

## **REPORT OF THE 2013-2016 COMMISSION FOR THE STUDY OF MINISTRY**

### ***THE CHARGE TO THE 2013-2016 COMMISSION FOR THE STUDY OF MINISTRY***

The 2012 General Conference authorized the 2013-2016 Commission for the Study of Ministry to undertake its work based on guidelines stated in Petition 20868-MH-Non-Dis, which assigned the following tasks to the Commission:

**“The scope of the work will be to provide future research and recommendations on any ministry issue lacking clarity from the 2012 General Conference. Secondly, the work of the Focus Team will be constructive and futuristic, examining the following issues that continue to need work:**

- 1. The nature and grounding of the elder;**
- 2. The nature and grounding of the variety of lay ministries;**
- 3. Course of Study and education for local pastors;**
- 4. The status of associate membership;**
- 5. The education of clergy in terms of seminary reform, relevant curriculum, global theological education, funding, and debt of seminary graduates; and**
- 6. The present accountability structure of United Methodist theological schools including the University Senate and Commission on Theological Education.”**

Organized by the 2012 resolution and pursuing this charge, the Commission is pleased to offer this report, including legislative proposals for the 2016 General Conference.

### ***OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS***

***Note: Unless preceded by "ADCA," all Disciplinary references are to The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012.***

#### **I. The Mission of the Church and Its Challenges**

The United Methodist Church is clear about its stated mission, to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world (¶120), and is challenged today to make significant changes in order to fulfill that mission better. The Call to Action Report ([www.umc.org/who-we-are/call-to-action](http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/call-to-action)), which served as a backdrop to restructuring proposals at the 2012 General Conference, grew out of a sense that we were not adequately fulfilling our mission as a denomination. Our challenge is an adaptive one, as technical

solutions are inadequate, and defining the problem itself requires new learning (Heifetz). While we must always listen for the Spirit, this is a particularly important time to attune our ears to the Spirit, who will guide us “into all the truth” (John 16:13).

Our challenge is also generative. The United Methodist Church’s heritage as a spiritual growth movement within a sacramental church is particularly suited to “emerging” / “emergent church” interests in liturgy, sacrament, spiritual discipline, and incarnational theology that views nature, body, mind, and soul wholistically. The Church must create networks for formation and support to advance and develop these interests for future generations.

In addition, The United Methodist Church needs to cultivate a “learning organization” culture, continuously engaging living Wesleyan theology and contemporary ministry practices. Bishops, deacons, elders, and local pastors must have avenues for constant learning and growth, enriching and fulfilling their ministries as teachers. This does not mean imposing views on church members; rather, the culture of a learning organization is a mutual, collaborative process between lay and clergy that seeks insight into how our living tradition connects with contemporary contexts and issues.

To fulfill our Church’s mission and thrive in the twenty-first century, we must find new settings and structures to adapt its heritage and practices in order to generate a living Church for our time. In particular, we must prioritize Wesleyan understandings of Service, Word, Sacrament, Order, Compassion, and Justice to articulate a compelling vision of ordination that engages leaders in lifelong formation. We must engage in *generative* work, drawing on the United Methodist way of being church as a creative resource to stir new imagination and design for today’s mission.

The 2012 General Conference charged the Commission for the Study of Ministry to lead the Church in facing these adaptive and generative challenges and resolving issues that hinder the ministry and mission of the Church. We have wrestled with the challenges in conversation with groups and constituents who have helped to shape our observations and recommendations.

## **II. The Contemporary Context for Ministry and Leadership Formation**

If transforming the world is part of the mission to which God calls us in Jesus Christ, what does this world look like? Where do we begin the work of transformation?

The acronym *VUCA* provides a shorthand way to describe our world. We live in a world that is *volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous* (Johansen). Global climate change; economic growth and income inequality; political polarization and instability; flourishing racial-ethnic and religious diversity; and the constant onslaught of information reflect a new day. This is a challenging world, but the challenges also bring opportunities.

If this is the world in which we live and serve, what kind of leadership does the Church need? How will our context for ministry shape our visions for ministry? If our description centers on decline and demise, then our ministry may focus on recapturing what has been lost. If our description centers on volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity in an age of religious change and new information, then our ministry may focus on discerning the winds of the Spirit amidst the winds of change. To discern God's way, we need to draw upon our rich theological and spiritual resources.

