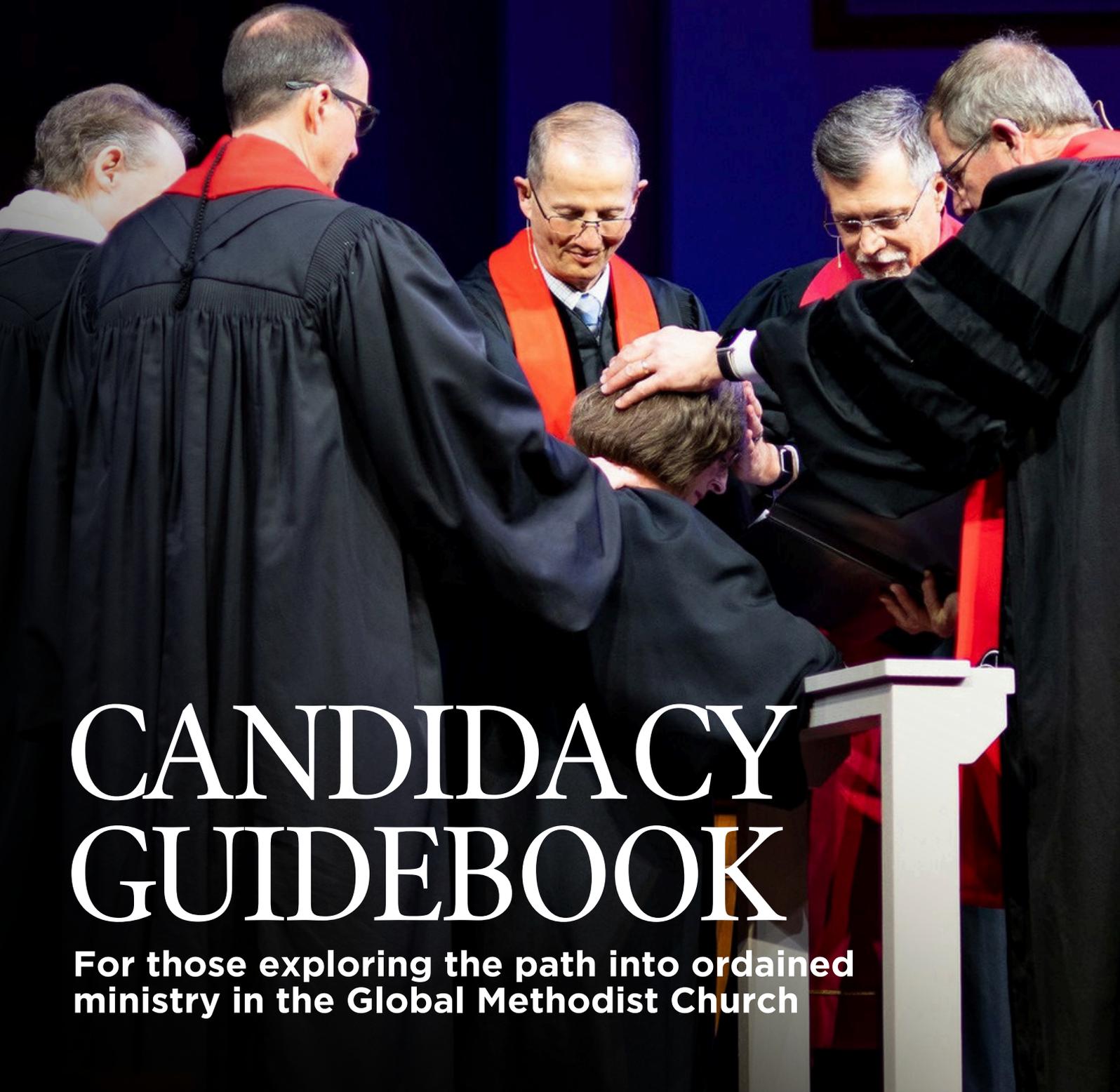




GLOBAL
METHODIST CHURCH



CANDIDACY GUIDEBOOK

**For those exploring the path into ordained
ministry in the Global Methodist Church**

Effective April 2025

Approved by Ministry and Higher Education Commission

www.globalmethodist.org

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Pour out thy spirit from on high;
Lord, thine ordained servants bless;
Graces and gifts to each supply,
And clothe them with thy righteousness.

Within thy temple when they stand
To teach the truth, as taught by
thee, Savior, like stars in thy right
hand Thy servants in the churches
be.

Wisdom and zeal and faith impart,
Firmness with meekness from above,
To bear thy people on their heart,
And love the souls whom thou dost love:

To watch and pray, and never faint;
By day and night strict guard to keep;
To warn the sinner, cheer the saint,
Nourish thy lambs, and feed thy sheep.

Then, when their work is finished here,
In humble hope their charge resign.
When the chief Shepherd shall appear,
O God, may they and we be thine.

James Montgomery, 1771-1854

PREFACE

This Guidebook has been prepared for those who are inquiring about candidacy for the ordained ministry of The Global Methodist Church. Beyond providing basic information to the candidate, it is intended to guide discussion between the candidate and a mentor, or perhaps amongst a group of candidates who are all at the same stage of their process.

We are glad that this book has found its way into your hands. We pray that you find it useful, and that everyone with whom you deal will help you clarify your call and forward you on your way to whatever place of service our Lord has called you.

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Chapter One: Call

You are probably reading this book because you have heard God calling you to some kind of ministry. You may not be sure that he really is doing that, so you're checking it out by investigating candidacy for ordained ministry; you may have many doubts. Or you may be sure of your call, confident in your future course of action, your goal almost tangible. Either way, you have been given this book to read and discuss with others in order to clarify your understanding of God's will for your life. One thing is very sure: God calls people to serve him.

Serving God means following Jesus Christ. We are called to confess, obey, and grow to be like Christ. That is the path of discipleship (see Chapter Three). This call is for everyone. But then, God calls each person individually to do particular things in his service. God has a call for each person's life. In the adventure of faith, each person follows a path that is unique to that person, even if others have followed that path before. At the risk of quoting a bad example, let us consider these words from *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*:

Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin

To sound the depth of that thou wilt profess (Act I, Scene 2).

Faust speaks these words at the end of his formal schooling, when he is pondering what he will make of his life. He chooses poorly, but the question he sets himself is not a poor question. Having learned how to follow Christ, where will you follow him *to*? Where does he want you to go? What do you need to learn to follow him that way, and where will you learn it? And, most basic of all, how will you know when he calls?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Who have you already talked to about God's call on your life?

What feedback have you received?

Have those conversations been an encouragement, or have they given you second thoughts?

The concept of Call

Some people assume that obeying God means staying within the rules, offering worship and prayer at the stated times, etc. The time "left over" from that is presumed to be one's own, and the direction of one's life is presumed to be nobody else's business, so long as it isn't immoral. But when we offer God our "all," that means there is no time "left over" when we can make of our lives whatever we wish. As Jesus said, "when you have done all that is

commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’” (Luke 17:10).

That doesn’t mean it’s all work, work, work, till we die. It does mean that even our personal time, when we are pursuing our innocent pleasures – even when we are just sitting still, doing nothing – is a gift from God, for which he deserves our thanks. In the meantime, God expects a return from each of his servants. Some will produce thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, some a hundredfold from his seed corn; but regardless of the level of production, he has plans for our lives. And not just some lives, but not others. We’re used to the idea that God calls important people to do important things: Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Esther, Mary. But we are all important to God, so what we do with our lives is also important.

Call can be defined as “God’s best choice for your life.” What job or trade or profession you have, what hobbies you cultivate, your relationships – all these represent many choices. The possibility of choosing poorly is always there, and the possibility of there being more than one good alternative is, too. So when choices are to be made, we need to look for the best one, which will be the one that God intends us to choose. Paul sets this out in his Letter to the Romans:

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1-2).

When we offer ourselves to God, he transforms our minds and equips us to know what is good, acceptable, and perfect. That includes all the major details of our lives, not just moral conundrums. It includes his call on your life.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

How does the concept of offering God your “all” help to clarify your call?

What would you find the most difficult to turn over for God’s use?

If you find it difficult to talk confidently about your call to ministry right now, start by talking about your call to the Christian faith. How did you become a Christian? How has God been working in your life since then?

Finding your call

Our idea of what it is like when God calls is shaped largely by stories out of the Bible and stories from the pulpit. The call of a prophet or apostle in the Bible is often presented as an audible voice or a face-to-face meeting. Stories of the call to preach, as shared from the pulpit, often have supernatural elements included. How much of this is an experience someone else viewing

the encounter would attest to, and how much is internal to the person experiencing it, is often undetermined. In any case, however, the call comes as an intense, all-at-once experience: Gabriel appears to Mary; an angel appears to Joseph in a dream, Saul is knocked off his mount on the road to Damascus; Luther is almost struck by lightning and cries out, “God help me, I will become a monk!” The call of the fishermen Andrew, Peter, James, and John seems an ordinary thing only because the glory of God is concealed beneath the flesh of the man Jesus.

Some people do have these kinds of experiences. But many do not. One’s call is not more certain because of the manner of its coming. One minister described his call as a sequence of encounters with others, who could all see in him what he couldn’t yet see in himself. Ambrose hadn’t even been baptized yet when a boy called out in the deadlocked meeting to elect a new bishop of Milan, “Let Ambrose be bishop!” and he was chosen by acclamation. On the other hand, sometimes a call comes as a resolution only after long prayer over the question of what is good, acceptable, and perfect for one’s life.

Some people know what they want to do with their lives at a very young age. These early decisions often fade and change; but sometimes, they don’t. The age of the person being called isn’t that relevant. As one grows up and tries different things, some things seem to “fit” better, like trying on a suit of clothes. When you find the one that feels “just right,” you buy it. This means that if we want people to hear certain kinds of calls, we must encourage people – especially young people – to try various things. If the call to preach, for instance, is never talked about, if people are never challenged to speak from the pulpit, then we condition them to be less open to what God might be trying to tell them. It is good to hear stories of others’ calls, but those stories don’t define or limit one’s own call. Ultimately, God will tell or show you his best choice for your life, which may not be like anyone else’s.

But if a call can come any which way, if there are no distinguishing marks by which you can be sure, will we not miss our call? Would that not be a tragedy?

Personal story, Arthur Collins: When I was finishing my doctorate, I needed a part-time job to get me to the end of the particular stage I was at. The only job I could find as a stopgap was a job on the back line of a fast food restaurant. I told no one there that I was a minister, just a graduate student. In a college town, that satisfied everybody’s curiosity. But in the first week on the job, as the staff were closing down the store, I stood by a sink up to my elbows in greasy dishwater while one co-worker after another wandered by and told me the stories of their lives. Something in them sensed something in me that made them want to tell me things they needed to get off their chests. I went home and told my wife, pointing at my neck, “you know, you can’t take the collar off.” It’s there whether you tell others or not.

The point is, a call is not the same thing as opportunity. You may miss many opportunities, which will shape a great deal of what the world calls “success” in your case, but call is not like that. Call is not opportunity; call is who you are. So, a call will confirm itself, and re-confirm itself, repeatedly over the course of your life. God doesn’t call you just one time: this is

God's best choice for your life, not a limited-time special offer. And you are not too late to rise and follow him where he would lead you.

