

A United Methodist Glossary of Terms

The list below is of terms that candidates for ordained ministry and those who work with them through the candidacy and provisional process should be familiar with. The list is not all-inclusive. More details and in-depth information can be found in *The 2008 Book of Discipline*. Where appropriate, paragraph numbers are cited.

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Terms:

Annual Conference

A geographical area and organizational term. Defines a [region](#) that includes all UM churches and ministries in that area. Most clergy serving churches in that area are provisional, licensed or ordained members of that conference. Each church also has a number of laypersons (equal to the number of their clergy) who vote on governance and policy for that conference. Members of the annual conference meet annually to approve business, set the budget, and promote ministry programs and other items of interest to the members. The annual conference votes to commission [provisional](#) clergy members, to ordain [deacons](#) and [elders](#) and to license [local pastors](#) for pastoral ministry. The bishop appointed to that conference presides over the annual meeting and all matters affecting the ministry of that annual conference (¶¶ 11, 601-56).

Appointment Beyond the Local Church

One category of service for [provisional or ordained deacons](#). Many deacons' primary ministry is in a local church, however, many others serve a primary appointment "beyond a local church." This may be in a [United Methodist-related agency](#) or other area of service (such as social work, teaching, community development, etc.). If deacons serve in a primary appointment beyond the local church they also have a secondary appointment to a local congregation where they connect the ministries of the church with the needs of the world. In this way deacons find new and innovative ways to connect what happens in a local congregation with the needs of the community and world around them (¶ 331).

Apportionments

A portion of local church offerings that churches contribute to their district and conference to support the annual conference and general church ministries. That name was developed because each church is 'apportioned' their share according to a specific formula based on membership and budgetary commitments.

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Associate Members

[Licensed local pastors](#) who have reached age 40, completed at least four years of full-time service as a local pastor, and the five-year [Course of Study](#) and have been approved by the board of ordained ministry. They are not ordained, but are available for full-time service and are guaranteed an appointment as clergy to a local congregation within the annual conference. Associate members have voice and vote in every matter except those pertaining to ordination, ordained clergy and voting for delegates to Jurisdictional and General Conference (¶¶ 321–323).

Bishop

During a jurisdictional conference session, [bishops](#) are elected from among the elders, by lay and clergy delegates. Bishops oversee and supervise one or more annual conferences and meet with other bishops to lead The United Methodist Church. Bishops commission and ordain deacons and elders and appoint licensed local pastors, deacons and elders from the annual conference in which they lead. They are authorized to “guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine and discipline of the church” and to “lead all persons entrusted to their oversight in worship, in the celebration of the sacraments, and in their mission of witness and service in the world.” Bishops elected in the U.S. serve in that capacity until retirement and remain on the [Council of Bishops](#) after retirement (¶¶ 401-403).

Board of Ordained Ministry

Each annual conference has a [board of ordained ministry](#) consisting of deacons, elders, licensed local pastors or associate members, and laypersons who are appointed to that board by the bishop. The board recruits, nurtures and supports those in an annual conference who are seeking and preparing for ordained ministry or continuation as a licensed local pastor and evaluates whether or not they have the gifts and grace for ministry and are ready to serve. The board is the “credentialing” body for clergy in an annual conference and is also responsible for continuing formation programs for clergy and for matters relating to changing conference relationships and clergy conduct (¶ 635).

Book of Discipline

[The book of law](#) for The United Methodist Church that determines how the church governs itself. It includes historical information, doctrinal standards, laws, and policies that can only be changed by the General Conference. After each General Conference session it is updated and reprinted based on decisions made by delegates of the General Conference session.

Book of Worship

[The basic handbook](#) for worship services that reflects the theology of The United Methodist Church. It contains the order of services, the liturgy for Holy Communion (referred to as Word and Table), Baptism, marriage, funerals, healing, and many other types of worship services. It also contains blessings, prayers, and resources for weekly worship services and special celebrations.

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Cabinet

The [bishop](#) and [district superintendents](#) when meeting as a body. Each annual and missionary conference has a Cabinet.

Call, Call Story, or Calling

A specific experience or set of decisions, circumstances or other type of encouragement that lead an individual to believe that God has asked her or him to enter ministry. Many clergy will refer to being “called” to preach or serve. During the candidacy process, candidates for licensed or ordained ministry will be asked to write and/or talk about how they have discerned [God’s calling](#) in their lives and how and where they believe God is calling them to serve.