Yet, the future cannot be a simple return to the past. Ministry occurs in contexts—historical, social, and cultural. Jesus told stories and used images that connected with first-century listeners. When we ask questions about the nature and ordering of ministry, formation for ministry, and effectiveness in ministry, we need to consider the fullness of our contexts and God's movements in our Church and world, past and present.

### **III. The Leadership We Need**

What kind of leadership does The United Methodist Church seek in the twenty-first century? What leadership qualities would help us in our adaptive and generative work? Many voices contributed to this conversation. Qualities might include:

- Spiritual depth, a vibrant relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and a sense of call into licensed or ordained ministry that grows out of that relationship;
- Intellectual grounding in Scripture, historical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology;
- Intellectual openness to God's revelation in many times and places, including an understanding of history, other religious traditions, literature, and sciences;
- Social and emotional intelligence;
- Strong basic ministry skills, especially good communication skills; and
- Adaptive leadership skills, such as conflict transformation and vision to lead change.

We risk reaching for a technical solution to answer questions of leadership. If we understand leaders as "outcomes" with a set of features, we might easily conclude that we can determine a clear path or process for developing leaders. Such linear, product-driven, technical thinking may not honor the organic, messy, and contextual reality of how God calls and deploys leaders for the Church. Scripture suggests that leaders are less a product of a linear process than a gift of God to the faith community, called for a particular time to serve God—even with their shortcomings—and to shape, guide, develop, and lead.

A variety of sources and influences develop and deepen the leaders described in Scripture. Cooperating with God's vision for creation, transformed leaders and transformed

communities—not theological schools or learning systems—reshape the Church and society through leading the work and witness of social justice, compassion, mission, and ministry.

The following are guiding questions as we consider leadership for the Church in the twenty-first century:

- What are the fruits of someone called to and gifted for licensed or ordained ministry?
- What formative experiences and curricula transform individuals for vibrant ministry? What is needed in academic degrees, mentoring, apprenticeships, and core teachings?
- How might we accommodate each leader's unique gifts? How might the needs of a first-career young adult be different from a third-career, middle-aged adult? How might curricula adapt to accommodate differences?
- What contextual learning must occur to transform the community where one serves? What core skills are needed regardless of context?
- What strategies are needed for ongoing transformation of the leader in a culture of shifting tensions and ever-changing contexts?

#### **IV. Formation for Leadership**

Given the complexity of our world and the challenges we face, the education and formation of clergy and pastoral leaders is more complicated and challenging than ever before. Currently, four components—often understood implicitly as stages—mark the trajectory of vocation into ordained and/or set-apart ministry: vocational discernment, spiritual/intellectual formation, practice and placement, and mentoring.

These components are often assumed to focus on individuals. However, this individual-focused, linear picture does not account for the complexity that envelops our ecclesial and broader cultures. Thus, we need to identify places where systemic integration and collaboration occur in forming persons for set-apart ministry.

First, United Methodist seminaries collaborate with local churches and judicatory bodies (e.g., bishops, cabinets, Boards of Ordained Ministry). Learning from these collaborations and providing incentives to replicate and expand collaborations will strengthen United Methodist theological education and formation. Though there is disagreement about the current structure of theological education and the amount of direct input the Church should have in seminary curriculum, collaborations between the Church and seminaries can open both to the world's changing dynamics and promising resources. As Bishop Grant Hagiya says, ". . . [T]he academy must work more directly with the needs of the church and . . . the church must reduce its huge expectations of the seminary" (45).

Collaborations might include:

1. Assessing and deploying technology to enhance the intentionality and accessibility of education and formation for pastoral leaders;
2. Learning from vital congregations and their leaders in the global south; and
3. Working in partnership with immigrant communities within our neighborhoods to develop leadership formation.

Numerous opportunities wait for us in the midst of challenges and complexity.

Second, The United Methodist Church must examine how to use our financial resources most effectively for ministry formation. Many socio-economic factors impinge on education for ministry, among them the costs of higher education. By requiring graduate education for ordination, for instance, we are asking persons to invest significant resources; often seminary graduates accumulate debt, and then serve in positions with a compensation rate that makes repaying that debt difficult (Early). We are grateful that the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry's Seminary Indebtedness Task Force is studying educational debt in the Church, and that several United Methodist seminaries are developing programs to address the problem. The task force's report is printed in the *Advance Daily Christian Advocate* and posted at [www.gbhem.org/gc16](http://www.gbhem.org/gc16).