A call is also not dependent upon particular skills or talents one already possesses. God doesn't call the equipped; he equips those he calls. God gives spiritual gifts of various kinds to all his children to be used in his service. Some would be of immediate and obvious benefit in following a particular call. However, other equally essential skills must be developed through study and practice. On the seminary dean's office hung a cartoon: an eager person saying, with uplifted face, "Use me, God! I'll go anywhere! Do anything! Face any trial!" In the last panel, a dejected student hunched over an enormous book says to God, over his shoulder, "Studying wasn't what I had in mind, Lord."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Have you had any opportunities to "try on" this new calling to see if it fits? (Examples: preaching, teaching/leading Bible studies, leading a ministry in your local church, etc.) Which of these Biblical call stories do you find most relatable to your experience?

Exodus 4:10-14 (Moses's excuses; God's response)
Esther 4:8, 11-14 (Mordecai: for such a time as this)
Matthew 4:18-22 (Calling the brothers in pairs)
2 Timothy 1:5-7 (Faith of mother and grandmother)

Types of call

Some calls we observe routinely. Enough people follow that particular path, or that particular call is important enough to the work of the Church, that we have beaten the path clear. Such is the call to ordained ministry. But everyone is called to ministry, one way or another. *Some* of those calls lead to professional vocations. Others lead to particular specialties within the volunteer structure of the church, such as teaching Sunday School, working with youth, doing church music.

Church professions include both representative and specialty ministries. Representative ministries include the pastorate, chaplaincy, and missions. The usual goal for representative ministries is ordination, in which the church recognizes your call and authorizes you to act in certain ways on behalf of the whole church. Other church professions, such as music, counseling, Christian education, and certain teaching jobs in higher education, may or may not lead to ordination.

There are many other professions, which have no particular connection to the church, to which people may articulate a sense of call by God: teaching; the law; medicine; social work; nursing; counseling; even farming. Indeed, any worthy profession or trade, well done, might be thought of as God's best choice for your life; on the other hand, sometimes a job is just a job. William

Carey, “the father of modern missions,” is remembered as a missionary in India, but he described himself as a “cobbler,” which was his trade. At times, when he couldn’t support himself by the work to which God had called him, he made his living as a shoemaker.

Some people’s call is to a particular task or role in some worthy endeavor which pays them nothing. Their paid work enables them to give themselves away to God. The Sunday School teacher, the Scoutmaster, the coach, the youth counselor, the choir director or volunteer organist, and the person who rises to leadership in the Walk to Emmaus movement may all view their activities as more than “what they like to do.” God has called them to be an honest worker in whatever they earn their living, yes, but God has also called them to do some particular activity which their living makes possible.

A call can include other things besides work (paid or volunteer). We say that marriage is a call from God, which implies that parenthood is, too, and singleness as well. Some are called to one kind of life, and some to another. And if marriage be a call from God, then it follows that a call can be for a certain time of one’s life only; for none of us start out married, and all of us if we live long enough will wind up single again. Some calls, especially in active fields requiring bodily strength and endurance, may change as one ages. Unable to do the things one once did, one may still promote the work of the field and advise or coach, but the physical abilities one once offered to God are lessened. Some calls follow well-trodden paths, some are unique. Some will earn you money, some you will give away. Some are for a season only; some are for the duration of your life. But all of them represent God’s best choice for your life and define who you are as a servant of God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

What do you perceive your spiritual gifts to be?
As you reflect on your life, can you identify time(s) when God called you to something specific? A major life decision, choice of marriage partner? A specific nudge to participate in a mission trip or Walk to Emmaus?

The role of the church

When someone contemplates a particular call that many have followed, the church is comfortable providing guidance. If there is a certain course of education to be followed—to become a teacher, preacher, or lawyer, say—we can recommend institutions and courses of study. In the case of church professions, every denomination has guidelines and official bodies that can provide guidance and help in assessing one’s call. Mentors can be found or assigned..

First, the church needs to teach the necessity of learning to *listen*. Until you have heard what God has to say (about anything), you are not in a position to speak positively about a course of

action. Prayer is not just about giving God our laundry list of wants; it is about opening ourselves up to hear what God is saying to us. God has a particular call (perhaps more than one) for your congregation at this time. God is also calling leaders for your congregation and for other things he wants them to do. We must become a listening people again.

Second, the church needs to encourage people to try out various calls. When we reduce everybody to the status of an audience, a crowd, we deny ourselves (and them) the benefits of becoming what God has called them to be. The senior pastor who is jealous of others filling the pulpit, the worship committee that wants to keep the kids from messing around on the organ, the congregation that never considers asking new people to pray or teach or sing – may be standing in the way of someone hearing a call from God.

Personal story, Janet Lord: When I was about six years old, I was at the church during the week while my Dad was fixing something or another. I was noodling around on the piano, as six-year-olds are wont to do, when a teenage boy wandered in. I stopped immediately, anticipating being told to do just that, when he said, "Don't stop. I like to hear you play." It was the first inkling that I ever had that something I liked to do would actually be beneficial to someone else. I've been a church musician (now an ordained deacon) for over 50 years. That teenage boy? He went into ministry as well.

Third, as a listening people, we must learn to listen to God and each other. We need to provide leaders (formal and informal) who are available to hear the first struggles of someone testing out a call. When someone tries to tell us something, we must be open and accepting, not critical. A first, tentative statement may be indicative of something big, or it may not. We accept what they say, for what it's worth, giving them encouragement to search it out further. We pray for them. They may eventually resolve their doubts and claim their call with confidence; or they may decide that no, that wasn't God calling, merely my eagerness or misplaced admiration for somebody.

Ultimately, a call is something that each person must testify to for oneself; however, the church may sometimes be called upon to affirm a call and may choose, for whatever reason, not to. If we don't hire you as a youth director, for instance, that doesn't mean you're not called to youth ministry; we just don't think you're called to be *our* youth director, *at this time*. Not every call to serve God in the church is a call to professional ministry, nor needs to be. After all, we believe in the priesthood of all believers. All of us are called to serve in different ways. No one call is better or holier than another, though some may be more important to the community at this particular time.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Why is it important that a person's call is confirmed by others within the community of faith?

When have you been told something that you didn't want to hear, but upon later reflection proved to be absolutely correct?

Articulating your call

You will be asked several times to describe your call to ministry, particularly in the early stages of your candidacy. You may fear that the people who are interviewing you know something that you don't and are deciding whether or not your call by God is real. Rest assured, no such thing is going on. No one knows your call better than you do. Asking you to tell the story is to assist you in examining it, not subjecting it to evaluation by others. Those walking alongside you want to hear you clearly articulate your call as best you understand it.

Now, those put in a position to supervise or evaluate you, or those on the same journey you are on, may perceive things in your life and experience which bear on the question of how you are attempting to follow God. They may pose questions you haven't considered. But the purpose of probing another's life and experience is not to discourage someone, but to ensure that you benefit from their wisdom. Yes, they are called to discern the spirits (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:10 KJV) of those who want to speak for God. But everyone already in a position of leadership believes God calls, and nobody finds it unusual that other people (including you) have responded. Their goal is to help *you* discern your own spirit and the Spirit of God, so that whatever God has called you to, you may pursue whole-heartedly and with success.

There may be roadblocks on the way to your goal, but they will tend to be concrete things: personal immaturity; a refusal to believe and teach the doctrine one is asked to uphold; a disorderly life that the candidate cannot or will not address; a stubborn spirit that insists on its own way and does not submit to correction; conflicting obligations that cannot be reconciled. That sort of thing. A fear that your call experience isn't very impressive doesn't make the list. Sometimes God shouts, sometimes he whispers. Only you can describe how he calls you, and all those interviewing you will treat your story with care and respect. Meanwhile, those who are very confident in their call should remember that your interviewers have heard many such stories. They are glad to hear yours. You don't have to convince them, just tell them your story.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

If you had to tell the story of your call in three minutes or less, what would you make sure to include?

When were some times when you struggled with your call?

What are the ways that God has continued to call you?

Chapter Two: Leadership

As you think about becoming an ordained minister, you may see yourself standing before the congregation, leading them in worship. Or you may imagine yourself preaching and people responding: you are leading them to Christ. You may think of all that you want the church to be, and do, and start dreaming about what you will do to make the church you are appointed to become or accomplish those things. And then you finally get the chance to lead a church and discover that your fantasy of the perfect church you want them to be has met the people's fantasies of the perfect pastor they want you to be, and then divorce or marriage begins – until further notice.

The Vision

But, wait: Isn't it the pastor's job to describe where we're trying to go? Isn't discerning that vision and offering it to the people what we should be doing? Well, yes. But consider the following. In John Madden's first book (*Hey, Wait a Minute! I Wrote a Book!*), he describes the one conversation about coaching he ever had with the great Vince Lombardi. Madden was just starting out as a Head Coach in the NFL; Lombardi was a coaching legend (and died shortly after the conversation). Madden asked him, "What makes a good coach?" Lombardi replied that a good coach knows what a winning team looks like.

In other words, the good coach knows when his team is *there*. When you've run that play enough, when you've reached the best condition and need to rest instead of do more sprints, when the team is communicating like they should. And mostly, you acquire that knowledge only by being part of a winning team yourself, as a player or a coach. The more you win, the more you know how it feels to be ready to win. Contrast that with all the other, struggling coaches and players. They all do game plans, run practices, and do conditioning. And every new coach assures his team and fans that the time is now, that we're going to "turn this program around," etc. In every town he arrives in, the new guy dusts off the same playbook and gives the same pep talk. But unless you've been part of a winning team, you're just doing what everybody else is doing; you don't know when you're *there*.

It has been a long time since most of us involved in Western Christianity have been part of a winning team. Many of us come from backgrounds where we celebrated just slowing the pace of decline (if we managed to), rather than growth. Some of us have churches on fire and are doing quite well. And everybody looks at those guys and tries to do what they're doing. And then we tinker with the game plan and put a new line or two in the pep talk, and we try all over again to make a winner out of our congregation. But few of us know when we're *there*.

The Global Methodist Church is attempting to do something new; or rather, we are attempting to revive something old. We are attempting to be the kind of Methodists John Wesley would recognize. That means rediscovering spiritual disciplines, including distinctive Methodist practices like Class Meetings or Bands. It means contacting more kinds of people than those who are already habituated to the church. It means rediscovering the ancient treasures of Nicene Christology and Methodist distinctives like Christian perfection. It means accountability for leaders and those being led alike. Most of us haven't seen a church like that in our lifetimes.

It's hard to lead people to where you haven't been. Wesley himself tried it in Georgia – and failed miserably. He fantasized at the time about leading Native Americans to salvation in Christ, hoping that if he could just see it really happen to somebody else, he might finally understand how it could happen to him. It wasn't until he returned to London in disgrace that he was surprised by his heart-warming experience in Aldersgate Street. And after that, he knew what he was talking about. Then, people listened. And they responded.

So the first job of the leader is to walk humbly with God. To understand how little we know, how much we need God to show us what to be, how to act, what to say. Being Spirit-led isn't a slogan, it's a necessity. We need first to seek God's grace and the transformation of our lives for ourselves, before we have much to share with the congregation. Wesley taught what he called Experimental Christianity. He meant by that "experiential Christianity," but still, experience comes from trying things. We want leaders who will try the renewed Methodism we offer to experience it for themselves. Because when we know what it feels like to walk with God, then we will know how to tell others where God wants us to go.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Can you think of an example from your own life where you recognized when things were working well?

