



## Ordained to Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service

Elders lead and serve the Church in the ministries of Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service. Elders' 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 order the Church's ministry. Most elders serve as pastors in charge of local congregations. However, elders may also serve in a variety of extension ministry (¶1343) settings (such as chaplaincy or pastoral counseling). Bishops and district superintendents are chosen from among the elders, because the ordering of ministry and administering the *Discipline* are elders' responsibilities.

## Service

Ordained ministry is rooted in servant leadership. As servant leaders, elders embody Jesus's teaching. For John Wesley, this meant refusing the limitations of parish boundaries and claiming the world as his parish. Today, elders lead in service by organizing the Church for its mission and service in the world. Through prophetic preaching, biblical interpretation, sacramental administration, theological reflection, and organizing the Church for ministry, elders equip Christians for their ministry of service in the world. Elders appointed to extension ministries (e.g., chaplaincy, counseling, campus ministry, and education) also carry out this task. Wherever appointed, elders carry their vows of Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service as ordained representatives of Christ's church.

## Itinerant Clergy

In more than 230 years of Methodism, the elders' distinguishing mark has been their willingness to offer themselves "without reserve to be appointed and to serve" (¶1333). Elders commit to full-time, itinerant service in the Church under the bishop's authority. Through itineracy, the Church also assures pastoral leadership for every local congregation.

Elders who are in good standing and continue to fulfill their professional responsibilities are continued under appointment unless they are on leave 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. This includes administrative oversight, evangelistic leadership, programmatic planning, spiritual nurturing, and pastoral care in the congregation. The pastor sets the vision and direction of the congregation for its witness in the world and leads the church in worship and liturgical life.



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## First Steps – Elder

- Read and discuss *The Christian as Minister* with a clergyperson or candidacy mentor. This book is available for purchase at [www.Cokesbury.com](http://www.Cokesbury.com).
- Contact a pastor, an elder, a deacon, or the district superintendent to inquire about admission into the candidacy process. The district superintendent invites applicants to enroll in 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 (¶1310)

- Be a member of the UMC or active in a United Methodist ministry setting for a minimum of one year.
- Register online in the Candidacy Application System and pay the candidacy application fee.
- Meet with the district Committee on Ordained Ministry (dCOM) to discuss your call to ordained ministry, and complete all required steps to become a certified candidate as listed in ¶¶1310-314 and determined by the annual conference.

## Educational Requirements and Academic Qualifications – Elder (¶1324)

- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Bachelor's degree (some exceptions apply) from an approved institution.
- Master of Divinity degree from a University Senate-approved seminary or completion of the Basic and Advanced Course of Study.

## Continuing Steps – Elder

- Demonstrate gifts for ministries of service and leadership to the satisfaction of the dCOM.
- Complete application requirements including health certificate, background checks, written theological exam, and autobiographical statement.
- Interview first with the dCOM and then with the Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM) to be recommended for commissioning.
- Receive Clergy Session approval for election to provisional membership, followed with commissioning by a bishop.
- After successfully completing the requirements of provisional membership, apply for 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 ¶¶1310-314 in *The Book of Discipline*.  
The ministry of the Elder is described in ¶¶1332-340 in *The Book of Discipline*.