Campus Minister or University Chaplain

[Campus ministers and university chaplains](#) serve on college campuses across the United States and around the world. Some work in United Methodist campus ministry units (sometimes called Wesley Foundations). Some work in cooperation with other denominations in ecumenical campus ministries. Others are chaplains at [United Methodist-related colleges and universities](#). Ministry with students is an important part of the work, but these ministers are also concerned with faculty, staff, and administration—in other words, they work with the whole campus. Some campus ministers and chaplains are ordained deacons and elders. Others are laypeople who have received training for ministry on campus.

Candidacy

[A discerning and preparatory period of time](#) and the process by which those wishing to serve as licensed local pastors, deacons or elders apply, prepare and are evaluated by their annual conference to serve on behalf of The United Methodist Church (§§ 310-314).

Candidacy Mentor

An ordained deacon, elder, associate member or full-time local pastor who has completed the Course of Study, who has been trained to provide guidance to candidates. They are assigned a candidate by the district committee on ordained ministry in consultation with the district superintendent and assist the candidate in understanding the process and further discerning their call as they become certified and licensed or provisional members (§ 349).

Candidacy Process

Another way of talking about candidacy (§§ 310-314).

Candidate

A person who is seeking recommendation or is enrolled in the candidacy process and wishes to serve as a licensed local pastor, deacon, or elder.

Central Conference

Central Conferences are the annual conferences for areas outside the United States. The church has seven central conferences and they are located in [Africa](#), [Europe](#) and the [Philippines](#) (§1540ff.).

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Certified Candidate

Someone who is enrolled in the candidacy process; has been approved by their local ministry setting; has submitted requested information to the district committee on ministry; and has been interviewed, and approved to continue the process of moving toward licensing or ordination (§ 311.2).

Chaplain

[Chaplains and pastoral counselors](#) are elders or deacons who engage in ministries of pastoral care in specialized settings. [Endorsed chaplains and pastoral counselors](#) are appointed to prisons, hospitals, the armed forces, and counseling centers where they serve people in difficult places outside the local church (§ 1421.5).

Charge Conference

This refers to a meeting of the local church that includes every member of the church's governing body (such as a church council) as well as clergy appointed to serve that church. It meets at least once a year, usually in the fall, to review church goals and objectives, elect new church leaders, set clergy salaries, and recommend and continue persons for candidacy. A charge conference is typically facilitated by the district superintendent who oversees that congregation (§ 246).

Clergy

Commissioned and ordained [deacons](#) and [elders](#); [associate members and licensed local pastors](#) serving under the full or part-time appointment of a bishop (§ 141).

Clergy Mentor

An ordained deacon, elder, associate member, or full-time local pastor who has completed the Course of Study, who has been trained to provide guidance to provisional deacons or elders during the provisional period. They assist provisional members in the process as these persons further discern their call and prepare for ordination.

Course of Study

Refers to [prescribed classes](#) taken by licensed local pastors for ministry preparation. Part-time and full-time local pastors attend the Course of Study while serving local churches (typically for a couple weeks in the summer). The full course takes at least five years to complete. Upon completion of the initial course of study, the pastor may become an associate member if they have completed four years of service and are at least forty years of age (§ 1421.3).

Deacon

[Deacons](#) are persons called by God, authorized by the church, and ordained by a bishop to a lifetime ministry of Word and Service to both the community and the congregation in a ministry that connects the two. Deacons devote themselves to the ministry of the Word, which includes sharing, teaching, and modeling the word of God. Additionally, deacons are called to a lifetime of servant leadership, serving both the congregation and the world. A deacon is called to serve all

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people, particularly the poor, the sick, and the marginalized, and to equip and lead the laity in ministries of compassion, justice, and service. The deacon's leadership role exemplifies Christian discipleship, equips and supports all baptized Christians in their ministry, and connects the church's worship with its service in the world (¶¶ 328-331).

Deaconess and Home Missioner

Deaconesses (laywomen) and home missionaries (laymen) are professionally trained persons who have been led by the Holy Spirit to devote their lives to Christ-like service under the authority of the Church. They are approved by the [General Board of Global Ministries](#) and commissioned by a bishop. They have a continuing relationship to The United Methodist Church through the General Board of Global Ministries. Deaconesses and home missionaries are available for service with any agency or program of The United Methodist Church. Deaconesses and home missionaries may also serve in other than United Methodist Church agencies or programs, provided that approval is given by the board in consultation with the bishop of the receiving area (¶ 1314).

Discern

Synonymous with "decide." However, it carries an underlying assumption that the decision (generally to serve in ministry) is made with considerable thought, prayer, study and attention to God's call in one's life.

District

One of several [smaller geographic areas](#) within a conference. Each church in an annual conference is also part of a district. Typically 60 – 80 churches are in a district. Each district is supervised by a [district superintendent](#). The number of districts in an annual conference varies depending on the size of the [annual conference](#).