Have you ever been part of a championship team of any sort? How did you get *there*?

A Leader Among Leaders

As you try out your leadership abilities in your new ministry location (appointment), you will find that you are not the only leader in the church, probably not even the most important leader. There are many leaders exercising different sorts of leadership. Figuring out how to be the best leader you can be is thus dependent upon figuring out how leadership works.

Leadership comes in two forms: positional and personal. On your first day in your new appointment, you occupy a place of honor and privilege. You represent Christ to these people, and you represent these people to Christ. When you stand at the Table, you stand in the midst of all the prayers going up and the Holy Spirit coming down. You also stand in the midst of all

the relationships across the congregation, around the Table. Simply by virtue of your appointment, you are automatically a leader. You stand in the very nexus of all the vertical and horizontal relationships that are the Church. And from the first, the people include you in their lives as someone occupying a very important place. They hardly know you, but you occupy a *position* of leadership, and exercise its authority.

It will be a while before your new parishioners will see you, yourself, as someone they are willing to follow somewhere new. This is particularly true when great matters involving change are being considered. More about that, below.

In the meantime, you are a leader among other leaders. Various persons in the congregation occupy positions with varying responsibilities. There are trustees, Sunday School teachers, the Women's Ministry president, and other leaders. Each has a job to do, an area of responsibility to look after. Some are effective in their leadership, and some are merely filling a slot. You are not their boss. You are there to help them be more effective in what they do, and do what you need to do. Some will be glad of your help – and some will not.

One thing you can do is provide or point them toward training in their areas of responsibility. One such opportunity is the Certified Lay Minister program. This is a training for lay leaders that is open to all church members. The CLM is not a stepping stone into the clergy (though some who eventually hear that call may have done that first for its own sake). The Global Methodist Church provides other resources to explain the CLM program, so we will not detail it here.

But why is it called “Certified Lay *Minister*” if it's not a step into ordained ministry? Because “ministry” is what all People of God do, not just the clergy. The primary work product of the church consists of three things: the prayers offered up in worship (the “liturgy,” from *leitourgia*, the work of the people); “the righteous deeds of the saints” (Revelation 19:8); the witness of the disciples (Acts 1:8). The prayers and expressions of love and good deeds and gifts and witness that all the Christians do because they are followers of Christ are the “good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). So, worship, good deeds, witness: those are the primary work product of the church, not what preachers do on Sunday morning or the things that show up as expenses in the church budget. Every Christian is a minister, doing God's work according to one's own capacity. Helping them do it better is a big part of your job. You are to “equip the saints to do the work of ministry” (Ephesians 4:12). Becoming a CLM is thus training for *lay* ministry, not ordained ministry.

In Exodus 18, we read that Moses was burdened with too much to do. People wanting decisions from him stood around all day, waiting for his attention. All his time was spent dealing with the crises and aggravations others brought to him. His father-in-law, Jethro, who was visiting the camp of the Israelites, told him he needed to find some other people who could do most of what he was doing. He was needed for other things that only he could do.

Encourage others to try things. Accept the efforts even of children and youth. People grow in their discipleship – including the ability to lead – by trying new things. Part of your job is to raise up the lowly – the young, the untried, the unskillful – so that they become what God wants them to be. At the same time, offer appreciation and encouragement to existing leaders, who don't get thanked near enough for what they do. "Outdo one another in showing honor" (Romans 12:10) means, among other things, don't hog the ball. Let other people lead, and the fruits of their leadership will be the fruit of yours.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

If you've been blessed to grow up in a community of faith, think about some of the Sunday School teachers, youth group leaders, "kitchen ladies", etc. that you have known. How did they model either good or bad leadership to you? If you did not grow up in a community of faith, or if your church background is a bit thin, think of leaders you have known in your schooling, in sports, or on the job. How did they model either good or bad leadership to you?

The Permission Givers

Now, let us consider the other kind of leadership: personal leadership. Some people are leaders even if they occupy no position of trust in the congregation. They may have occupied many such positions in the past, but which position they occupy now (if any) is irrelevant. They just *are* leaders. They have been made so by the congregation, and having been given that gift, they can almost never lose it.

Someone once described being a leader as sitting on a cliff overlooking a narrow pass with a gun in your hand. Nobody goes through that pass without your permission. The essential power of the leader is to deny or *give* permission. And who gave them that power, that "gun?" The congregation did because they trusted them.

In any kind of big, complicated decision affecting the group, few of the people involved will possess all the information they need to make that decision with confidence. And even if that information is readily available, the effort needed to weigh all the factors and come up with an answer that is best for the group may be more effort than many people have the time for. So how do most decisions get made? The group's members ask themselves, "Who's for it?" And they look to trusted leaders as their proxies. If Uncle Frank and Aunt Betty think it's a good, safe, and necessary idea, then that goes a long way toward making *Yes* possible. If Uncle Frank or Aunt Betty is hesitant or negative, getting the group to embrace the proposed course of action will be hard.

Now, this doesn't have to be a negative thing. Think of the important people in your life, people who believed in you and gave you a chance to try new things, who told you that failing

doesn't make you a failure. A parent, a grandparent, a teacher: they gave you permission to succeed by their encouragement. These congregational leaders can do that for the whole group. When they get on board with an idea, others come forward.

But why should these people have that much influence in the first place (especially compared to you, the appointed pastor and official vision merchant)? Because these people have proved over and over again that they have the best interests of the congregation at heart. They did not make themselves leaders. Even if they seem overbearing to you, the congregation *gave* them the power they have, because they trust them.

No doubt some of them are difficult people, just as some clergy are difficult people. And some of these trusted leaders with immense personal authority may be negative because they are lesser heirs of greater leaders they grew up under. They remember the great days when Mr. Standup and Grandma Blessing were leaders. That was when they built this building, grew to the congregation's greatest size, or did something else. They may remember former pastors, too, who were important to them when they were younger. They are trying to keep everything the way it was left to them, because they fear being the one who lost it all, like the last heir losing the family farm after six generations. They forget that Mr. Standup, Grandma Blessing, and Rev. Goodword were the giants they were because they *faced* the issues of their day instead of clinging to the past. But the more you challenge them, the tighter they will clutch their treasure – and the congregation will not likely desert them, even if many of them privately know they need to change.

So what do you do? Well, you can thunder and plead or try to sneak past the dragon's cave without awakening it, but these will not work. Unless you are the founding pastor or someone who has been there long enough to have been given the trust of most of the congregation, you simply don't have the personal clout to bring the congregation along in the face of this kind of opposition. You don't have that kind of leadership. You need a better plan.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Have you experienced these types of leaders in the church? What made them influential?

What is your leadership experience? Was/is it more positional or personal?

In your present context, what can you do to earn the trust of the people you're leading?

Getting real

Real leadership does not consist in getting people to do what you want them to do. That's *salesmanship*. And there are lots of clergy who are selling visions. They have a new Big Idea every six months, at a minimum. They think that's their job – telling people what they need to do. But real leadership is not about getting people to go where you think they should go. Real

leadership consists of knowing with intense clarity where *you* need to go and taking responsibility for the people who will follow you because you know where you're going.

Consider the career of John Wesley. He had to be talked into field preaching, which he thought undignified. But then, it worked. People responded. So, he adapted to doing it more. Then he found all these people who now wanted to be Methodists clamoring for his guidance. What was he to do with them? He organized them into classes and bands and societies to keep them going. As a result, he inadvertently built a huge movement in the Britain of his day. He was as surprised as anybody by his success. After the American Revolution, he had to face the fact that the Methodists in America needed their own church. If he didn't provide them with the structure and leadership, they would fall into separate groups, each making it up as they thought best. So, he did what he had to do, and authorized what became The Methodist Episcopal Church in North America, giving Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury the power to call together the circuit riders and create an independent form of Methodism. Meanwhile, Wesley was not in love with his ideas because they were his, but because he saw that they worked and that God blessed the people called Methodists when they did those things. He was willing to adapt in all kinds of ways, as long as they kept him going forward toward his goal.

“For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power” (1 Corinthians 4:20). The power of a person who is real all the way through, who knows what he knows and is willing to do it with or without others, makes the difference. Power comes from being willing to lay down your life to do what you *must*. People know who's real and who's just talking. And there will always be a market for Real. The question is, are you real enough to obey God when he says Go, or do you insist on getting others to go first? Are you just a salesman, or are you also the first and biggest customer?

This doesn't mean you can force issues if you're just stubborn enough. It means that you must lay down your life for what you believe. Do you love God enough to really hear what the other leaders – the ones who don't need a position to be heard – are saying? Can you bear witness to the truth, even if others refuse to accept it? Can you so live before others that they catch something of the vision you describe, live differently because you live differently? And if they don't, can you continue to love, lead and bear with them without compromising your vision?

It takes patience and perseverance to lead a congregation into new paths. G.K. Chesterton said, “Man will sometimes act slowly upon new ideas; but he will only act swiftly upon old ideas” (*Orthodoxy*, Chapter VII). Leading a congregation is a complicated conversation on multiple levels with many other leaders. It can't be done in a hurry, and the ability to listen is at least as important as the ability to talk. Not until most of those leaders have all come to the same way of thinking – each for one's own reasons – will things proceed with anything other than small results. That is to say, when each leader sees the vision as satisfying one's own desires and appreciates the others for making it possible, then big things can be done.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

What are some of your leadership failures so far? What did you learn from them? What are some of your successes so far? What did you learn from them? Are you willing to admit that God's vision for the people you will serve may be better than your own?

Weed your own garden first

Big questions about the congregation's future aside, be diligent in caring for those things within your own sphere of leadership. There are things that only the pastor can really do. Other people can run programs. Other people can chair meetings. Other people can be trusted to take care of things in their remit. Make sure that you do those things that are in your job description. Take joy in doing them. Set realistic goals for yourself and keep track of the results. Make sure that every report you give to the Pastor-Parish Committee and Church Council leads with the things you are doing that need to be done. Be accountable.

Beware of the tendency to think that it all depends upon you. That way lies not only exhaustion, but frustration. And pay attention to how people bless you in your congregational relationships. Show your appreciation. Send thank-you cards to those who do nice things for you and your family. *Enjoy* those you are with, and they will warm to you. If people rub you the wrong way, ensure you don't try to avoid them. Be as diligent to call upon them in the hospital or remember their concerns as you would those more responsive to your leadership. And beware of griping about your situation. Venting to others may be helpful, but it depends on who those others are: you don't vent the dryer back into the laundry room.

Keep talking up the vision, but remember, sometimes it won't happen until you've moved on. As St. Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:6). Sometimes, we plant, sometimes we water, and (praise God) sometimes we get to harvest. It's all part of the job.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Think about a leader you have known that you would readily follow. What three key qualities made them an effective leader? When have you seen a leadership position abused? Can you identify some causes? How will you hold yourself accountable to leading like Jesus?