## ***RECOMMENDATIONS***

### **V. Increasing Flexibility in Leadership Preparation**

***Recommendations in Section V address points 3, 5, and 6 as outlined above in the Commission's task.***

Our discussions have led us to conclude that The United Methodist Church needs to provide more entry points for Church leadership and be more flexible in how we define and prepare for the leadership we need. Our proposals for achieving those goals are as follows:

1. **Remove the minimum age restriction for local pastors to apply for provisional membership:** The current requirement for local pastors to have reached 40 years of age before applying for provisional membership is no longer relevant or useful. Its removal broadens another pathway into ordained ministry. This proposal pairs with efforts to strengthen Course of Study (*see ADCA, ¶324.6*).
2. **Charge the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry with continued conferencing on theological education:** Theological education should be a continuous topic of exploration through venues created and sponsored by the

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Such conversations should include seminaries, educational institutions, bishops, and annual conference leadership.

3. **Engage United Methodist seminaries to strengthen Course of Study:** We propose that the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry draw on the resources of United Methodist seminaries and educational institutions continuously to improve Course of Study.
4. **Online Study of United Methodist courses:** Allow candidates to complete the required United Methodist courses in history, doctrine, and polity through approved online offerings. This proposal pairs with the strengthened mentoring and formation structures discussed in Section VII below.
5. **Alternative advanced degrees:** Advanced degrees (beyond the bachelor's degree) combined with basic graduate theological studies could be considered by Boards of Ordained Ministry as educational preparation for ordained ministry. Should Boards of Ordained Ministry have flexibility to investigate and accept advanced degrees in fields relevant to ministry, when integrated with basic graduate theological studies in an approved seminary, revising ¶335(3)(b)? The issues here require further study and we commend this question to the next Commission (*see ADCA, Non-Disciplinary Resolution to renew Commission*).

## **VI. Leadership and the Nature of Ordination**

***Recommendations in Section VI address points 1 and 2 as outlined above in the Commission's task.***

A major theme of this Commission's work has been to study the theology of ministry and the nature and theology of ordination in The United Methodist Church. This prompted two major inquiries: (a) the relationship between ordination and the sacraments and (b) the relationship of licensing and ordination to conference membership.

Regarding the first inquiry, United Methodists often describe sacramental leadership as "sacramental authority," stationed in the Order of Elder. This language and its underlying assumptions are misleading. Our theology and practices of ministry in the Wesleyan tradition do not give rise to "sacramental authority," as if we are the givers of God's grace. Rather, the Commission recognizes that sacraments are God's gift to the Church, binding together all laity and clergy in ministry. As gifts, sacraments need to be received and administered so all people may participate with openness to God's Triune

presence. The elder's authority "to administer the sacraments" emerges from the Holy Spirit's gift and power. As such, in the Laying on of Hands and Prayer for Elders during the ordination service, the church first invokes the Spirit and then authorizes elders to carry out the work that God empowers.

We have complicated this understanding of ordination and the sacraments by ordering ministry in such a way that regularly *depends upon* non-ordained persons to preside at the celebration of the sacraments. Both licensed local pastors and commissioned ministers in preparation for ordination as elders are authorized and expected to celebrate baptism and Holy Communion, although this responsibility has been reserved to the ordained in most church bodies through Christian history. Under our present system, we have normalized this historical and theological anomaly, and unnecessarily so. While the missional urgency for ministry has extended the responsibility for celebrating the sacraments to local pastors, the exception has increasingly become the rule.

Regarding the relationship of licensing and ordination to conference membership, the Church faithfully deploys its clergy into the world for the sake of Christ's gospel, yet we have created practices of licensing and ordination that are not deeply grounded in a robust theological understanding of Christian ministry and ordination. The theology and practice of commissioning is not fully understood, thus creating a sense of liminality for persons in the roles of commissioned ministers during the time of provisional conference membership. Further, the current attachment of ordination to full conference membership subordinates the primacy of the Church's mission to the Church's structure. Instead of deploying ordained persons to do the work of the ordained, we delay ordination until the completion of the provisional period; instead of ensuring that the church receives ordained persons to meet urgent missional needs, we emphasize the rights and responsibilities associated with conference membership and postpone ordination.

This Commission focused on the church's vitality and the promise of new leadership to continue building this vitality. We sought to develop a process that is true to our Wesleyan traditions, resonant with the ecumenical church, and open to new clergy seeking ordination and authorization to lead the church's full ministry, even as provisional members. We have proposed a reshaping that is more coherent, clear, and congruent with the larger Christian tradition.

