

From the *2019 Book of Discipline of the Free Methodist Church—USA*:

The Ordained Ministry

Preamble

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It is biblical for the Church to set apart particular persons for special tasks of leadership. These persons bear witness to an inward call of the Holy Spirit. They are examined and set apart by public ordination, including the laying on of hands after the pattern of the early Church.

These men and women ordained by the Church are characterized by both gifts and graces. Gifts are special endowments of abilities. Graces are special qualities of character. Both have their source in the enabling Holy Spirit. Although the Church must discern and cultivate those who have such endowments, ordination is always first and foremost an act of God's calling and anointing. In each assignment, the ordained minister follows the model of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who gave His life for the sheep (John 10:1-18; Ezekiel 34), served willingly and selflessly (1 Peter 5:1-4) and commanded the undershepherds to feed the sheep (John 21:15-17).

Free Methodist ministers may carry out their task under appointment as pastors of particular congregations or they may be given other assignments. In either case, they are called to provide Spirit-filled leadership in the Church to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. A healthy church, reproducing more and better disciples as well as new churches, will be characterized by vital worship, evangelistic and social action, Christian nurture and fellowship.

Ordained ministers commit themselves to equipping the whole body of believers to these ends. Biblically and historically, they are set apart for the study and proclamation

of the Word of God, intercessory prayer, the winning of persons to Christ, the administration of the sacraments and the defense of the gospel.

Free Methodist ministers under appointment as pastors of churches are called to be leaders of God's people. Leadership requires vision, daring, moving people to action and living with the turbulence change brings. Pastoral leadership is rooted in a deep love for Christ and His compassion for human need. God's resources are abundantly available for all who embrace this task in courageous and radical obedience.

Ordained elders may be elected to lead the Church-at-large as bishops or superintendents. Under the direction of the bishop they may also be given other assignments, such as those of general church administrators, chaplains, missionaries, evangelists or theological teachers in universities or seminaries.

Qualifications for Pastoral Ministry

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- A. A person called by God enters a vocation which through biblical tradition and Methodist heritage carries significant responsibilities. Dealing with the souls of people and leading the church in making disciples requires a heart attuned to God and others, a mind appropriately informed for the work of ministry, and hands equipped for effective service.
- B. The Free Methodist Church prepares elders and leaders who will serve effectively in any context. Preparing for ministry with a solid education is a rich part of our heritage as Free Methodists and an integral part of developing leaders. A baseline of a Bachelor's degree (B.S./B.A. or equivalent) and some graduate work in theology is what we envision. We urge our candidates to entrust this part of their journey to one of our AFMEI institutions. While this may not always be possible or practical, still our colleges and universities remain essential partners in shaping the future of the Free Methodist Church.
- C. Outcomes-Based Ordination emphasizes candidate proficiency in 15 areas of qualification for ministry (see ¶5410.B). Candidates will enter this process with varying degrees of preparation and readiness; as such, Ministerial Education and Guidance Boards have the freedom to design formation plans according to the needs of the candidate.

- D. These qualities are intended to assist the church. Ordained ministers should examine themselves in light of these; conferences should publicly review these when designing evaluation and reporting instruments for pastors; Ministerial Education and Guidance Boards should consider these qualities and skills when interviewing and guiding ministers.

Steps Leading Toward Ordination.

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There are four steps to becoming an ordained minister in the Free Methodist Church.

- A. The person recognized by the Church as having the call of God to pastoral ministry is licensed as a local ministerial candidate (LMC) (see ¶6500).
- B. Acceptance by the annual conference as a conference ministerial candidate.
- C. Conference ministerial candidates (CMC), upon recommendation of the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board, are received into annual conference membership and elected to elders' orders.
- D. Ordination as elder completes the process.

Local Ministerial Candidate

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A local ministerial candidate is a member of the Free Methodist Church who is seriously considering a call to full-time Christian ministry. Local ministerial candidate status provides the opportunity to explore the perceived call to ministry with the pastor in the context of the local church. The requirements and responsibilities of a local ministerial candidate are found in ¶6500.