Chapter Three: Discipleship

What is a disciple? This question has been answered many ways. At times, we use it to refer to all believers or converts. But other times, we seem to imply that being a disciple assumes an active and regular attempt to follow the ways of our Master and some degree of ability in doing so. We are no longer beginners; we know what a disciple should know, we can do what a disciple can do, and we have reflected upon certain experiences a disciple should have had and thought about. However, we do not stop being disciples and become something else just because we know more, can do more, or have experienced more at some later stage. No matter how much we grow in the knowledge and love of God in Christ Jesus, we are still disciples. “When you have done all that is commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’” (Luke 17:10).

For the purposes of discussion, we need a quick and easy set of guidelines for discipleship. So we turn to the General Rules of the Methodist Church and their history.

THE GENERAL RULES OF THE METHODIST CHURCH (¶ 108, 2024 *Book of Doctrines and Discipline*)

The Nature, Design, and General Rules of Our United Societies

In the latter end of the year 1739 eight or ten persons came to Mr. Wesley, in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired, as did two or three more the next day, that he would spend some time with them in prayer and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That he might have more time for this great work, he appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely, on Thursday in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), he gave those advices from time to time which he judged most needful for them, and they always concluded their meeting with prayer suited to their several necessities.

This was the rise of the United Society, first in Europe, and then in America. Such a society is no other than “a company of men having the *form* and seeking the *power* of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.”

That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called **classes**, according

to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in a class, one of whom is styled the leader. It is his duty:

1. To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order: (1) to inquire how their souls prosper; (2) to advise, reprove, comfort or exhort, as occasion may require; (3) to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the preachers, church, and poor.
2. To meet the ministers and the stewards of the society once a week, in order: (1) to inform the minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly and will not be reproved; (2) to pay the stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding.

There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies: "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." But wherever this is really fixed in the soul it will be shown by its fruits.

It should be particularly noted that there was no requirement for admission into the early Methodist societies that one should profess belief in any doctrines, nor be able to testify to any Christian experience. Many of the early Methodists were what we would today call "seekers." They wanted to believe and know they were saved, but they had many doubts. They were told to act as if they were Christians until they should be able to confess themselves to be such.

Disciples live a *disciplined* life practicing spiritual *disciplines*. (Note all these uses of the root word.) Disciplines are habits that we are trained to follow, whether we feel like doing them or not; indeed, we are drilled in habits before we have any reason to know they will be beneficial. A child trained to make his bed or brush her teeth will soon do so without argument and be happier for it. A child trained to pray, give, and serve will find that these habits will make the Christian life more rewarding, even though we begin to instill these habits in our children before they fully understand and adopt our faith for themselves.

Discipline is like a trellis we train the vine of our life to climb. It sounds a fine thing to be an adult convert and testify to the transformation of one's life, but it is a lot harder to train a vine that has grown any which way to climb a trellis installed after the vine is full-grown, than to build a trellis to support the first green shoot. There are dangers either way, of course. A person habituated to the disciplines of the Christian life who somehow never comes to a full relationship with the living Christ may come to think that his "works" are sufficient to reach heaven. Likewise, a person converted to Christ with no previous Christian discipline may become frustrated with trying to act as a Christian should and give up trying, saying to oneself, "at least I believe – that ought to count for something."

The danger for the ordained minister is that we may come to think that our job-related activities will substitute for the ordinary duties of every Christian: that our sermon preparation will do for our own Bible study; that praying for and with others can replace our own devotional time with Christ; that our offering of self in ministry (that is, doing our job) makes up for our not helping a non-parishioner or neglecting our family or not giving of our wealth to God.

We may also neglect the kind of face-to-face accountability which was the genius of the Methodist Class Meetings and Bands. We understand that the Christian faith is about Me- and-Jesus. We also understand that we need the Church, the big gathering of All-of-Us-and-Jesus. But there is an intermediate stage between these two relationships: You-and-Me- and-Jesus. We need companions for the journey, someone we can go to for support and (when needed) correction. The archetypal mountain man, Jedediah Smith, grew up Methodist. He wrote home to his brother from the Rocky Mountains in 1829, "Oh when shall I be under the care of a Christian Church? I have need of your Prayers." Even the man everyone else saw as immensely strong, the support of everyone else on the frontier, felt the need of others to help him walk his path.

The Global Methodist Church seeks to resurrect the common practice of Classes and Bands in Methodism. There are also other forms of spiritual accountability groups, and there are deep friendships that fellow disciples sometimes form without formal organization. We need each other. Sadly, many clergy are deeply lonely. They spend all their time surrounded by people who admire their strength, but they have no one to share with and they are often exhausted. It is difficult to find the support you need among your church members. So seek that support in other friendships, outside your parish or with other clergy. But don't try to go it alone.

Classes are general gatherings to explore and share our faith with others. In early Methodist days, everyone, young and old, was required to be part of a Class Meeting. Instruction took place here, but these were not primarily classes in our Sunday School sense. They were more like what we call accountability groups. Their purpose was for the members to account for their lives and spiritual growth and keep each other going on the Christian journey. Meanwhile, some wanted more intimate sharing and covenanted with others to be part of a Band. *Bands* are confidential groups where the members share more deeply and are willing to challenge and be challenged by the others in the Band. Both Classes and Bands often have time limits, so that after six months or so people can rearrange their schedules and commitments.

Whether or not you belong to a Class or Band (or something like them), many disciples find it very important to have at least one spiritual friend or prayer partner with whom they talk (and pray) regularly. There are also sometimes opportunities to find a mentor (formal or informal) or a spiritual director. These relationships are less peer-focused and more like finding a coach or counselor to provide guidance, insight, and encouragement.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Are you part of a group that functions as a Class, Band, or other accountability group? Do you have a spiritual friend or prayer partner? Where could you find or build these relationships?

Are you being mentored? If not, who could mentor you as a disciple? Whom are you mentoring? If no one, who can you mentor?

The General Rules continued...

It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

First: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced, such as:

The taking of the name of God in vain.

The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work therein or by buying or selling.

Drunkenness: buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity.

Slaveholding; buying or selling slaves.

Fighting, quarreling, brawling, brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the using many words in buying or selling.

The buying or selling goods that have not paid the duty.

The giving or taking things on usury—i.e., unlawful interest.

Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation; particularly speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers.

Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us.

Doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as: The putting on of gold and costly apparel.

The taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God.

Softness and needless self-indulgence.

Laying up treasure upon earth.

Borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.

The first General Rule, above, is not to do things you know are wrong. This is followed by a representative list of things recognized as wrong in 18th Century Britain and America. (It is not an exhaustive list of sins, by any means.) Some of the things listed we quickly recognize as wrong today. Some were peculiarly prominent in that time and place, such as “buying or selling goods that have not paid the duty.” Smuggling was rife in those days and many made a living by evading the excise taxes. Even “respectable” people participated, often with a nod and a

wink. Wesley would have none of it. Even sins approved by society are still sins, and avoiding sin is not possible if “everybody’s doing it” can be offered as an excuse. Christianity has always been, to one degree or another, countercultural. Seeking to follow Jesus will make some people look askance at you, and it may cost you some friends. “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4)?

That doesn’t mean we have to make a big show of the things we refuse to do. Wesley was known to despise jewelry and fancy clothes. One time, he was at a large gathering of Methodists at the house of a prominent follower. The daughter of the house was wearing a ring on her finger. Another Methodist seized her by the hand and dragged her over to where Mr. Wesley stood. Shoving her hand, with its ring, under his nose, he embarrassed her by saying in front of everybody, “What do you think of *that* for a *Methodist* hand?” Wesley said mildly, “The hand is very lovely.”

There is a difference between being a witness and being a boor. In any case, we avoid doing certain things not to show off how virtuous we are, but because we think Jesus doesn’t like us doing those things. And it is his good opinion we are seeking, not others’.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Consider Wesley’s list of sins. They were all behaviors that were (more or less) culturally acceptable in his day. What sinful behaviors are deemed acceptable in your cultural context, but not for a disciple of Jesus? What sins do you think Wesley might list today? What is the difference between being a witness and being a boor? Can you think of a time when you have been a boor instead of a witness? Can you think of a time when someone was a witness of faithfulness to you?

It is expected of all who continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Secondly: By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men: To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison. To their souls, by instructing, reproofing, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine that “we are not to do good unless *our hearts be free to it.*”

By doing good, especially to them that are of the household of faith or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others; buying one of another, helping each other in business, and so much the more because the world will love its own and them only. By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed.

By running with patience the race which is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth

and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them *falsely*, for the Lord's sake.

The first General Rule is to avoid doing evil, the second, immediately above, is to do good. As Wesley is commonly reported to have said, "Do all the good you can by all the means you can for as long as ever you can." The specifics of doing good here remind us that you must prompt yourself to do actual good things for others, not just host a benevolent attitude toward them. Jesus did not say to the blind man, "Feel good about yourself," he healed him.

Again, while clergy people often spend their time doing good with and for other people, we cannot simply substitute the deeds of the job for what we are supposed to be doing on our time off. Helping others includes people we don't know—and it includes our families.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Keep track of how many times over a week you do something good for someone else. Were you surprised at the number? What can you do to intentionally raise the number and variety of good acts you can do in a week?

It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Thirdly: By attending upon all the ordinances of God; such are:

The public worship of God.

The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded.

The Supper of the Lord.

Family and private prayer.

Searching the Scriptures.

Fasting or abstinence.

The third General Rule, immediately above, names specific spiritual disciplines – spiritual habits – that we must train ourselves to maintain. A lot of these are things the ordained minister is responsible for providing to others – we conduct worship, preach the Word, and celebrate communion. So, you get to do some double-dipping here; that said, most ministers find after a while that they really appreciate the occasional chance to just worship, hear somebody else preach, and linger over taking communion instead of organizing it. Seek out these opportunities.

Meanwhile, your devotional life is still there to maintain. Prayer, studying the Bible (and not just for sermon research), fasting or abstinence are things you do for yourself, to keep your soul

in trim. You can't just draw water for others indefinitely; you must have your reservoir refilled regularly.

These are the General Rules of our societies; all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written Word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know his Spirit writes on truly awakened hearts. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be known unto them who watch over that soul as they who must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways. We will bear with him for a season. But then, if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.

Disciplines are like athletic skills. They cannot be taught by lecture. They require coaching. A good coach is not only capable of doing the skills himself (though he recognizes that others he coaches may be better at them than he will ever be). A good coach can explain what is to be done, take somebody through the exercise, critique the performance and give suggestions for improvement afterwards. In order to teach someone to pray, forgive, or read the Scriptures with understanding, you need to do it together and be able to ask questions and suggest alternatives that improve what the learner is getting out of it. There may be other people in your congregation who can coach others in spiritual skills; this is what a good Class Leader in the old Methodist way would do. Don't be jealous of these persons; use them, and get them more training. You can't do for everybody; you need help.

And find someone to coach *you* in those areas where you need to grow. Put it in your Continuing Education plan. Pablo Casals was asked why, at the age of 90, he continued to practice the cello three hours a day. The master replied, "Because I think I am making progress."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Consider the means of grace, above. Which come naturally to you? With which do you struggle? How do your personal habits conform to or conflict with the means of grace?