District Committee on Ministry (dCOM)

Evaluates, certifies and recommends to the board of ordained ministry all those who apply to become licensed or ordained. The district committee oversees the process for all candidates within that district and supervises all matters dealing with candidacy and licensing local pastors. The committee conducts annual interviews to certify candidates, recommend candidates for provisional membership and license all local pastors serving within the district (¶¶ 310-314).

[District Superintendent \(D.S.\)](#)

An elder appointed to serve as supervisor of the churches within a geographical area of an annual conference, called a district. They serve as extensions of the bishop's authority and supervise clergy serving within that district (¶¶ 419-425).

Elder

[Elders](#) are persons called by God, authorized by the church, and ordained by a bishop to a lifetime ministry of Word, Sacrament, Order and Service. Like all baptized Christians, elders are committed to a lifetime of service, although this service manifests itself in different ways than deacons or the laity. The elder

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embodies, or brings to life, Christ's teachings in servant ministries and servant leadership and gives pastoral leadership in ordering the life of the congregation for service. Elders devote themselves to the ministry of the Word, which includes primary responsibility for preaching and teaching the Word of God (¶¶ 332-335).

Endorsement

[Endorsement](#) is the process to ensure that pastoral counselors and prison, hospital or military chaplains are qualified and prepared to appropriately represent the denomination in their ministry setting (¶ 1421.5).

Episcopal

Refers to something relating to a bishop. For instance, an 'episcopal area' is the area under the supervision of a particular bishop.

Extension Ministry

Refers to elders who serve in ministry outside of a local church setting. It includes such settings as conference administration, chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, teaching, etc. The bishop must appoint the elder to that position, although this typically happens at the elder's request and through consultation with the bishop (¶¶ 343- 344).

Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members

The [Fellowship](#) provides mutual support for its members for the sake of the life and mission of the church. All licensed local pastors and associate members shall be members of and participate in the Fellowship (¶ 323).

Full Connection

An ordained deacon or elder serves in "full connection" to an annual conference, as a member of that annual conference. This means that their life and work is amenable to the annual conference and that they are supported by and accountable to that annual conference. Ordained members in full connection have voice and vote in all matters related to the annual conference, to the clergy of that conference, to the general conference, and constitutional amendments of the UMC.

Full Member (similar to "Full Connection")

Refers to an ordained elder or deacon. They have full voting privileges and are accountable to the annual conference in which they are ordained.

General Conference

The international gathering and business meeting of the United Methodist denomination. It convenes once every four years, in a different location. There are 998 delegates (half are ordained, half are laypersons) representing each annual and central conference. [This body](#) decides on petitions to change the Book of Discipline. It is the only body authorized to make decisions and speak on behalf of [The United Methodist Church](#) (¶¶ 8, 501-511).

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Home Missioner

See deaconess (§ 1314).

Inventory of Religious Activities and Interests (IRAI)

An interest inventory that candidates complete before becoming a certified candidate. It is administered by the [General Board of Higher Education and Ministry](#) through the [Online Candidacy Application System \(OCAS\)](#). Candidates and mentors receive copies of the results to review together during the exploration phase of candidacy.

Itinerate

Indicates that an ordained elder, associate member, or full-time local pastor will agree to serve where the bishop appoints them. This system of appointments is referred to as itinerancy.

Jurisdiction

[A group of annual conferences](#) within a geographical region in the United States. There are five jurisdictions in the U.S. ([North Central](#), [Northeast](#), [South Central](#), [Southeast](#), and [Western](#)). The Jurisdictional Conference meets every four years after General Conference and consists of representatives from each annual conference in that region. The conference's primary responsibility is to elect bishops for their jurisdiction (§§ 512-537).

Layperson

A member of a local church. In The United Methodist Church laypersons are responsible for leadership in all levels of the denomination – from the local church, to the district, to the annual conference, Jurisdictional Conference and General Conference. Laypersons are also involved at all levels of decision-making about candidates for licensed and ordained ministry.

Licensed Local Pastor

Someone who is not ordained as an elder or deacon but is appointed to preach, conduct worship and perform the duties of a pastor in a particular setting. In order to meet the requirements, a person must complete licensing school and receive an appointment to serve. [Licensed local pastors](#) must attend the Course of Study each year and meet with the dCOM annually for approval and eligibility for continued licensing. Licensed local pastors are not required to earn a Master's of Divinity or to itinerate, are not guaranteed an appointment and usually serve smaller congregations (§ 315ff.).

Online Candidacy Application System (OCAS)

The online system at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry Web site through which all who wish to [begin candidacy](#) for licensed or ordained ministry must register. After writing to the district superintendent requesting admission to the candidacy process and assignment of a candidacy mentor, that office will provide the information to enroll you into the OCAS (§ 311.1).

