



HIGHER EDUCATION & MINISTRY

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

MINISTRY OF ELDERS



Bishop Cedrick Bridgeforth

Mike DuBose, UMNNS

Ordained to Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service

Elders are ordained clergy who lead the Church in the ministries of Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service. Their primary responsibilities are communicating the faith and proclaiming God's Word through preaching and teaching. Elders administer the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion and are responsible for ordering the Church's ministry. Most elders serve as pastors of local congregations, though some serve in extension ministries such as chaplaincy or pastoral counseling. Bishops and district superintendents are also elders, reflecting the responsibility for ordering ministry and administering the Discipline.

Service

Ordained ministry is rooted in servant leadership that sets apart clergy in ministries to represent God's love. Ordination is a lifetime covenant that includes mutual care and accountability and is founded in the sacrament of baptism, through which all Christians are called into service. Elders are ordained into this lifetime relationship.

As servant leaders, elders embody Jesus's teaching. For John Wesley, this meant refusing the limits of parish boundaries and claiming the world as his parish. Today, elders lead by organizing the Church for its mission and service in the world. Through preaching, biblical interpretation, sacramental administration, theological reflection, and ordering the Church's ministry, elders equip

Christians for lives of service. Elders appointed to extension ministries (e.g., chaplaincy, counseling, campus ministry, and education) do the same in this calling. Wherever they serve, elders carry their vows of Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service as ordained representatives of Christ's church.

Itinerant Clergy

For more than 280 years of Methodism, elders have been distinguished by their willingness to offer themselves "without reserve to be appointed and to serve" (¶333). Elders commit to full-time, itinerant service in the Church under the authority of the bishop. Through itineracy, the Church assures pastoral leadership for every local congregation.

Elders who remain in good standing and continue to fulfill professional responsibilities are continued under appointment and are assured equitable compensation for their ministry.

Elder as Pastor in Charge

Elders oversee the local church's ministry as it fulfills its mission of service and witness in the world. Their leadership includes administrative oversight, evangelistic leadership, program planning, spiritual nurturing, and pastoral care. As pastors, elders lead the congregation in worship and its liturgical life and, in partnership with lay leadership, set the vision and direction for its witness in the world.

First Steps – Elder

- Read and discuss *The Christian as Minister* with a clergy person or candidacy mentor. This book is available at Cokesbury.com.
- Contact the pastor of your church, another elder or deacon, or the district superintendent to inquire about admission and invitation into the candidacy process.
- Participate in a candidacy mentoring group or meet with a candidacy mentor (as assigned by the annual conference) to study *Answering the Call: Candidacy Guidebook* and refine your call to ministry.

Becoming a Certified Candidate – Elder (¶310)

- Be a member of the UMC or active in a United Methodist ministry setting for at least one year.
- Follow your annual conference's process for enrolling as a certified candidate.
- Complete all required steps to become a certified candidate as listed in ¶310-314 and determined by the annual conference.

Educational Requirements and Academic Qualifications – Elder (¶324.3 (undergrad), ¶324.4.a (graduate), ¶335 (overview))

- High school diploma or equivalent

- Bachelor's degree from an approved institution (some exceptions may apply)
- Master of Divinity degree from a University Senate-approved school of theology or completion of the Basic and Advanced Course of Study
- Completion of the Basic Graduate Theological Studies as part of all theological education

Continuing Steps – Elder

- Demonstrate gifts for ministries of service and leadership to the satisfaction of the district committee on ordained ministry (dCOM).
- Complete all application requirements including health certificate, background checks, written theological exam, and autobiographical statement.
- Interview with the dCOM and Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM) and receive recommendation for commissioning.
- Receive Clergy Session approval for election to provisional membership and be commissioned by a bishop.
- After completing the requirements of provisional membership, seek recommendation by the BOM and approval by the Clergy Session for ordination and full membership.
- Be ordained by a bishop.

The candidacy process is listed in ¶310-314 in *The Book of Discipline*. The ministry of the Elder is described in ¶332-340 in *The Book of Discipline*.



Front row, newly ordained elders: the Rev. María Magdalena Zelaya Cruz, the Rev. Héctor Mauricio Láinez Rodríguez and the Rev. Juana Jamileth Moncada Torres. Second row: Bishops José Roberto Peña Nazario, Juan Miguel Simpson Bennett, Rubén Sáenz Jr. and Lizette Gabriel Montalvo.

Rev. Gustavo Vasquez, UM News

Learn more at gbhem.org/ministry/elders.