Chapter Four: Ordination

Why do we have a special class of people set apart from the laity? What does it mean to be ordained? In 1 Corinthians 4:1, Paul says (referring to himself and other beyond-the-local church leaders), “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

Stewards of the Mysteries of God

What are these mysteries? First, the Gospel: Someone must get the telling right and ensure consistency in the story, whether told by this person or that person. Then there are baptism and the eucharist: Someone must explain what these things mean, teach how to celebrate and receive them properly, watch out for innovations and abuses in doing them. As time goes on and questions arise concerning exactly who Jesus is and how he connects us to God, someone must consider the implications, argue them out and explain the results to everybody else – *and* hold other teachers accountable for their understanding and explanation of these things. As people come forward to take their place among the clergy, someone must examine them, “discern their spirits,” and say Yes or No to admitting them to the company of authorized preachers and pastors.

The clergy initiate the young and outsiders into our tribe, the People of God. They watch for abuses. They teach the Word of God, pass on the traditions of our faith, and oversee other teachers who do the same. They recite the story, over and over, like some West African *griot* or old Irish *shanahy*, being extra careful to add nothing and subtract nothing from the whole Truth of God. They are the institutional memory of the Church.

This is why clergy are bound in a covenant with each other. We are a professional body that holds each other accountable for our teaching, practice, relationships, and lifestyle. As Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 4:2, “Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.” Accountability is the flip side of authority. The more authority one is given, the greater the account to be rendered. And to whom should we be accountable? To God, certainly (“Let not many of you be teachers, my brethren,” said James in his letter [3:1], “for we know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness”). However, clergy are also accountable to the whole Church and the congregations we serve. We are accountable primarily to each other. This is why there is an ordained clergy at all. It’s not just about call and leadership. It’s about holding each other accountable in the name of God and the Church. It’s about – to use a Methodist phrase – “watching over one another in love.”

The clergy are more than just a union looking out for their benefits. We are Members of the Annual Conference because we are members of the congregation of the clergy, and it is there that we experience support and correction. Clergy work as a group to guide the Church.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

In your experience, what do clergy do that laity do not?

What could happen if a local congregation (or even the Church as a whole) had no clergy?

Can you think of a situation when clergy accountability was needed, but neglected? Can you think of a situation when clergy accountability was needed, and rendered appropriately?

Parish Ministry

Within the parish, the pastor is the congregation's principal teacher, evangelist, and worship leader. That doesn't mean that he or she does all the teaching, all the evangelizing, or hogs the limelight (though some try to do all these things). Nor are these the only things the ordained minister does.

The appointed pastor has *the cure of souls*, to use an old phrase. That doesn't mean the pastor is in charge of fixing damaged souls, though we all do that to some degree. "Cure" in this sense is what a "curator" does. The people of the parish are a collection of people with needs, hurts, hopes, and relationships. Each of them is precious to God. And all of them are in the care of the pastor, who looks after them, prays for them, and guides them to the throne of grace and the kingdom yet to come. Certainly, lay people participate in pastoral ministry (cf. Chapter Three), but the pastor takes the lead and directs the activity of whatever other shepherds are available.

Furthermore, the pastor functions as the chief operating officer of the congregation. The church has many similarities to other small businesses in its community. There are fiduciary responsibilities, health and safety standards to comply with, and various other legal obligations. These may not seem like "ministry," but failing to keep the church in good order can endanger our larger mission. There are also (endless) meetings to attend, records to keep, forms to file. A wise pastor will find others to help share this load. However, the pastor still needs to make sure that the congregation is operating properly.

All this doesn't leave much time for anything else. And yet, some pastors are bi-vocational, juggling two jobs at the same time. Others have significant personal ministries of evangelism or writing or teaching that they do in addition to their full-time appointments. Managing all this without shorting one's responsibilities to the congregation (or the Conference) can be a challenge. Wesley always urged his preachers to be good stewards of their time.

The Global Methodist Church expects our clergy to be ordained. Ordained clergy should have sufficient education and training to do the job well and will have the support of, and accountability to, other clergy for their work. The GMC uses laypersons as supply pastors only in limited circumstances. Initially, Methodism was a renewal movement within the Church of

England, and nearly all its ministers were laity. However, following the launch of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784, a course of study was supplied to prepare candidates for ordination as deacons and elders. This sequential, two-step ordination was inherited from Anglicanism, which inherited it from Roman Catholicism. We also, at least in American Methodism, kept bishops, though our bishops were not quite like bishops in either the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church.

Each order or office is nested within the previous group. All baptized Christians form the laity (Greek *laos*), the People of God. Some Christians in the church are also deacons, ordained for the purpose of particular ministries for which they have acquired special training and received special authority. Some deacons are also elders, who have acquired further training and exercise further authority. Some elders are set apart for special, focused service for specific periods of time to serve as superintendents/presiding elders or as bishops. During such tenure and after the conclusion of their service as district superintendents/presiding elders, they continue to be elders.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

What do you think are the primary responsibilities of a pastor?

How might caring for the church's buildings get in the way of the mission? How can proper care of buildings further the mission?

The Diaconate (Deacons)

In Acts chapter 6, we read of a disagreement that arose within the Jerusalem proto-congregation between "Hellenists" and "Hebrews" (Greek-speaking and Aramaic-speaking Jews) about how the widows of each group were being treated in the daily distribution of aid (primarily food). All members of that first church held all their goods in common, so all the dependent members of the congregation were directly supported by the church rather than through their individual kinship groups. The apostles found managing this a distraction and told the congregation to pick seven men of good repute to whom they could delegate this duty. These seven were the first deacons. "Deacon" is from the Greek *diakonos*, "helper."

From the first, the deacons did more than manage charitable distributions. Stephen got in trouble for his fiery preaching and was stoned by the Jewish leaders (and he is thus the first martyr). Philip wound up baptizing the first convert from Ethiopia, a eunuch in the service of the queen of that country.

There were female deacons, too. Paul mentions Phoebe of Cenchreae, who had a church operating out of her home. No doubt these women helped with the distribution of aid to persons dependent upon the church and other duties as local need demanded. Later, as

baptismal ceremonies became more elaborate, they were necessary for assisting with the baptism of female converts, since this involved disrobing and being dressed in new clothing. And note, there is no word for “deaconess” in New Testament Greek. Female deacons are called by the same title as their male counterparts.

The deacon eventually became a liturgical leader, with many cantors and choirmasters helping to lead church music in both East and West. In the West during the Middle Ages and beyond, the archdeacon was the main administrator and distributor of charity in a local diocese. After the Reformation, some Protestant churches made deacon a lay office, overseeing missions or finance. In the Anglican tradition, and thus in Methodism, deacon was a stepping stone toward elder. In recent years, the permanent deacon has caught on as a clergy career in its own right.

Deacons may serve in many specialized ministries, such as youth work, religious education, music, associate pastors, and church administration. Deacons appointed as pastors in the Global Methodist Church have full authority to baptize and offer communion within their parishes. Deacons serving as a pastor beyond a temporary appointment must move toward ordination as an elder.

The call of a deacon can differ significantly from the call to elder’s orders. Deacons are called to Word, Service, Compassion and Justice. While a deacon may serve in a local congregation, for many the primary focus is to build a bridge from that congregation to service in the community. This can take a variety of forms including the obvious, such as coordinating mission outreach, creating volunteer opportunities for church members within the community, or serving in settings beyond the local church as chaplains, counselors, or educators. The call might also be fulfilled in ways that are less obviously service-oriented, such as administration or some form of justice ministry. The distinction is that for someone who is passionate about a specific area of ministry that God is calling one to, the responsibilities of caring for the various needs of a congregation may actually inhibit one’s ministry rather than fulfill it.

Noted deacons in church history include Alcuin of York, the leading scholar of the Ninth Century, who Charlemagne recruited to lead his efforts at education reform. Another Thirteenth Century deacon was Francis of Assisi, who founded new ways to serve Christ and others and revolutionized the Church of his day and beyond. Neither was ever ordained to the presbyterate.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Have you ever known a deacon? What did the deacon do that changed the way you understand ministry?

The Presbyterate (Elders)

Elders originated as the body of leaders who assisted the pastor/bishop. The number of elders required to cover the work depended upon the number of Christians in a given community and the physical size of the community. Each place, whether large or small, was a single congregation, so the pastor/bishop of the large city needed more help than the pastor/bishop of an isolated village. Eventually, as more places of worship were established within the whole community, the bishop could no longer act directly as the pastor of them all, and elders were assigned as the pastors of parishes within a local church (diocese) overseen by a bishop. With that, it became normal to associate the celebration of eucharist with the presbyterate. When there were too many people to baptize for one person to handle, the bishops eventually delegated most of that job to the elders as well.

By the time Christianity became legal in the Fourth Century, it was common for presbyters to be called “priests.” After the Reformation, many Protestant Churches changed the designation back to Presbyter, Elder, or Minister. Some sects made “elder” a lay office within the congregation, as they had done with “deacon.” But within the Methodist tradition, the elder is an ordained minister, a member of the clergy.

The call to elder’s orders is a call to Word, Sacrament, and Order. Elders preach and teach in the congregation. They also take the lead in clergy education. Elders have full authority to baptize and celebrate communion anywhere throughout the world, so long as they do not interfere with another clergyperson’s authority in that person’s appointment. Elders also have the additional duty of overseeing the work of others, including other clergy. Thus, elders are routinely appointed as senior pastors and presiding elders (superintendents). Upon request by a superintendent, any elder can preside at a Charge Conference. And elders are eligible for election to the episcopacy.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

What do you understand the differences to be between a deacon and an elder?
Which do you feel drawn to at this time?

Superintendency

In ancient times, the pastors and bishops of the Early Church developed into diocesan leaders while the main work of pastoral care fell to the elders. Bishops of small towns (*chorepiskopoi*) lost status and were reduced to elders or even what we would call supply pastors. Bishops established themselves as the successors of the apostles, and the chain of consecration from one bishop to another is what is called “apostolic succession.”

John Wesley was an Anglican priest, but not a bishop. Yet he claimed to be a “scriptural *episkopos*.” That is, he was in a position of leadership over a significant following who looked to him for supervision and sacramental care. He appointed preachers and oversaw the work of the Methodist Societies. When the Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1784 outside Baltimore, Maryland, the first two “General Superintendents,” Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke, called themselves “bishops.” Wesley was unhappy with this, but it stuck. Methodist bishops’ powers are not patterned after any theory of what functions the apostles had. Still, they are clearly patterned after the prerogatives that Wesley had exercised in Britain and his designee Asbury in America.

For Methodists, “bishop” is not a third order of ministry, but a position an elder is consecrated (not ordained) to. The bishop has no special teaching function for the whole Church separate from that of the elders as a whole. In the Global Methodist Church, bishops serve for up to two 6-year terms. They may keep the courtesy title of “bishop emeritus,” but their ordination status is that of elder.

Bishops preside over Annual and General Conferences, travel the connection to oversee the work of the global Church, appoint clergy to their places of work, and ordain those who are elected deacon or elder by the clergy members of the Annual Conference.

Conference superintendents assist the bishop providing spiritual and temporal leadership to each annual conference. Presiding elders on behalf of the Bishop, assist the Conference Superintendent in overseeing the churches and clergy of the Conference. These clergy may be pastors themselves, even while supervising the work of other pastors in nearby parishes. They might also be elders of Senior status.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

What is the name of your presiding elder? How can you contact him or her?
What is the name of your bishop? How can you contact him or her?

