

Local Pastors Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Question: Are local pastors a relatively recent phenomenon in United Methodism?

Absolutely not. From the very beginning the Wesleyan Movement employed non-ordained 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, non-ordained ministers (now called “Local Pastors”) have been an integral part of the Methodist Movement and The United Methodist Church.

Question: How does one become a local pastor? (*Book of Discipline*, ¶ 315)

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 License to Preach School;
3. They have been approved by the Annual Conference (recommended by $\frac{3}{4}$ vote of the District Committee on Ministry (dCOM) and affirmed by the Board of Ordained Ministry (BoOM) and the Clergy Session of Annual Conference);
4. They have received an appointment by the bishop.

Question: Can a person remain a local pastor forever?

Each year the District Committee on Ministry (dCOM) recertifies and relicenses each person after the person has demonstrated “progress” in education and professional growth. The *Book of Discipline* (BOD), in ¶ 319.3, 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.

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

Question: Is a license for pastoral ministry is good only for one year?

Yes. The local pastor license must be renewed each year by completing necessary educational requirements and meeting with the District Committee on Ministry (dCOM). If the committee agrees, it will make recommendation to the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry (BoOM) and the Clergy Session of the Annual Conference for approval. (*Book of Discipline*, ¶ 316.2)

Question: What if a person becomes eligible for the license between sessions of the annual conference?

A person who has completed the process for licensing may be granted an interim license upon recommendation of the cabinet, the District Committee on Ministry (dCOM) and the Executive Committee of the Board of Ordained Ministry (BoOM). (*Book of Discipline*, ¶1317)

Question: What pastoral and ministerial authority does a local pastor have?

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. (*Book of Discipline*, ¶1317)

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 or in a non-church setting, can I participate as an officiant?

Yes, with a couple of stipulations. The other church or wedding site must be the State of Indiana. In addition, the local pastor must contact their district's Conference Superintendent and ask that the venue for the ceremony be added to their charge for the date specified.

Question: Can I officiate the wedding of strangers who come in from the street?

Answer: Maybe. If the local pastor believes officiating the marriage ceremony is a natural extension of the ministry of the church they are serving and if the marriage is in the church in which they are appointed, the answer is yes. If the wedding is to be at the city park or at a church that the local pastor is not appointed, the answer is no. (And don't forget, the *Book of Discipline* (¶ 340.2 (3)(a)) requires the local pastor to provide marriage counseling in advance of the ceremony!)

Question: Can I officiate a marriage ceremony as soon as I receive my license for pastoral ministry?

Answer: Yes, the local pastor may officiate a marriage ceremony in their church as soon as the license is issued.

Question: Are the limits placed on marrying persons also placed on serving the Lord's Supper?

Answer: Yes. The license gives the local pastor the ministerial authority only in the church or churches where they are appointed. Of course, they may take the sacraments to the hospital rooms and homes of your parishioners, or to a retreat of your church as an extension of the church's ministry.

Question: What are the rules about funerals?

There are no requirements by anyone (state or church) that a licensed or ordained minister must preside at funerals or burials.

Question: What about preaching at places other than at the church to which I have been appointed?

There is no requirement that only licensed or ordained persons may preach. If a local pastor preaches in the next county or holds a “revival” in the next state, the license is not an issue. They will be preaching as a layperson. The license gives you ministerial authority only in the church or churches where you are appointed.

Question: Where do I go if I have questions about ministry or face problems or questions for which I have no answers?

The *Book of Discipline*, in ¶1316.4, says that local pastors are to be assigned a clergy mentor. They should call the chair of the District Committee on Ministry (dCOM) or their district’s Conference Superintendent to inquire about this. It is always better to call the Superintendent sooner than later.

Question: Can a local pastor participate in the denomination pension program?

Yes. They must participate unless they sign a waiver.

Question: Are there some special provisions in the tax laws regarding ministers?

The tax code is in flux concerning United Methodist clergy. If in doubt, or if they have questions, they should consult a tax expert. The district’s Conference Superintendent or the Conference Director of Administration and Financial Services may be able to help them find resources.

Question: Are local pastors required to participate in continuing education?

Yes. Upon completing the License to Preach School, a local pastor must enroll in and complete the Course of Study (COS) Program. This program is 20 courses that cover theology, church history, worship and preaching, mission and evangelism, and administration. The COS Program is to be completed within eight (8) years for Full-time Local Pastors or twelve years (12) for Part-time Local Pastors.

Upon completion of the COS Program, a local pastor is required to participate in a regular program of Continuing Education. This program is self-directed and can be tailored to their own unique development and pastoral setting. One option is the Advanced Course of Study Program which consists of 32 semester hours of graduate theological study.

Question: If I need pastoral care or counseling and feel alone, are there resources for me?

Yes. Call the district office for more information.

Question: Can a local pastor participate in ministerial associations? What if they ask me to preach at a sunrise service on Easter?

This would be appropriate especially if the local church has agreed that participation in this association as an expression of their ecumenical ministry.

Question: What if the ministerial association asks me to serve communion at the Baptist Church on Good Friday?

In order to officiate over communion, the local pastor must contact the district's Conference Superintendent and ask that the venue for the service be added to their charge for the date specified.

Question: Can a local pastor wear a robe and/or stole?

A local pastor may wear a robe or alb. 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 generally not customary for persons to wear a stole if they have not been ordained.

Question: What if I want to be an Associate Member of the Annual Conference?

The *Book of Discipline* ¶ 321-323 outlines the requirements and process for becoming an Associate Member.

Note: Significant portions of this document were copied (with edits) from the West Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church's document, *Local Pastors FAQ*.