Conference Ministerial Candidate

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- A. A conference ministerial candidate is a member of the Free Methodist Church who has been received by an annual conference in preparation for ordained ministry.
- B. The conference ministerial candidate shall:
1. be a local ministerial candidate;
 2. be thoroughly acquainted with the history and conversant with the polity of the Free Methodist Church, normally as provided in an approved course of study;
 3. have completed application for ministry appointment;
 4. be interviewed, certified and recommended by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board and received by the annual conference upon satisfactory response to the questions (see ¶8710);
 5. be under the guidance of the conference superintendent and an assigned coach/mentor;
 6. maintain membership in a Free Methodist Society;
 7. maintain relationship as a conference ministerial candidate by annual recommendation of the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board.
- C. A candidate who has been involved in a divorce, annulment or dissolution of marriage shall not be admitted to the conference as a conference ministerial candidate or in full membership until approved by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board, the conference superintendent and the bishop. This shall also apply to a candidate whose spouse has been divorced. Divorce prior to conversion shall not in itself bar a candidate from consideration for conference membership.
- D. The Ministerial Education and Guidance Board shall examine potential conference ministerial candidates and determine readiness based on the 15 areas measured in the Outcomes Based Ordination assessment (see ¶5410)

E. The Ministerial Education and Guidance Board may recommend the conference deacon track to a candidate for reasons when:

1. A Conference Ministerial Candidate (CMC) who is called to a specialized ministry but not the general itinerant ministry of a Free Methodist elder.
2. A CMC who is called to pastoral ministry in the Free Methodist Church, but due to age, or language skills is not able to complete all of the preparations for becoming an elder.
3. A CMC who desires to continue in ministry in the Free Methodist Church but needs to suspend completing the course of study for an extended season (e.g. personal, vocational, or medical reasons).

To be considered as a Conference Deacon the candidate must complete the Local Ministerial Candidate (LMC) vetting process and 50% or more of the core curriculum for CMCs (including FM History and Polity, Old Testament and New Testament Survey Courses, Wesleyan Theology, and one or more practical ministry courses, internship, or practicum).

The Conference MEG Board presents qualified conference ministerial candidates to be confirmed as Conference Deacons. Following their confirmation, a Conference Deacon shall receive a card stating his/her status with the Conference. A Conference Deacon maintains the same relationship with the annual conference that he/she had as a CMC. If at a later time a Conference Deacon desires to seek ordination, he/she may contact the MEG Board to reengage with the ordination process. If a Conference Deacon seeks a transfer to another conference, he/she could do so as a CMC/Conference Deacon.

F. A conference ministerial candidate shall be interviewed annually, for sufficient time to demonstrate proficiency and fruitfulness commensurate with ordination and conference membership. Normally this will be a period of 2 to 3 years. (See ¶5010.C)

- G. When a conference ministerial candidate is under appointment to a society as pastor-in-charge, he/she is considered “clergy” (to maintain a lay/clergy balance) when serving on committees and boards. In all other matters, including election as a delegate to general conference, he/she is considered a “lay person.”
- H. A conference ministerial candidate appointed by a Ministerial Appointments Committee to have charge of a society or with the superintendent’s approval may administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper and solemnize marriages in that place, if civil law permits.

Elder’s Orders

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- A. A minister may be received into membership, elected to elder’s orders and granted a seat in the annual conference upon providing satisfactory answers to conference membership questions (see ¶8720) and receiving the recommendation of the MEG Board based on his/her demonstrated proficiency in the 15 Outcomes- Based Ordination areas (see ¶5410).
- B. Election to elder’s orders constitutes the acknowledgement of the annual conference that the person so elected has met all the biblical (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1) and ecclesiastical requirements to serve as an overseer in the Church. Only an ordained elder may serve as a ministerial delegate to General Conference, a conference superintendent or a bishop.
- C. The elder shall administer baptism and the Lord’s Supper, solemnize marriages, and lead in divine worship. When appointed to a society, an elder shall perform the responsibilities of a pastor.

Outcomes-Based Ordination

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- A. Outcomes-Based Qualifications

A candidate shall:

1. be initially approved by the society and granted a local ministerial candidate's license;
2. be granted conference ministerial candidacy at the recommendation of the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board upon review of his/her portfolio and Outcomes-Based Ordination Assessment interview;
3. complete the prescribed process of coaching, assignments, coursework, and assessment from his/her Conference Ministerial Candidate Formation Plan;
4. expand his/her portfolio with documentation showing his/her progress through the CMC Formation Plan;
5. be interviewed and recommended by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board to elder's orders; and
6. be approved by the annual conference and ordained by the presiding bishop or appointee.