Women in Ministry

According to the New Testament, women in the first century were engaged in what we would now call ordained ministry. Phoebe is referred to as a deacon (Romans 16:11). Junia is a woman referred to in Romans 16:7 (NIV) as “outstanding among the apostles.” Many scholars have argued that “apostle” was a title not restricted to merely the Twelve (plus Paul), and some have interpreted this phrase to describe Junia herself as an apostle. A fresco decorating a ruined church has been found dating to the Fifth Century, which shows a woman in liturgical garb, which would indicate that there were female elders or bishops at this time. However, there is no record of any female clergy among early church historians such as Eusebius.

At any rate, women have been active in many church leadership roles over the centuries. In Seventh Century Northumbria, the princess Hild (St. Hilda) was an abbess who presided over a double monastery of monks and nuns, exercising authority over the male priests who served in her establishment. This was not unusual in the Old English Church. Women were active as preachers and teachers in the early Methodist movement, beginning with Susannah Wesley, the mother of John and Charles, and including Mary Bosanquet Fletcher. Populist forms of Methodism, including charismatic offshoots, have been very open to the ministry of women. The Methodist Church ordained its first female elder in 1956.

The Global Methodist Church is committed to accepting and promoting the ministry of women at all levels of the church. Women will be considered equally as candidates for ordination and will be considered fairly in matters of assignment and promotion. Women may be elected as General Conference delegates and as bishops, as their colleagues may determine. Women have been instrumental in launching the Global Methodist Church.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

In your cultural context, do you see many women in ministry leadership?

What is your understanding of the biblical reasons for supporting women in ministry?

If you are a woman, have you experienced challenges to your ministry because of your sex?

If you are a man, how can you support your female clergy colleagues?

Race/Ethnicity and Ministry

In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female (Galatians 3:28). All peoples and people groups, of whatever race, ethnic origin, or language, are welcome in the Church of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ can be authentically received, celebrated, and transmitted in any culture or society, and that same gospel judges and corrects every culture and society. The Global Methodist Church is committed to accepting and promoting the ministry of people from all ethnicities and cultures at all levels of the church. In multi-racial or multi-ethnic societies, members of minority groups will be considered equally as candidates for ordination and will be considered fairly in matters of assignment and promotion.

In “global majority” areas of the GMC, we respect the leadership of local members and clergy, who are equal partners in the work with those from Western countries such as the USA. We will include persons in general church leadership from all geographic areas and all major ethnic/cultural groups represented in the church. When we have the opportunity to appoint persons from one geographical area or culture to ministry in another geographical area or culture, and in all matters of cooperation between Conferences from different geographical areas, we will be mindful of the legacy of colonialism and seek to avoid depriving anyone of agency in the ministry we share together.

One reason we have different ways of satisfying educational requirements for ordination is that educational systems and opportunities vary according to where one lives worldwide. We have designed an education and credentialing system for clergy that concentrates on equipping those who are called, rather than creating a class system based upon expensive credentials offered by elite institutions.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

In your cultural context, are there racial and/or ethnic divides? Are you part of the majority or minority culture? How has this impacted your ministry? What could you do to expand your connections to colleagues and communities unlike your own?

Social Class and Ministry

We are told that “God does not show favoritism” (Romans 2:11 NIV). We are also told that showing partiality to those who have wealth is wrong (James 2:1-7). God calls people from all sorts of backgrounds and sends them to all sorts of people. We do not wish to be captured by the culture and restrict ourselves to ministering to and with people only like ourselves.

Ministry requires learning to relate to different kinds of people. All pastors are missionaries to the community in which they are appointed. That community may or may not be like their own, even if they seem to “fit in” by the obvious markers of race and social class. As clergy we must be willing to serve communities outside of our comfort zone or cultural background. The laborers must go where the harvest is ripe, not sit idle until the crop they want is ready.

The traditional path to ordination (a four-year college degree, followed by seminary) is not always financially feasible or available. Many people who are discerning a call to ministry are older and entering ministry as a second career. Some of these persons have academic degrees, but many do not. The GMC is committed to having clergy that are sufficiently trained for their work without putting undue financial stress on those pursuing God’s call. For this reason, we have designed a clergy education and credentialing system that provides more than one path to ordination.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Consider your own background. What feels like “home” to you? Have you ever spent an extended period of time in a community, or with other persons, from a different social background? What was that like for you?

What challenges are you likely to face in acquiring the education needed to pursue your call?

Disqualifiers for Ordination

Even as the Global Methodist Church is earnest about opening the ordained ministry to all sorts of people, we must also warn those who apply that ordination is not a right but a privilege conferred by those to whom responsibility for counseling and credentialing candidates is given. There are things that may disqualify someone seeking entrance into the ordained ministry in the GMC.

All of us are sinners born and we have all made many mistakes. We believe in redemption. We love to celebrate what God can do in people's lives. Nevertheless, there may be old crimes or accusations in some people's backgrounds that make it difficult or even impossible for us to grant authority to someone with this in their past. Allegations of abuse or harassment, mental instability, embezzlement or fraud are among the things that make it hard to accept a candidate. Boards of Ministry and clergy executive sessions must consider the confidence we want people to have in our clergy. The question of our parishioners' safety and well-being is also a priority. Sometimes, the judgment is obvious; sometimes, evidence must be sifted and wrestled with. We would like to say Yes every time, and even those who say No may grieve to say so. But sometimes the answer is No.

Similarly, ministers of the Gospel are expected to pursue holiness of heart and life. There are lifestyle standards that clergy in the GMC agree to live by. These include, though they are not limited to, fidelity in marriage between one man and one woman, or remaining chaste or celibate in singleness.

When considering a candidate for ministry, we must consider not only their training, giftedness, and aptitude, but also the candidate's theological commitments. Candidates for ministry in the GMC must be orthodox in their theology and able to articulate their understanding of the Wesleyan/Arminian tradition. While there is room for differing opinions and emphases on many matters, ministers within the GMC must share the core theological commitments of the Church. Candidates who do not affirm the doctrine of the GMC, and/or are unwilling to conform to the polity and practices of the GMC, will be more at home in another tradition.

Even in a church that wants to say Yes to everybody who hears God calling, we must exercise discretion. "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28) gives the lead to the Holy Spirit, but it still leaves us to exercise our own judgment. Sometimes No is for a season, and with grace and growth can be turned into Yes. Sometimes No is for the foreseeable future. This applies to new candidates for the clergy, and also ordained clergy who might betray their sacred trust or fall into folly.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

If you had to make a list of “disqualifiers” for ministry, what would it include?
What sacrifices or lifestyle changes do you think you might have to make to pursue your call?

Chapter Five: Careers

Every call to a profession eventually intersects with a job. Jobs include tasks that you find fulfilling and those that you don't. With any job, there is some drudgery, and a lot of just showing up. Many jobs in the clergy field are entrepreneurial; you don't have a supervisor standing over you nor a clock to punch. You are your own boss to a great degree.

There is freedom in that, but there is also great trepidation. How do you fill the hours? How do you make sure you are doing the most important thing, instead of merely the urgent thing? How are you accountable for what you get done? Sometimes, it's easier to just show up and run a station on a factory floor for eight hours.

Things to remember: You will never get it all done. Nor will you always see the fruit of your labors. You will exhaust yourself if you can't rest until everything is done. If you can't deal with the ambiguity of people's responses, you will be full of self-doubt. Ministry requires that you have a good inner sense of what you need to be doing, and the discipline to get things done without being told what to do.

Ministry can be a lonely career. You work with many people, but your relationships are often unequal. You carry their loads, but there are few people you can rely upon to carry yours. Everyone experiences criticism, but clergy receive more than their share. Clergy families often share in the isolation and receive the criticism, even though they are not the people doing the job. Some people require a lot of extra grace from us, and learning to deal with broken, hurting, and difficult people is part of the job.

To do the job well, clergy must be physically, spiritually, emotionally, and relationally healthy. Clergy need to build relationships with friends they do *not* pastor. They need to take care of themselves and their families. They need rest. Only someone who takes care of oneself can meet the needs of others without eventually burning out. When Jesus reached a point where he couldn't deal with any more people, he just -- left. He went off, alone, to pray. Sometimes, he didn't even take his disciples with him.

The job can be very rewarding, but it can also be exhausting. There is no such thing as a part-time pastor; you may be the pastor of fewer people and get paid less, but nobody does the other half of the Sundays in the pulpit or visits the other half of the sick people in the hospital. Whether you are full-time or part-time, establishing boundaries so that you're not always

working is important. But so is being fully present and accountable for the time you spend doing the work. Setting realistic goals for yourself and negotiating realistic goals with your Pastor-Parish Relations Committee or other employer are essential.

Many clergy jobs pay less than jobs requiring comparable education and experience in secular society. They may come with benefits such as parsonages, though those are a mixed blessing. "Labor without grudge is without grief," wrote the poet Charles Williams. If you find yourself struggling financially, that is understandable. But if you find yourself resenting your low salary, then that will affect your work – the work you were once so excited to be called by God to do. It will also make you miserable.

There are several kinds of job opportunities for clergy. The following is a sample.

Pastor

Most ordained clergy are pastors. Some are part-time, with or without another job to do. Some are full-time, but the only person on the staff. Some pastors lead staff which they need to supervise and motivate.

Most pastors preach nearly every Sunday. Even in appointments where there are multiple clergy on staff, the senior pastor will preach most Sundays. The rhythm of preparing and delivering sermons takes up a lot of the pastor's best thinking time.

Pastors also visit throughout the congregation. They are expected to visit shut-ins on a regular basis, to visit the sick in the hospital, to call on newcomers and invite them to further participation, to establish relations with people on their own turf (home or work), to see the children and youth play sports or take part in school plays, etc. They are not alone in doing this work, but their presence means a lot to the people they are assigned to.

Pastors attend many meetings and perform a lot of administrative work. This includes regular reports, preparing for business meetings, responding to instructions from bishops and superintendents, etc.

Pastors teach the faith. They often lead one or more Bible studies. They are responsible for preparing people for membership, including teaching confirmation or new member classes. They may lead a small group or supervise several small groups.

Pastors plan and lead worship. They are authorized to celebrate communion and baptize. They pray with and for others and teach people how to pray.

Pastors counsel the troubled, talk to people about following Christ, and do a lot of listening. They must be able to keep confidences (which is not the same as keeping secrets). They do weddings and funerals and are often honored guests at family gatherings.

As leaders of the congregation, they are supposed to keep the congregation focused on the group vision. They support the work of volunteers and interpret to those volunteers how the varied ministries of the people together support the congregation's mission. "There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord" is served, as Paul said (1 Corinthians 12:5 NIV). Pastors are the fount of honor in their congregations and make sure that everyone's work is noticed and valued.

Pastors serve on community committees and work with other clergy and community leaders. As Members of the Annual Conference and the congregation of the clergy, they may have responsibilities for administration and programs beyond the local church.

As representatives of the whole Church, they also state denominational policy and ensure its implementation. As the one who orders the life of the congregation, the pastor ensures that financial and legal requirements are met (usually by checking with the person or body responsible for that area).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

There are many expectations of a pastor. Which do you think are the most important? Since no pastor can be excellent at everything, how will you approach this ministry with your strengths and weaknesses?

What aspects of pastoring a church appeal to you? What do you think will be draining?

