



# Clergy Orders in the United Methodist Church

Board of Ordained Ministry | South Carolina Conference | The United Methodist Church

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¶ 305. **Orders in Relation to the Ministry of All Christians**—Baptism is God’s gift of unmerited grace through the Holy Spirit. It is an incorporation into Christ which marks the entrance of each person into the church and its ministry (Romans 6:3, 4, 18).

The New Testament witness to Jesus Christ makes clear that the primary form of his ministry in God’s name is that of service, *diakonia*, in the world. Very early in its history, the church came to understand that all of its members were commissioned in baptism to ministries of love, justice, and service within local congregations and the larger communities in which they lived; all who follow Jesus have a share in the ministry of Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve. There is thus a general ministry of all baptized Christians (see ¶¶ 126-137).

Within the people of God, some persons are called to the ministry of deacon. The words deacon, deaconess, and diaconate all spring from a common Greek root—*diakonos*, or “servant,” and *diakonia*, or “service.” Very early in its history the church, as an act of worship and praise of God, instituted an order of ordained ministers to personify or focus the servanthood to which all Christians are called. These people were named *deacons*. This ministry exemplifies and leads the Church in the servanthood every Christian is called to live both in the church and the world. Those called to the ministry of deacon are called to witness to the Word in their words and actions, and to embody and lead the community’s service in the world for the sake of enacting God’s compassion and justice.

Within the people of God, other persons are called to the ministry of elder. The elders carry on the historic work of the *presbyteros* in the life of the Church. Beginning in some of the very early Christian communities, the *presbyteros* assisted the bishop in leading the gathered community in the celebration of sacraments and the guidance and care of its communal life. Those called to the ministry of elder are called to bear authority and responsibility to preach and teach the Word, to administer the sacraments, and to order the life of the church so it can be faithful in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

¶ 306. **Order of Deacons and Order of Elders**—There shall be in each annual conference an Order of Deacons and an Order of Elders. All persons ordained as clergy in The United Methodist Church upon election to full membership in the annual conference shall be members of and participate in an order appropriate to their election. An order is 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.

¶ 307. **Purpose of an Order**—The specific and limited function of each order is to: (1) provide for regular gatherings of ordained deacons and ordained elders for continuing formation in relationship to Jesus Christ through such experiences as Bible study, study of issues facing the church and society, and theological exploration in vocational identity and leadership; (2) assist in plans for individual study and retreat experiences; (3) develop a bond of unity and common commitment to the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church and the annual conference; (4) enable the creation of relationships that allow mutual support and trust; and (5) hold accountable all members of the order in the fulfilling of these purposes. All of the functions of the order(s) shall be fulfilled in cooperation and coordination with the Board of Ordained Ministry and do not replace the normal supervisory processes, the processes of evaluation for ordained ministers, or the responsibilities of the Board of Ordained Ministry, the cabinet, or the clergy session.

¶ 308. **Organization of an Order**—The bishop shall convene and provide continuing spiritual leadership for the order, with the support and assistance of the Board of Ordained Ministry. Necessary financial support shall be provided by the annual conference through the budget of the board. The board may also use other appropriate funding sources for this purpose. The board shall nominate from within the order’s membership and the order shall elect quadrennially a chairperson of the order who, in cooperation with and under the guidance of the bishop, will provide continuing leadership for the order. The chairperson will be responsible for implementation of plans and activities of the order and will represent the order to the conference Board of Ordained Ministry. The chairperson will serve as a member of the board’s executive committee. Activities of the order and proposals for funding shall be regularly reported to the board.

¶ 309. **Membership in an Order**—1. Persons shall become members of the Order of Deacons or Order of Elders following their election to full membership in the annual conference. Acceptance Candidacy for Licensed and Ordained Ministry of the status of full membership will constitute a commitment to regular participation in the life of the order.

2. **Changing Orders**—Upon recommendation of the Board of Ordained Ministry and vote of the clergy members in full connection in an annual conference, elders may be received as deacons in full connection, and deacons in full connection may

be received as elders, provided they are in good standing and have:

- a) informed the bishop and district superintendent of their intention,
- b) applied in writing to the Board of Ordained Ministry,
- c) articulated to the Board of Ordained Ministry their call to the ministry of the deacon or the elder,
- d) completed all academic and other requirements for admission to the order for which they are applying, ¶ 324, ¶ 330, ¶ 335, and
- e) completed at least two years, and no more than eight years, under appointment in a context related to the order to which they are transitioning.

3. Such persons shall retain their credentials and full membership in the annual conference through the transition period from one order to the other. When ordained to the order to which they are transitioning, they shall surrender to the conference secretary the credentials of the order from which they are leaving.

ADDITIONAL SOUTH CAROLINA TRANSITION REQUIREMENTS – 1. The Board of Ordained Ministry will interview such persons, inviting them to articulate their call and their understanding of the ministry to which they are transitioning as outlined in the Book of Discipline.

2. The Board of Ordained Ministry will determine if such persons have completed all academic and other requirements for the order of elder according to the Book of Discipline, and South Carolina Conference policy guidelines. If not, the Board of Ordained Ministry may require additional education to assure that their education is equivalent to academic requirement of the order to which they are transitioning.

3. Upon the recommendation of the Board of Ordained Ministry and two thirds vote of the Clergy session, such persons may be ordained into the order in which they are transitioning and be received by that order.

4. Following satisfactory completion of the listed requirements, such persons shall deposit their previous credentials as a deacon/elder with the Conference Secretary and will no longer function under their previous ordination, but under their new one.

PERSONS SEEKING TO TRANSITION SHOULD SEND A LETTER TO CLERGY SERVICES REQUESTING TO BEGIN THIS PROCESS.