provide for agile and innovative possibilities for ministry in a very complex, diverse, and global context. Wesley’s strength lay in his ability to create new approaches to ministry without sacrificing his strong theological roots. It is our hope that this document may inspire a broad-ranging conversation about how we reorder our life of ministry that arises out of our heritage and speaks effectively into a twenty-first-century global context. *DCA Advance Edition*