Missionary/Agency Director

A missionary is usually a pastor who brings the gospel to a particular people or place. We still send people to other countries on both short-term and long-term bases. There are also "home missions" to particular populations and regions within a given country where the need is great.

Missionaries not only deal with spiritual needs, but also social, economic, and systemic needs. Missionaries spend a lot of time and effort connecting community resources and helping make them available to others. This may mean drilling water wells, assisting in economic development, building churches, providing transportation, managing volunteers, dealing with natural disasters, running thrift stores, offering literacy classes and childcare, operating schools, and a host of other services, as well as preaching and conducting evangelistic tours.

Preparation for missions involves both education for ministry, but also acquiring many other practical skills needed in a particular area. Missionaries also usually have to raise their own support, so fundraising is a huge part of this job description.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Have you ever been part of a short-term or long-term mission? What did you find satisfying about that? What did you find frustrating?

Church Planter

A church planter is a pastor who starts a new congregation from scratch. Long before the first service is held, a target population in a particular community must be identified and its needs and characteristics studied. A ministry plan must be developed. It's not just opening the doors and putting "Everybody Welcome" on the sign out front. Your brand-new congregation must gather enough people to be self-sustaining within a reasonable amount of time.

People designated as church planters by their Conference or other denominational agency are recruited and given special training long before they are deployed into the ministry field. A whole team is involved in ensuring the success of the mission.

There *are* entrepreneurial pastors who manage to do it all on their own. The land is littered with congregations, mega-churches even, that are the fruit of one charismatic, multi-talented clergyperson. But for every one of those that succeeded in doing that, there are scores of new church starts which failed to grow the congregation to the point where it could sustain itself.

The Global Methodist Church is committed to starting new congregations to reach people for Jesus Christ. Starting new congregations will require a team approach, including recruiting and training church planters. We can't just sit back and wait for that one person to come along who can do it all.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Have you ever been part of a new church start? What were the joys and struggles of that experience?

Do you think God might call you to plant a church someday?

Chaplain

A chaplain is a minister who works within an institution, providing pastoral care and counseling to its employees or volunteers. Chaplains minister not only to persons from their particular faith background but also to whoever presents a need. They work with clergy from other religious traditions to ensure that individuals' religious needs are met.

All the armed forces have full-time chaplains who are also commissioned officers. Hospitals often have paid chaplains and local clergy who volunteer as chaplains. There are industrial chaplains and school/college chaplains. Police, Fire, and EMS units often have chaplains who are serving pastors who carry extra credentials and volunteer their time. Scout camps often have chaplains for their summer camps who are clergy in good standing in their denominations. Hospice chaplains work with the dying and their families.

While any ordained minister or ministerial candidate might end up in a volunteer chaplaincy position, career chaplains typically carry extra educational credentials and are interviewed and endorsed by a denominational committee before their application to be chaplains is considered by the institution they seek to serve in.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Have you ever been ministered to by a chaplain? What were the circumstances? Was it a positive experience?

Have you considered extending your training to include a Clinical Pastoral Education internship?

Pastoral Counselor

All pastors do some counseling; however, “pastoral counseling” is a particular specialty within the mental health field. It requires specialized training in counseling and credentials from an accrediting agency such as the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. Some pastors carry those credentials and do pastoral counseling in addition to their routine pastoral work. Other pastoral counselors do nothing but counseling as part of a church staff or as an independent professional.

Evangelist

Some ministers' main activity is preaching. They conduct tours and speak in local churches. They may also publish resources. Some head independent organizations, and some are designated as Conference evangelists.

Musician

There are many volunteer church musicians who accompany the congregation on instruments or lead choirs. There are also part-time church musicians who may be paid for their work but are not ordained. Then, there are musicians who are also ordained ministers.

Ministers of Music help design worship services. Depending on their talents and the demands of their particular jobs, they may accompany the congregation, lead or play in worship bands, or direct choirs. A given congregation may have multiple worship services each weekend, with different sorts of music featured in each.

Beginning in the late Roman Empire/early medieval period, the Church organized a liturgical year in which the entirety of the gospel story would be presented over the course of the calendar year. Meanwhile, monks and nuns began chanting all 150 Psalms over the course of each week and each day was broken up into periods with set times of prayer. In effect, the Church set out to convert the passage of time into a means of grace. The Minister of Music helps guide a congregation through the entirety of the gospel message over the course of each year, doing through music what the pastor does through preaching.

Of course, this requires a great deal of cooperation and a good understanding of the musician's and preacher's shared task (and anyone else involved in organizing the worship service). It also requires specialized education not only in music but in divinity.

Youth Minister

Many congregations use volunteers for youth ministry. Some have paid staff who lack professional training and ordination. Ordained youth ministers are usually employed only by larger congregations. Youth ministers organize many programs, trips, and retreats. They meet regularly with youth in the church and assist with pastoral care of families involved in the youth program.

As staff members, they relate directly to the senior pastor and to whatever committee provides oversight to their function (Pastor-Parish or Youth Committee). It is important that they see what they do in terms of the whole ministry of the local church.

Director of Christian Education

Christian educators lead things like Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, church camps, and special programs. A DCE recruits volunteer teachers, provides training, purchases curricula and resources, and puts together teams to do special programs. Christian educators are typically part of a larger staff, and the senior pastor will gather the staff together to consider the whole ministry of the local church.

In addition to working with non-fee-paying programs such as Sunday School, some congregations operate day care facilities, pre-schools, and other fee-paying programs as part of their ministry. These kinds of ministries often have a separate board in order to keep the concerns and liabilities of operating a school from dominating the work of the congregation's

governing body. These ministries are headed by a director and often have paid staff of their own.

In addition to the educational requirements to be ordained, many DCEs carry other professional credentials in their particular field. Many DCEs are lay professionals, but some are ordained.

Church Administrator

Some larger congregations pay their treasurers or business managers. Some local church administrators are also credentialed as clergy. Having a professional operate the business side of the local church frees up the senior pastor and program staff to deal with people's spiritual needs.

In addition to the educational requirements to be ordained (if they are), a church administrator needs business training and experience beyond what the Course of Study can provide.

Professor/Higher Education Administrator

Many seminary professors, and some college professors in certain fields (such as Philosophy, Theology, etc.) are ordained ministers. Faculty members in higher education routinely possess advanced degrees, usually at the doctoral level. Competition for jobs in higher education is stiff and acquiring the full boat of credentials takes a long time. But if that is what God has called you to, that is your mountain to climb. Go for it.

If you are interested in obtaining an advanced degree, you should be aware that some institutions distinguish between practitioners' degrees and scholarly ones. In most fields, candidates for professional postings will need a Ph.D. or Th.D. rather than a D.Min.

Some professors – and some pastors with certain experiences and proven abilities – also serve as deans or presidents of institutions of higher education. Search committees seek applicants for these positions and openings are published in various academic journals and newsletters.

Conference/Denominational Staff

Religious bodies at various levels employ clergy to lead in particular areas: leadership development, the accomplishment of some denominational goal, clergy services, church camping – whatever the needs identified might be. Search committees are set up to identify leaders (frequently ordained ministers) with the special gifts to provide that leadership.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After reviewing this list of ministry jobs, which do you think God is calling you to do?
Are there any jobs you hadn't previously considered that now intrigue you?
Are there any ministry jobs you don't think you would be a good fit for?

Chapter Six: Steps

It is possible that after working through this handbook, you have discerned vocational ministry is not God's calling for your life. If so, God bless you as you serve Him faithfully as a lay person. If, however, you have discerned that God is calling you to ministry, this chapter will take you through the candidacy process. The process of entry into ministry is governed by ¶¶ 501-517 in the *2024 Book of Doctrines and Discipline* (available online at <https://globalmethodist.org/books-of-doctrines-and-discipline/>). ¶506 is specific for Candidacy.

A Piece of Advice: Always keep copies of all correspondence and forms you send or receive when communicating with your mentor, presiding elder, committees, or Board of Ministry.

Professing Member

You must be a professing member of the GMC or a predecessor denomination for at least one year before you can start the candidacy process. Membership in the church is conferred through baptism, whether as a child or an adult. Children too young to make a personal confession of faith are called "baptized members." To be a "professing member" you must make your own confession of faith and be baptized (if not baptized before) or confirmed. Members take vows to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ and to uphold the church's doctrine. As a candidate for ordination, your practice and beliefs will come under examination repeatedly, both by yourself and others.

Initial Education

You must have or obtain a high school diploma, GED, or the equivalent to apply for candidacy.

Inquiry

The process starts when you ask your local pastor or presiding elder (district superintendent) about becoming a candidate for ministry. He or she will be glad to talk to you about the ministry generally, give you a copy of this book or show you how to access it online, and tell you what to do next.

Local Church Approval

Your pastor will schedule an interview with your local church's Pastor-Parish Relations Committee (or equivalent). These are the persons in your church charged with handling confidential matters relating to the appointment of clergy to your congregation. You should already be well-known to them. You will be asked to share the story of your call with them. If they approve your application by a two-thirds majority, they will forward your application to a regular or called Charge Conference of your congregation. If the Charge Conference approves your application by a simple majority, your next step is to fill out the application.

US Annual Conferences: <https://globalmethodist.org/clergy-and-church-applications/>
Conferences outside the US: consult your presiding elder or Board of Ministry.

Personal Information

You may be asked to submit personal information on a Data Sheet obtained from your Annual Conference Board of Ministry Registrar.

Discernment process

Upon becoming a candidate, you enter a time of supervised discernment. You must spend at least six months actively examining your call and where it is taking you. This process will be guided by a mentor designated by the Board of Ministry. The discernment process includes the following elements.

- 1) You will be given this guidebook and begin a series of meetings with your mentor (and other candidates, if possible) to discuss the material in this book.
- 2) Criminal Background Check and Credit Check: You will be asked to provide information and releases to allow for a criminal background check and a credit check of yourself. There may be a cost for these. These confidential reports will be sent to the Annual Conference Board of Ministry (BOM) and shared with the presiding elder. These are not done to assess your worthiness of God's call (for none of us are worthy), but to make sure you have nothing in your record that would hinder your employment in a position of trust.
- 3) You must complete a psychological evaluation which will be arranged with the BOM. There may be a cost for this.

- 4) You must submit a written statement of your call to the BOM, along with any other personal documentation they may require. The BOM will schedule an interview with you.
- 5) During your six-month discernment period, you must complete a supervised internship or employment in a ministry setting guided by your BOM.
- 6) After review of all your materials and a personal interview by a team from the BOM, the entire Board will act upon your application. You must be approved by a majority vote of the entire Board. You are now a certified candidate for ordained ministry.

Ministerial and Spiritual Formation

After being certified as a Candidate for Ministry, you begin formally preparing for ordination. Formal preparation for the clergy is both personal and professional. It includes certain educational requirements, which can be met in a variety of ways. There is no time limit for completing the requirements for ordination as a deacon, *but* if you are recommended and appointed to serve as a Supply Pastor, you must complete the requirements for ordination within five years. you cannot remain as a Supply Pastor indefinitely. Supply Pastors can be given authority to celebrate the sacraments in their local settings as an extension of their supervising elder's ministry but only after completing a course on the Sacraments approved by the BOM. ¶512.

The BOM will guide you in your formation. You must follow the process they outline and complete the educational requirements. There are several ways to do this.

