

LOCAL PASTORS FAQ

1. **QUESTION: ARE LOCAL PASTORS A RELATIVELY RECENT PHENOMENON IN UNITED METHODISM?**

ANSWER: Absolutely not. From the very beginning the Wesleyan Movement employed unordained persons for preaching and providing spiritual leadership. When the Methodist Movement first came to America there was no such thing as trained clergy except for those denominations who brought European trained ministers to lead ethnic and non-English speaking churches. There were no seminaries in America. Therefore, those early Methodist leaders happily recruited fervent men and women who were not ordained to “preach the Word”, to tend the flock, and to start new churches. From the earliest days until presently, unordained ministers (now called “Local Pastors”) have been an integral part of the Methodist Movement and The United Methodist Church. Now we have also “Certified Lay Ministers.”

2. **QUESTION: HOW DOES ONE BECOME A LOCAL PASTOR? (paragraph 315)**

ANSWER: A person may receive a “license for pastoral ministry” giving authority to be a local pastor when:

1. they are a certified candidate for ordained ministry;
2. they have successfully completed the Local Pastors’ Certification School;
3. they have been approved by the Annual Conference (recommended by ¾ vote of the District Committee on Ordained Ministry (dcom) and affirmed by the Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM) and the Clergy Session);
4. they have received an appointment by the bishop.

3. **QUESTION: CAN A PERSON REMAIN A LOCAL PASTOR FOREVER?**

ANSWER: One may be a certified candidate for twelve years; each year the District Committee on Ordained Ministry recertifies and relicenses each person after the person has demonstrated “progress” in education and professional growth. The *Book of Discipline* (BOD) indicates that a full-time local pastor must complete the educational requirements of the Course of Study (COS) within eight years, and a part-time local pastor within twelve years.

However, the *Book of Discipline* (BOD), in par. 319.4, gives the local pastor the option of remaining in a “local relationship” upon completion of the Course of Study (COS) school. The request to remain “local” is made to the District Committee on Ordained Ministry to be approved by them.

4. **QUESTION: DOES THE ABOVE INDICATE THAT A LICENSE FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY IS GOOD ONLY FOR ONE YEAR?**

ANSWER: Yes. The local pastor must request renewal of the license each year when meeting with the District Committee on Ordained Ministry. If the committee agrees, it will make recommendation to the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and the Clergy Session of the Annual Conference for approval.

5. **QUESTION: WHAT IF A PERSON BECOMES ELIGIBLE FOR THE LICENSE BETWEEN SESSIONS OF THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE?**

ANSWER: There is an interim process. There must be a unanimous vote by the dcom. A license granted *ad interim* must be affirmed by the BOM and the Clergy Session.

6. **QUESTION: WHAT PASTORAL AND MINISTERIAL AUTHORITY DOES A LOCAL PASTOR HAVE?**

ANSWER: A local pastor has the pastoral and ministerial authority of any United Methodist minister including the privilege of officiating The Lord’s Supper, baptism, and the marriage service. However, the authority is limited to the church or churches where the local pastor is appointed. The local pastor does not have the authority or privilege of being an itinerant minister.

7. **QUESTION: IF A MEMBER OR AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN MY CONGREGATION IS MARRYING A PERSON OF ANOTHER DENOMINATION AND THE WEDDING IS TO BE IN THE OTHER CHURCH, CAN I PARTICIPATE AS AN OFFICIATE?**

ANSWER: Yes, as long as the other church or wedding site is within the State of Ohio. Such participation would be understood as an extension of the ministry of the church where you are appointed minister.

8. **QUESTION: CAN I OFFICIATE THE WEDDING OF STRANGERS WHO COME IN FROM THE STREET?**

ANSWER: Maybe. If you believe officiating a marriage ceremony is a natural extension of the ministry of the church you are serving and if the marriage is in the church, the answer is yes. If the wedding is to be at the city park or at the Baptist Church, the answer is no. (And don’t forget, the *Discipline* requires you to provide marriage counseling in advance of the ceremony!)

9. **QUESTION: CAN I OFFICIATE A MARRIAGE CEREMONY AS SOON AS I RECEIVE MY LICENSE FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY?**

ANSWER: You may officiate a marriage ceremony in your church as soon as you have a license *and have registered with the Secretary of the State of Ohio*. If you officiate a marriage ceremony before you are properly registered with the state, the folks are not married in the eyes of the state. Ministers who perform marriages without the state’s permission are in violation of the state laws.