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Ordained Ministry

The [specific ministry](#) of deacons and elders who have been ordained by a bishop to serve in The United Methodist Church (§§ 301-304).

Order of Deacon/Order of Elder

A covenant community within the church to mutually support, care for, and hold accountable its members for the sake of the life and mission of the church. These orders, separately or together, seek to respond to the spiritual hunger among clergy for a fulfilling sense of vocation, for support among peers during this stressful time of change in the Church, and for a deepening relationship with God. All ordained persons upon election to full membership in the annual conference shall be members of and participate in an order appropriate to their election (§ 306).

Ordination

Performed by the historic laying-on of hands by the bishop. This signifies that the church affirms and continues its apostolic ministry through these persons - empowered by the Holy Spirit. Those ordained commit to living and proclaiming the whole gospel. Persons may be [ordained](#) as deacons or elders. [Deacons](#) are ordained to the ministries of Word and Service. [Elders](#) are ordained to the ministries of Word, Sacrament, Order and Service (§§ 301-304).

Pastor

A pastor is an ordained elder or licensed person approved by vote of the clergy members in full connection and may be appointed by the bishop to be in charge of a station, circuit, cooperative parish, extension ministry, ecumenical shared ministry, or to a church of another denomination, or on the staff of one such appointment. Deacons, while they may serve similar roles as the pastor in a local church, should not be called pastors (§ 339).

Pastor/Staff Parish Relations Committee (PPRC or SPRC)

The committee in each local congregation that assists clergy and staff members in setting priorities for leadership and service to the church. Responsible for evaluating all candidates for licensed or ordained ministry from that congregation. [To begin the candidacy process](#) one of the first steps is for a candidate to be approved by this committee and by the charge conference of his or her local congregation. Candidates then apply to their district superintendent and dCOM to continue the candidacy process (§ 258.2).

Polity

Refers to the rules and traditions of the [UMC](#). It includes the [Book of Discipline](#), history, practices, and beliefs of the denomination.

Professional Certification

The church's recognition that an individual has met the required academic standards, experience, and continuing study necessary to achieve and maintain professional excellence. Persons may receive [professional certification](#) in one of the following areas: business administration, [camping and retreat ministries](#),

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[children's ministry](#), [Christian education](#), communications, [evangelism](#), [music ministry](#), [older adult ministry](#), [spiritual formation](#), or [youth ministry](#). Laypersons and clergy can receive professional certification and studies are available for [undergraduate](#) or graduate students. [Para-professional certification](#) is available for those who do not hold a Bachelor's degree.

Professional Ministry

To make one's living by serving the church through ministry. It is one's full-time profession or vocation and can apply to laypersons or those who are licensed or ordained.

Provisional Membership

The step in the ordination process between certified candidacy and ordination. Once someone has been commissioned they serve as a provisional member of the annual conference. Those applying for ordination as deacons or elders must first serve as a provisional member for a minimum of two years, depending on the requirements of a specific annual conference. After completing the requirements for provisional membership a person can apply for ordination and full membership in the annual conference. Provisional membership is completed when a person is ordained a deacon or an elder, or a decision is made not to proceed toward ordination and provisional membership is ended (§¶ 324-327).

Seminary or Theological School

Term for post-graduate school of theology. These schools educate and prepare people for ministry. They offer a wide variety of classes, from ancient languages, to urban ministry, to church history and Biblical studies. The United Methodist Church supports [13 theological schools and seminaries](#), and students preparing for ordination must graduate from an institution that is [approved by the University Senate](#) of the UMC.

Social Principles

[The Social Principles](#) are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions. They are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit; however, they are not church law. The Social Principles are a call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice (§¶ 509).

University Senate

[The senate](#) is an [elected body](#) of professionals in higher education created by the General Conference to determine which schools, colleges, universities, and theological schools meet the [criteria for listing as institutions affiliated with The United Methodist Church](#). Students preparing for ordination must complete their educational requirements at an institution [approved by the University Senate](#) (§¶ 1414-18).

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Vocation¹

1. a particular occupation, business, or profession; calling.
2. a strong impulse or inclination to follow a particular activity or career.
3. a divine call to God's service or to the Christian life.
4. a function or station in life to which one is called by God: the religious vocation; the vocation of marriage.

Young Adult Seminarians Network (YASN)

[YASN](#) is a network of United Methodist seminarians ages 35 and under and those concerned with the issues of those 35 and under. The Young Adult Seminarians Network began in 2004 at Student Forum, the annual gathering of the United Methodist Student Movement.

Works Cited

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¹ <http://www.dictionary.com>, June 30, 2009.

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