- a) If you are in the United States or Europe, you are encouraged enroll in a degree program such as a Master of Divinity (MDiv), a Master of Arts (MA) in Biblical Studies, a Master of Ministry (MMin), or a Master of Theology (MTh); if you are in a Conference outside the USA or Europe, the equivalent degree program would be a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in ministry including biblical studies). Deacons intending to pursue a specialty requiring other degrees or certificates should consult with their Annual Conference Board of Ministry. Availability of degree programs by accredited institutions varies, and your BOM may consider one more appropriate for your career path than another. Degree and certificate programs started after January 1, 2026 must be taken in GMC approved schools.
- b) Individuals whose setting, age, or life circumstances make such formal academic degree programs difficult or impracticable may, with a secondary diploma, complete a non-degree certificate of pastoral studies from an educational program or programs approved by the Commission on Ministry

In the event of a change in educational requirements, candidates in process shall be allowed to complete their educational program as per the requirements specified in the *Book of Doctrine*

and Discipline (including the *Transitional Book of Doctrine and Discipline*) in effect at the time they began their studies, provided that the candidate demonstrates adequate progress toward completing their education.

Educational Requirements for Deacon's Orders

You must complete a minimum of ten courses (approx. 30 credit hours). Those courses are:

- Introduction to the Old Testament;
- Introduction to the New Testament;
- Systematic Theology;
- Wesleyan Theology and Doctrine;
- Methodist History and GMC Polity;
- Basics of Preaching;
- Pastoral Care;
- Evangelism and Missions;
- Wesleyan Sacraments and Worship;
- Inductive Bible Study or Hermeneutics.

Applying for Ordination as a Deacon

You may then apply to the BOM for ordination as a deacon. The BOM will interview you and assess your readiness for ordination. Your interview will assess your readiness for ordination in part on the following historic questions first asked of John Wesley's traveling preachers.

- 1) Do they know God as pardoning God? Have they the love of God abiding in them? Do they desire nothing but God? Are they holy in all manner of conversation?
- 2) Have they gifts, as well as evidence of God's grace, for the work? Have they a clear, sound understanding; a right judgment in the things of God; a just conception of salvation by faith? Do they speak justly, readily, clearly?
- 3) Have they fruit? Have any been truly convinced of sin and converted to God, and are believers edified by their service?

As long as these marks occur in them, we believe that they are called of God to serve. These we receive as sufficient proof that they are moved by the Holy Spirit.

You will also be asked the following specific questions. You must supply written answers to these questions at the time of your application.

- 1) What is your personal experience of God?
- 2) What is your understanding of evil?
- 3) What is your understanding of grace?
- 4) How do you understand the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers and the Church?
- 5) What is your understanding of the Kingdom of God?

- 6) What significance do you believe that the resurrection holds?
- 7) What is your understanding of the nature and authority of Scripture?
- 8) What is your understanding of the nature and mission of the Church?
- 9) What gifts and graces do you bring to the work of ministry?
- 10) What is the meaning of ordination?
- 11) What is the role and significance of the sacraments?
- 12) Have you studied our form of church discipline and polity and will you support and maintain it?
- 13) For the sake of the church's witness, are you willing to dedicate yourself to the highest ideals of the Christian life, exercising self-control in your personal habits, integrity in all of your relationships and if married, fidelity in your covenant with your spouse, or if single, chastity in your personal conduct?

Your Board of Ministry might require additional information to be submitted prior to interviewing for ordination. In order to be ordained, the BOM must recommend your candidacy for deacon by a two-thirds majority. You must then be approved for ordination as a deacon by a two-thirds majority of the deacon and elder clergy members of the annual conference in executive session and be approved by the bishop. You will then become a full member of the Annual Conference and be ordained by the bishop through the laying on of hands.

After Ordination as a Deacon

You may choose to remain a deacon for the rest of your career. The office of deacon is a full-time career in which many find fulfillment of their call. Some serve as pastors or on a ministry team in a local church under the bishop's appointment; others secure their own employment and seek its endorsement by the bishop as a valid ministry. If the appointment as a local pastor is more than temporary, however, the deacon must continue towards elder's orders. ¶1509.5

Pursuing Elder's Orders

A deacon seeking ordination as an elder must declare he or she is doing so to the BOM. He or she must show oneself to be faithful, mature, and effective in a minimum of two years' service as a deacon as guided by your BOM.

Educational Requirements for Elder's Orders

The candidate for elder's orders must complete an additional ten courses (beyond those required of a deacon). These courses must include the following courses, plus two more electives:

- History of Christianity through the Reformation;
- History of Christianity, Reformation to the Present;
- Apologetics;
- Wesleyan Discipleship and Spiritual Formation;

Christian Leadership and Conflict Resolution;
One elective course in Old Testament;
One elective course in New Testament;
Ministry of the Holy Spirit.

At least two electives may be chosen from the following areas:

Mission of the Church and Church
Renewal;
Cross Cultural Ministry and Evangelism;
Advanced Preaching;
Hebrew or Greek language studies;
Pastoral Counseling;
Church Finance and Administration;
Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) in a hospital or similar setting;
Philosophy of Religion;
Field Study in Israel;
Theology Elective;
Theology of Worship;
Children or Youth Ministry;
Gospel Vision for Justice;
Mission and Church Renewal;
Media and Modern Applications;
Directed Internship or independent study.

Note: The GMC recommends the completion of the highest degree available to qualify for ordination; however, possession of a degree, in itself, will not satisfy the requirements for ordination. Transcripts must be examined in order to make sure that the right courses have been taken. Those who seek to transfer to the GMC while in possession of current ordination credentials from another denomination will generally have their ordination status acknowledged; however, the Board of Ministry may require particular courses to be taken if the applicant's educational history shows some significant lack of or deviation from the expected standards of the GMC.

It is also technically true that one could be ordained without completing a degree or certificate program. A Deacon pursuing an MDiv could be ordained after completing only part of the degree; meanwhile, ordination as an Elder requires only twenty courses, while an MDiv is usually thirty courses. Not completing a degree or certificate program might hinder the candidate's approval by the Board of Ministry.

Applying for Ordination as an Elder

The candidate for elder's orders must provide to the BOM a written set of answers to the following historic questions.

- 1) Have you faith in Christ?
- 2) Are you going on to perfection?
- 3) Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?
- 4) Are you earnestly striving after perfection in love?
- 5) Are you resolved to devote yourself wholly to God and God's work?
- 6) Do you know the General Rules of our Church?
- 7) Will you keep the General Rules of our Church?
- 8) Have you studied the doctrines of the Global Methodist Church?
- 9) After full consideration, do you believe that our doctrines are in harmony with the Holy Scriptures?
- 10) Have you studied our form of church discipline and polity?
- 11) Do you approve our form of church discipline and polity?
- 12) Will you support and maintain them?
- 13) Will you exercise the ministry of compassion?
- 14) Will you diligently instruct the children in every place?
- 15) Will you visit from house to house?
- 16) Will you recommend fasting or abstinence, both by precept and example?
- 17) Are you determined to employ all your time in the work of God?
- 18) Are you in debt so as to embarrass you in your work?
- 19) Will you observe the following directions?
 - a) Be diligent. Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly employed. Never trifle away time; neither spend any more time at one place than is strictly necessary.
 - b) Be punctual. Do everything exactly at the time. And do not mend our rules, but keep them; not for wrath, but for conscience' sake.

Your Board of Ministry might require additional information to be submitted prior to interviewing for ordination. The candidate for elder's orders must be interviewed by the BOM and recommended by a two-thirds vote. He or she must be approved for ordination as an elder by a two-thirds vote of the elders in the clergy executive session and approved by the bishop. The deacon will then be ordained an elder.

Continuing Education

Completing required courses is the minimum expectation for those seeking ordination in the GMC. Clergy are expected to continue to learn across their careers. Boards of Ministry in the various Annual Conferences will set expectations for how much must be accomplished within a given time period. Continuing education may include professional reading, taking courses, attending seminars, travel, research, and spiritual renewal experiences. It should certainly include periodic recertification in modules on Personal and Professional Boundaries; Protection of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults; and Clergy Ethics.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Make a list of questions for your mentor or presiding elder that you need answers to.

Supporting materials

REFERENCES IN 2024 BOOK OF DOCTRINES AND DISCIPLINE

<https://globalmethodist.org/books-of-doctrines-and-discipline/>

The Ministry of the Called (¶¶ 501-521)

- ¶ 501 Ministry in the Church
- ¶ 502 Certified Lay Ministers
- ¶ 503 Orders of Ministry
- ¶ 504 Types of Ordained Ministry
- ¶ 505 Basic Qualifications of the Ordained
- ¶ 506 Entrance Into Ordained Ministry
- ¶ 507 Educational Requirements for Ordination
- ¶ 508 Historic Questions
- ¶ 509 Ordination as Deacon
- ¶ 510 Ordination as Elder
- ¶ 511 Ministerial Training Fund
- ¶ 512 Supply Pastor
- ¶ 513 Chaplaincy and Other Endorsements
- ¶ 514 The Ministry of Evangelists
- ¶ 515 The Ministry of Missionaries
- ¶ 516 Transfer of Clergy Credentials
- ¶ 517 Appointment of Clergy From Other Denominations.
- ¶ 518 Leaves of Absence
- ¶ 519 Affiliate Clergy Membership
- ¶ 520 Senior Status
- ¶ 521 Transitional Provisions

CANDIDACY CHECKLISTS

As of March 24, 2025

INITIAL PATH TO CANDIDACY

		Completed	Date
Professing member of GMC for 1 year	Or of predecessor denomination		
Meet with local pastor or presiding elder	Inquiry and guidance		
Approvals	2/3 Staff-Parish Relations Committee		
	Majority of Charge Conference		
*Fill out Online Application			
Enter Discernment Period			

DISCERNMENT PERIOD

		Completed	Date
Minimum of 6 months	Supervision by BOM through assigned mentor		
Assigned mentor	Also part of candidacy group, if possible		

Work through guidebook with mentor	And group, if possible		
*Criminal Background Check			
*Credit Check			
*Psychological evaluation	Arranged by BOM		
Written statement of call	Submit to BOM		
Interview BOM	Approval by BOM		
Certified Candidate for Ministry			

MINISTERIAL AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION LEADING TO ORDINATION AS DEACON

		Completed	Date
Formation period determined by BOM Mentoring continues	If serving as a Supply Pastor or Transitional Local Pastor, you have only 5 years to qualify as deacon		
Education requirements: 10 courses	Course work or degree		
Any additional BOM requirements	Some require additional submissions		
Ordination interview with BOM	Historic Questions, Deacon's Questions		
Approvals	2/3 BOM		
	2/3 Deacon & Elders in Clergy Executive Session		
	Bishop		
Ordination as Deacon			

MINISTERIAL AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION LEADING TO ORDINATION AS ELDER

		Completed	Date
Minimum 2 years' service as deacon			
10 additional courses	Course work or degree		
Any additional BOM requirements	Some require additional submissions		
Ordination interview with BOM	Historic Questions		
Approvals	2/3 BOM		
	2/3 Elders in Clergy Executive Session		
	Bishop		
Ordination as elder			

*Conferences outside the USA may have different requirements. Check with your BOM.