B. Outcomes-Based Assessment

Heart Formation:

1. The candidate is characterized by spiritual maturity and a strong sense of call to ministry
 - Shaped by the spiritual disciplines
 - Identity and calling rooted firmly in Jesus Christ
 - Models a life of holiness led by the Spirit
2. The candidate demonstrates a high level of self-awareness
 - Understands and is able to articulate their strengths and weaknesses
 - Builds teams around blind-spots
 - Knows how their leadership/communication style impacts others both adversely as well as positively

3. The candidate lives a life that is balanced for the demands of ministry

- Attends adequately to physical, emotional and mental needs
- Schedules regular time for play and recreation
- Lives a simple life free of addiction and compulsion

4. The candidate lives a life shaped by love for others

- Prioritizes spouse and children (if applicable)
- Builds and maintains healthy, close relationships with people inside and outside of the church
- Cultivates relationships of confession and accountability

5. The candidate models humility

- Remains teachable and accepts correction when needed
- Maintains a non-defensive posture towards leaders, followers and peers
- Willingly seeks the perspective of others

Head Formation:

1. The candidate demonstrates biblical understanding

- Possesses holistic biblical knowledge
- Has a Wesleyan hermeneutic that accepts the authority of Scripture
- Demonstrates ability to root their Wesleyan worldview in the Bible

2. The candidate demonstrates a Wesleyan theological integration

- Knows and embraces the history, polity, Articles of Religion and core values of the FMC
- Articulates the Wesleyan distinctives compellingly
- Understands and embraces Wesleyan relationship theology

3. The candidate has a theological education commensurate with ordained ministry

- Has completed an undergraduate degree or demonstrates equivalent understanding of life and ministry
 - Has completed some graduate work in theology or demonstrates theological competence at a graduate level
 - Embodies a life-long passion for learning through modeling and encouraging others
4. The candidate has an ecumenical posture towards the Church and the world
- Actively seeks to build and maintain bridges among fellow Christian groups
 - Demonstrates an appreciation for the contribution of other Christian traditions while wholeheartedly embracing our own
 - Demonstrates a growing appreciation for humanity and value of all people regardless of their believe system
5. The candidate processes the ability to practically apply learning
- Demonstrates an ability to make complex theology understandable to all
 - Demonstrates an ability to find God’s redemptive activity in daily life
 - Demonstrates an ability to deepen faith through real life experience

Hand formation:

1. The candidate demonstrates fruitfulness in ministry
- Has a track record of transformational preaching/teaching/leading
 - Personally and corporately engages in evangelism
 - Able to build and maintain healthy and diverse faith communities
2. The candidate embraces the ministry of justice and compassion
- Challenges injustice and discrimination wherever it is found
 - Engages local and global needs of the broken and poor
 - Continually focuses ministry on the margin, seeking to emancipate all who exist within enslaving systems

3. The candidate operates as a servant leader

- Promotes the development of others
- Serves the local and global church demonstrating cross-cultural competency
- Creates healthy ministry environments characterized by safety and non-judgement

4. The candidate empowers others to discover and function within their God given design

- Wholeheartedly supports the role of women in leadership
- Facilitates and promotes multicultural community and staff
- Actively helps others discover their brilliance

5. The candidate leads with creativity and vision

- Seeks best practices of contextual and culturally relevant ministry
- Envisions alternatives and successfully leads others towards more creative and effective outcomes
- Casts compelling vision and develops strategic plans to accomplish it

Service Requirements for Ordination

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The spiritual formation necessary for healthy, effective, long-term ministry happens best in the context of a local church. In order to properly observe and assess the gifting, calling and brilliance of a potential ordinand, supervised experience in a local church or in a context beyond the local church as approved by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board, is essential. Normally a candidate will move through this season of formation and supervision in 2 to 3 years.

Ordination Credentials

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A. Ministers, whether located or itinerant, whose ordinations are recognized by an annual conference, shall be entitled to credentials from the president of the conference, certifying their ordination. Duplicate copies of credentials for ministers received after June 10, 1969, are remitted by the president of the conference for retention and permanent filing by Ministerial Credentialing Services.

B. Ordained ministers in good standing who unite with another church or are granted permission to withdraw from the Free Methodist Church shall deposit their credentials with the secretary of the conference and receive a receipt for them.

If the credentials are not deposited with the secretary of the annual conference from which the minister has withdrawn, the credentials shall be declared null and void by action of the annual conference.

C. Ministers who are expelled from the Church or who are allowed to withdraw under charges must surrender their credentials. If they refuse or neglect to deposit them with the secretary of the conference from which they have been separated, the conference, by official action, shall declare them null and void.

D. Credentials may be restored only by the annual conference to which they were surrendered or which declared them void.

E. In the event of the loss of ordination credentials, a certified duplicate copy shall be made available through the Board of Bishops' office.

F. After a period of three years, an ordained person neither appointed to nor actively seeking a recognized ministry function in the life of a Free Methodist Church shall deposit his/her credentials with the secretary of the conference and receive a receipt for them (see ¶5630).