Thus, we propose the following legislative initiatives:

1. **Deepening the theology of ordination:** We have proposed legislation clarifying our ordination theology, especially in the introductory paragraphs of each section. Ministry, in all of its forms, is a gift of the Holy Spirit, exemplified in the language proposed for ¶301.2: "Individuals discern God's call as they relate with God and their communities, and the Church guides and confirms those callings. Calls—and

the discernment and confirmation of them—are gifts of the Holy Spirit” (*see ADCA, ¶¶301.1, 301.2, 302, 305, and NEW Section VI Introduction*).

2. **Clarifying the relationship between ordination and the sacraments:** Our exploration led to the following theological convictions, which undergird the proposed legislation and require reflection on all forms of ministry throughout the Church (*see ADCA, ¶¶316, 328, 340*).
  - a. ***All ministry, including the ministry of the laity, deacons, elders, and local pastors, is grounded in the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, with baptism as the fundamental initiation into the Body of Christ and call into a life of discipleship.*** The baptized are called to follow Jesus Christ and to serve God with their whole lives. Their baptismal call sends them out to participate in God’s work in creation. Within the Body of Christ, some are called, equipped, and set apart to lead the Body so the whole may flourish. Those called to the ministry of deacon are called to witness to the Word in their words and actions, and to lead the community’s service in the world for the sake of enacting God’s compassion and justice. Those called to the ministry of elder are called to preach and teach the Word, administer the sacraments and order the life of the church so it can be faithful. Those called to the ministry of local pastor are called to preach and teach the Word, preside at the celebration of the sacraments and order the life of the local congregations in which they serve. The ministry of all Christians is to live every day, in every aspect of their lives, as Christ’s disciples in the world, and to embody God’s call to serve; to love God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength; and to love their neighbors as themselves. Each of these ministries is vital to Christ’s Church and its service in the world.
  - b. ***While ministry is borne out of baptism, it is sustained in the Eucharistic meal initiated by Jesus Christ’s breaking bread with his disciples, and giving his own ministry and life for the healing of the world.*** This meal is a thanksgiving for God’s good gifts, for Jesus’ life, and for the continuing work of the Spirit. The meal is a renewing call to the Body of Christ—beckoning the community back to its calling into discipleship and nourishing the body with food to strengthen its commitment and service. Within the Body, the deacon is called to set the table, to receive and serve the bread and cup, and to send the community back into the world to serve—and, with the permission of the bishop, to preside at Holy Communion “for the sake of extending the mission

and ministry of the church” (§328). The elder is called to administer the sacrament of Holy Communion, leading the people in the feast of celebration and ensuring that all of God’s people have opportunity to receive Holy Communion (§340). The local pastor is called to preside at the celebration of Holy Communion within a particular appointment (§316). All of the gathered community actively receive and participate in God’s grace as conveyed in Holy Communion, opening themselves to God’s action in their lives and to the transformative power of God’s Spirit, then going forth to be God’s presence in the world.

- c. ***Administration of the sacraments is an act of receiving God’s Spirit to preside at the celebration of God’s sacraments.*** The Christian tradition celebrates the origins of all life in God’s Spirit. In the beginning, God’s Spirit moved over the waters (Gen. 1:1-2) and bestowed the breath of life upon every living being—*nephesh hayah* (1:20, 1:27). All people of God are gifted and sustained by God’s Spirit, and the gifts of life and calling of God continue to be poured out irrevocably (Romans 11:29). The language we have for the Spirit’s action in baptism, Holy Communion, and ordination is the same: “pour out your Spirit upon [this person], that [this person] may be....” With these words, we seek the Spirit to make us new.

This means that “sacramental authority” is not adequate to describe ministry. “Sacramental authority” suggests a power that certain people hold, rather than a gift bestowed by God. For example, “take thou authority as an elder,” as spoken in the service of elder ordination, reminds us that elders *receive* that authority, and that they are called to trust the Spirit’s outpouring of life as they administer the sacraments. To administer is to preside and also to give leadership that ensures the offering of baptism and Holy Communion to all of God’s people. Similarly—but in more circumscribed ways—local pastors (§316) and those deacons granted authority by the bishops “to extend the mission and ministry of the church” (§328) are being called to preside at the celebration of the sacraments within their designated settings.