To register: Secretary of State, 30 East Broad Street- 14th Floor, Columbus, OH 43215
Phone: 614-466-4980 (Ask for the Elections Office)
Web: www.state.oh.us/sos

10. **QUESTION: ARE THE LIMITS PLACED ON MARRYING PERSONS ALSO PLACED ON SERVING THE LORD’S SUPPER?**

ANSWER: Yes. The issue is: is the ministerial function an extension of the ministry of the church where you are appointed? Of course, you may

take the sacraments to the hospital rooms and homes of your parishioners, or to a retreat of your church or district youth.

11. QUESTION: WHAT ARE THE RULES ABOUT FUNERALS?

ANSWER: There is no requirement by anyone (state or church) that a licensed or ordained minister must preside at funerals or burials.

12. QUESTION: WHAT ABOUT PREACHING AT PLACES OTHER THAN AT THE CHURCH TO WHICH I HAVE BEEN APPOINTED?

ANSWER: There is no requirement that only licensed or ordained persons may preach. If you preach in the next county or hold a “revival” in the next state your license is not an issue. You will be preaching as a layperson. Your license gives you ministerial authority only in the church or churches where you are appointed.

13. QUESTION: WHERE DO I GO IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT MINISTRY OR FACE PROBLEMS OR QUESTIONS FOR WHICH I HAVE NO ANSWERS?

ANSWER: The *Discipline* says that you are to be assigned a clergy mentor. Call the chair of your District Committee on Ordained Ministry and inquire about this. If nobody has been assigned to you, call your superintendent. It is always better to call your superintendent sooner than later.

14. QUESTION: CAN A LOCAL PASTOR PARTICIPATE IN THE DENOMINATION PENSION PROGRAM?

ANSWER: Yes. You must participate unless you sign a waiver. To enroll, phone the Conference Treasurer at 1-800-437-0028/614-844-6200. Ask to speak to Beth Gibbs, Pension Officer.

15. QUESTION: ARE THERE SOME SPECIAL PROVISIONS IN THE TAX LAWS REGARDING MINISTERS?

ANSWER: The tax code is in flux concerning United Methodist clergy. If in doubt, or if you have questions, consult a tax expert. The superintendent, conference treasurer or controller may be able to help you.

16. QUESTION: ARE LOCAL PASTORS REQUIRED TO PARTICIPATE IN CONTINUING EDUCATION?

ANSWER: Yes. After completing the COS, full-time local pastors are required to earn 4 Continuing Education Units (1 C.E.U. equal 10 contact hours) per year, and report them to their Charge Conference. Part-time local pastors must do continuing education in proportions to their “timeness,” i.e. half time= 2 C.E.U. Provisional/Probationary members are in their supervised years program, which satisfies the C.E.U. requirement. Seminary students are in seminary and don’t need “continuing” education. Your church may have continuing education funds. Contact the Office of Ministry (1-800-437-0028/614-844-6200) if you need additional financial assistance.

17. QUESTION: IF I NEED PASTORAL CARE OR COUNSELING AND FEEL ALONE, ARE THERE RESOURCES FOR ME?

ANSWER: Yes. Phone the district office or Office of Ministry.

18. QUESTION: CAN A LOCAL PASTOR PARTICIPATE IN MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATIONS? WHAT IF THEY ASK ME TO PREACH AT A SUNRISE SERVICE ON EASTER OR TO SERVE COMMUNION AT THE BAPTIST CHURCH ON GOOD FRIDAY?

ANSWER: This would be appropriate especially if the local church has agreed that you should participate in this association as an expression of their ecumenical ministry.

19. QUESTION: CAN A LOCAL PASTOR WEAR A ROBE AND/OR STOLE?

ANSWER: You may wear a robe if you wish. An alb is particularly suitable for local pastors to wear, and may be worn by any lay person contributing to the worship service. A stole is traditionally seen as a sign of ordination in The United Methodist Church and is conferred at the time a person is ordained. It is not customary for persons to wear a stole until they have been ordained.

20. QUESTION: WHAT IF I WANT TO BE AN ASSOCIATE MEMBER OF THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE?

ANSWER: See BOD paragraphs 321-323.

Note: Local pastors, full-time and part-time, are clergy members of the annual conference. Years ago they were laity and called “lay pastors.” This term is no longer used for local pastors.

Note: In the West Ohio Conference, all persons seeking a license for pastoral ministry must successfully complete the local pastors’ certification school.

(LPQUEST august 2009)