3. **Reshaping the ordination process:** We propose that the 2016 General Conference reshape the entry process into ordained ministry, such that persons may be ordained and elected to provisional membership after completing all educational requirements, followed by a residency period, then eligibility for election into full membership. The Wesleyan tradition has always emphasized the lifelong process of growing in faith, recognizing God’s movement in young lives through prevenient

grace, and continually offered to people as they grow in relationship to God through justification and sanctification. The tradition also emphasizes a life of growing in ministry, initiated at baptism and followed by confirmation and professing church membership. Similarly, ordination is a process, and begins with inquiry, discernment, and several levels of preparation, followed by ordination and ongoing formation under supervision until the person and the church discern a readiness for full membership.

This proposal would authorize the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, to ordain persons and elect them into provisional membership when they have completed all candidacy and educational requirements. Additionally, the Church would reserve full membership to a later action, after the ordained provisional member completes a residency period and after the church further discerns that provisional member's readiness for full and lifelong responsibility in and for the connection. Ordination is a lifelong relationship with God and the Church, effected by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. The *authorization to perform ministerial functions* depends upon conference relationship. This authorization begins with ordination and provisional membership.

The United Methodist Church has already established practices to require the surrender of such authorization by those ordained clergy who exit the ministry or The United Methodist Church (§§359-361). The exit procedures for ordained persons who are not elected into full membership would be parallel. This movement through stages of relationship finds its parallels in ecumenical practice and in other professions, such as medicine. It is also attuned to the traditions of The United Methodist Church and its antecedent denominations, which have taken different forms over nearly 300 years but have been marked by movements, or stages, in ordained ministry and conference relationships (*see ADCA, NEW Section VI*).

4. **Increasing flexibility for deacons to preside at the celebration of the sacraments:** We propose that bishops be empowered to authorize deacons to preside at the celebration of the sacraments. This authority is grounded in the Church's mission in a particular context, but need not be limited to the particular place of appointment or to circumstances in which an elder is not present. This proposal, as those offered above, is clearer and more congruent with the larger Christian tradition and bears promise for extending and deepening the ministry of Christ's church in the world (*see ADCA, ¶328*).

## VII. **Leadership Support and Development Through Pathways for Thriving in Ordained Ministry**

***Recommendations in Section VII address points 1, 3, and 5 as outlined above in the Commission's task.***

The Commission studied vocation and the development of The United Methodist Church's leadership to address issues of support, accountability, learning and growth opportunities, and security of appointment. The discussions have led our group to affirm the need for the Church to:

- Build relationships that foster effective mentoring during candidacy and provisional periods and focus on leadership formation;
- Require lifelong mentoring, learning, and coaching, and provide a range of models to guide conferences in designing and implementing approaches that best fit their unique needs;
- Promote effectiveness through the use of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry's *Effective Ministry Assessment* process;
- Collaborate with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry to support annual conference boards and cabinets in their work of holding clergy accountable to effective ministry.

Based on these needs, the Commission brings forward three proposals:

1. **Strengthen the requirement for lifelong learning and coaching:** Change the word "should" in the first sentence of ¶351.2 to "shall." This ensures that clergy actively engage in lifelong learning and coaching. The revised paragraph would read: "A clergy member's continuing education and spiritual growth program *shall* include such leaves at least on week each year and at least one month of one year of every quadrennium" (emphasis added).

Further, the Wesleyan Movement has always emphasized the importance of group mentoring to promote fellowship and accountability in spiritual and educational growth. Thus, this petition would make the new ¶351.2 consistent with ¶351.1 in the 2012 *Book of Discipline*: "Throughout their careers, clergy *shall* engage in continuing education for ministry, professional development, and spiritual formation and growth in order to lead the church in fulfilling the mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ. This shall include carefully developed personal programs of study augmented periodically by involvement in organized educational and spiritual growth activities" (emphasis added) (*see ADCA, ¶351.2*).

2. **Covenant groups for clergy:** All candidates and clergy shall participate in covenant groups for mutual support and growth across their lifetime of ministry. The 2012 General Conference enacted the previous Commission's legislation for ministry candidates to participate in candidacy mentoring groups (§349.1a). The response has been very positive. We now propose that similar groups be developed and continued throughout the active ministry of every clergyperson:
  - a. **Add group mentoring during the period between certification of candidacy and provisional membership.** When candidates are outside of the bounds of the annual conference, such as in seminaries, they shall be assigned to courtesy mentoring groups (*see ADCA, §349.1a*).
  - b. **Add group mentoring for local pastors.** Assign local pastors to a mentoring group, wherever possible. While there are some challenges to group mentoring (geographical distance, new pastoral appointments, schedules, participants' resistance, time frame of 5-12 years), the group process nonetheless has proven beneficial. As mentors are identified and groups form, we recommend that Boards of Ordained Ministry train mentors to communicate expectations and provide for consistency among groups. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry will train annual conferences in developing and implementing clergy group mentoring (*see ADCA, §349.3*).
  - c. **Continue** and strengthen mentoring groups for certified candidates (§349.1a), covenant groups for provisional members (§326), deacons (§328), and elders (§332).
  - d. **Emphasize** the importance of all deacons and elders participating in covenant with members of their respective order and local pastors participating in their fellowship, which may include covenant groups for spiritual growth, ministry coaching, and other forms of spiritual enrichment and training (§§323, 328, 332).
3. **Periodic clergy assessments:** Clergy shall regularly participate in two forms of periodic reviews of their ministries. In order to support clergy and hold them accountable to reflect seriously on the meaning and fruitfulness of their ministries, annual conferences shall organize two kinds of periodic reviews of clergy on a regular rotation.

- a. **Ongoing evaluation:** We propose clearer guidance for ongoing evaluation of full connection members and local pastors. It is essential for each cabinet and Board of Ordained Ministry to follow the mandate to develop clear “criteria, processes, and training” that will provide the basis for evaluation (§350.1). The criteria for self-evaluation should include self-assessment and appropriate metrics, and we recommend that cabinets and Boards of Ordained Ministry partner with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry to use the agency’s *Effective Ministry Assessment* process.
- b. **Periodic, more in-depth assessment:** Every eight years, each clergyperson shall engage in an extensive personal and professional assessment and development process. Cabinets and Boards of Ordained Ministry, in consultation with the Chairs of the Orders and Fellowship, will design and implement this process. It shall include both a formal review and an in-depth renewal opportunity comprised of a combination of elements, such as:
  - Time apart for prayer and reflection,
  - Reflection with a covenant group,
  - Meetings with a coach,
  - Celebration of ministry milestones, and
  - Discernment of future ministry challenges and opportunities.

In addition, the review shall include personal and professional self-assessment, objective measures, observations of trends from the previous eight years, and some form of peer review. Each district superintendent shall receive the initial report of the eighth year effectiveness review. When deemed important to the evaluation process, the cabinet or Board of Ordained Ministry may request psychological assessments. When recommended by the district superintendent, clergy under review may meet with the bishop and members of the cabinet to assess the review and establish next steps (*see ADCA, §350.3*).

## VIII. **Enhance Preparation of and Support for Local Pastors**

***Recommendations in Section VIII address points 3, 4, and 5 as outlined above in the Commission’s task.***

1. **Education and training:** While some local pastors will have a Master of Divinity, most continue theological education through Course of Study (§319.1). The

Commission recognizes the desire for an alternative to the traditional five-year (or 20-course) program, and the opportunity to earn a degree at Course of Study's completion.

- a. ***Create an undergraduate degree program that meets Course of Study requirements:*** Authorize the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry to partner with United Methodist-related colleges and universities to develop a degree program that would also meet the requirements of the Course of Study.
- b. ***Remove the phrase "five-year" everywhere The Book of Discipline references Course of Study to create flexibility for these alternatives.***

These proposed changes would increase educational access and provide well-rounded liberal arts and theological education for local pastors via an undergraduate institution (*see ADCA ¶¶319.4, 322.1(3), 324.6c, 1421.3d*).

2. **Support and accountability:** Local pastors are accountable for ministry through their local churches, district superintendents (¶350), and the district Committees on Ordained Ministry (dCOM). The local pastor meets annually with the dCOM to be recommended for continuance of a license and the opportunity to serve (¶319.2). The dCOM is encouraged to have a robust set of information each year to evaluate the ministry of the local pastor, which may include:
  - Clergy annual assessment/evaluation,
  - Educational progress/Course of Study transcripts,
  - Mentor report,
  - Continuing education report for local pastors who have finished educational requirements, and
  - Written materials submitted in advance for review concerning theology, preaching, leadership, and practice of ministry, etc.

Local churches are encouraged to support local pastors as they meet the commitments of ministry and education. This can include supporting the clergy family while the local pastor is away for Course of Study, providing financial support for Course of Study and other training, and communicating to the congregation the expectations and benefits of being part of the United Methodist connection.

Each annual conference has a Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members to provide mutual support for its members for the sake of the life and mission of the Church. The fellowships are encouraged to provide regular gatherings for continuing formation; promote study; develop a bond of unity and commitment to the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church and the annual conference; and, to enable relationships that offer mutual support and trust (§323). Annual conferences, Boards of Ordained Ministry, and bishops are responsible for supporting and funding the fellowship.

Local pastors are encouraged to nurture collegial relationships through participation in lectionary groups, covenant peer groups, etc. All clergy shall engage in continuing education for ministry, professional development, and spiritual formation and growth in order to lead the Church in fulfilling the mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ (§351.1). It is expected that all annual conferences make available and encourage the use of spiritual guides, life coaches, pastoral counselors, or vocational mentors for all clergy—and that clergy utilize these support systems throughout their careers (§349).

Annual conferences are encouraged to include the blessing and sending forth of newly licensed local pastors during the annual conference session.

3. **Associate membership:** The Commission discussed the role and status of associate members as a part of conversations related to licensing, education, and ongoing support of local pastors and associate members. At this time, the Commission does not recommend changes to “Section V. Associate Membership,” *The Book of Discipline*.

## **IX. Leadership For Very Small Congregations**

***Recommendations in Section IX address point 2 as outlined above in the Commission’s task.***

The Commission studied the use of certified lay ministers serving in pastoral roles within very small congregations and heard many stories of congregations with 15 or fewer active members. We gratefully give witness to the important role that many such congregations have had historically in their communities. We recognize the reasons for their decline are many and various. Nonetheless, we join with others in the growing concern over the amount of energy and resources spent to deploy clergy and laity to very

small, single-generation churches. The need to address these concerns continues to increase.

The Commission strongly encourages conferences to share and adopt best practices that enable congregations to finish their work well and “pass the baton” to other congregations, new church starts, or community ministries where resources might be used most effectively for future disciple-making. This allows a congregation to leave a legacy for the future. Such congregations might continue to meet in the tradition of a Wesleyan Class Meeting, where they can enjoy fellowship, prayer, study, and accountability for the purpose of discipleship without the burdens of local church structure.

After considering legislative options to create new possibilities for churches transitioning toward closing, the Commission determined that conferences could better handle such work in less formal ways. Adding to *The Book of Discipline* would be more complicated than helpful.

#### **X. Clarifying the Status of the Certified Lay Minister**

***Recommendations in Section X address point 2 as outlined above in the Commission’s task.***

Different conferences utilize certified lay ministers (§271) in a variety of ways. The Commission understands that Discipleship Ministries is proposing legislation to clarify the role and purpose of the certified lay minister. We support that effort. In our study, we have concluded that the certified lay minister is not intended to be used as a lay supply pastor and to serve a church in the same way as clergy.

- 1. The district Committee on Lay Servant Ministries (§668) should be charged to review certified lay ministry candidates.** The dCOM should not be the body to vet the candidate for certified lay ministry and make a recommendation unless the Board of Laity is unable to do so. This process confuses the nature of the dCOM, which is an extension of the Board of Ordained Ministry. The Board of Ordained Ministry relates to clergy, and the dCOM recommends candidates, local pastors, provisional members, and associate members to the Board of Ordained Ministry and clergy session for licensing and ordination. The certified lay minister is a layperson and relates to the Board of Laity. Thus, having the dCOM recommend a certified lay minister is confusing and might lead one to

misunderstand the certified lay minister's role (*see ADCA, ¶666.10 and NEW 668.4*).

## XI. **Conclusion**

Focused and sustained study of ministry continues to require attention and responsiveness to cultural needs and church-wide expectations. The 2013-2016 Commission for the Study of Ministry recommends and requests renewal for the 2017-2020 quadrennium. The resolution to renew the Commission for the 2017-2020 quadrennium lists details related to the Commission's structure, the questions to address, and funding (*see ADCA, Ministry and Higher Education/Superintendency – Non-Disciplinary Resolution*).

## **Works Cited**

Early, K., Miller S., & Ruger, A. "The Gathering Storm: The Educational Debt of Theological Students." *Auburn Studies*. September 2005.

Hagiya, Grant. *Spiritual Kaizen: How to Become a Better Church Leader*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2013.

Heifetz, Ronald A. *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1994.

Johansen, Robert. *Leaders Make the Future*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009.