

Pastor Discernment Tool for Those Considering Vocational Ministry

(To be submitted to the District Superintendent
and District Committee on Ministry)

Name of Ministry Candidate: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Name of Church or Ministry Setting: _____

Date(s) of Pastoral Discussion: _____

*The Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM) of the Texas Annual Conference has stated: The role of the pastor and the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) of every congregation is to lead individuals through a discernment process of identifying, clarifying, and understanding his or her calling for ministry, whether in the general ministry of the church, licensed ministry, or ordained ministry. Therefore, the BOM encourages every congregation to be on the lookout for potential ministers, to preach about being called into ministry, and to have on hand both Ministry Inquiring Process and Christian as Minister as resources for those exploring the possibilities and options for ministry. **Because this is such a weighty matter, the pastor and the SPRC must know the individual well enough to recognize his/her potential and fitness for ministry so they can recommend him/her, or not, and, further, to give the person opportunities to try different ministry settings in the local church where their giftedness can be evidenced and refined.***

*We recognize that all Christians are called by God to be in transformational ministry in the world as they are gifted. Ordination and licensing are particular callings by God recognized by the Church's conferring of authority in vocational ministry. When a member of your congregation is seeking validation of a perceived calling, the SPRC is encouraged to spend time in prayer, reading *The Book of Discipline, Chapter Two*—particularly ¶¶ 301-305, and using this Discernment Tool to help them clarify their ministry calling.*

These questions are to be completed in a conversation or series of conversations with the candidate. Please answer all the questions as completely as you can. A signed copy must be submitted to the District Superintendent's office before an appointment can be set with the individual pursuing vocational ministry. You are also encouraged to use this as a springboard to further conversations. Keep in mind, the answers submitted in this tool are your evaluations confidentially shared with the District Superintendent.

CALLING

A calling into representative ministry is understood as the initiative of God's grace to choose certain persons to lead the church. Those in representative ministry may serve as ordained elders or deacons or as licensed pastors or certified lay ministers. Ministry settings may include the local church, chaplaincy, higher education, or other settings. All are committed to share in the ministry of Word, sacrament, order, and service.

Your responsibility as the pastor is to help the individual understand his/her internal sense of calling, specifying how his/her ministry is to be expressed. At the same time, there is to be an external calling—a confirmation by the Church that clarifies whether they are being called to representative ministry, or not.

Can this person clearly profess his/her faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and acknowledge the Bible as God's Word?

How did this person recognize God's prompting them to explore ministry as a vocation?
Can this person be fulfilled through leadership as a lay person?

Explain to this person the requirements and authority of the various expressions of ministry in the United Methodist Church.

Ordained Ministry as an Elder—¶ 302

Elders lead God's people to grow in faith and love, with most serving as pastors in charge of local congregations through Word (preaching and teaching), sacrament, order, and service. They can also serve as chaplains, teaching, or pastoral counseling.

Ordained Ministry as a Deacon—¶ 302

Deacons lead God's people into ministry to the world through Word (teaching and may include preaching), service, compassion, and justice, often in specialized ministry. Some deacons serve in churches in roles such as ministers of Christian education or music. Many serve beyond the local church, in settings such as social service, education, health, or policy advocacy organizations.

Licensed for Local Pastor—¶ 315

Local pastors—either part time or full time—are licensed to serve as a congregation's pastor, with responsibilities for preaching, administering the sacraments, providing pastoral care, and administrative leadership. They do this while pursuing theological education through an approved seminary or in the Course of Study.

Certified Lay Minister—¶ 271

The certified lay minister serves as the leader of a small congregation, preaching the Word, provide a care ministry to the congregation, assist in program leadership, and be a witness in the community for the growth, missional and connectional thrust

Lay Servant (formerly Lay Speaker)—¶ 266

A lay servant is committed to the local congregation, becoming well informed of the scriptures and the doctrine, heritage, organization, and life of the United Methodist Church. He/she

receives specific training to develop skills in witnessing to the Christian faith through spoken communication, church and community leadership, and care-giving ministries. This individual gives leadership, assistance, and support to the mission and ministry of the church.

Other comments:

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Spiritual maturity refers to more than what an individual knows or does; spiritual maturity is the imitation of Christ evidenced in the character, mindset, and actions of an individual. Leaders in the Church are expected to have grown and continue to grow in the love and knowledge of Christ.

How does this person exhibit spiritual maturity?

What are examples you have witnessed that this person upholds the highest ideals and behavior of a follower of Christ?

How would you describe this individual's theological depth?

Does this person express any misgivings about the United Methodist Church doctrines and practices?

Other comments:

ATTRIBUTES AND GIFTEDNESS

Ministry is Christ-centered within a community of faith. Therefore, those in ministry must be comfortable in social settings and relational in both public and private occasions.

What social and relational skills have you seen this person exhibit that will be necessary for ministry?

How does this person evidence emotional stability in his/her life?

How does this person demonstrate communication skills (interpersonal and public speaking) necessary for ministry?

Other comments:

EXPERIENCE

Every individual is shaped by past experiences. Take time to reflect on how experiences evidence potential for ministry, as well as equip him/her for ministry.

In what ways has this person shown the ability to articulate his/her faith—to tell his/her faith story?

How has this person effectively led or participated in your congregational setting?

Administration

Pastoral Care

Spiritual Formation

Worship

Describe a ministry this person has initiated.

How has this person experienced stability and success in previous employment?

How will this person's previous vocational experiences contribute to his/her ministry?

Other comments:

INVESTMENT

Because of the spiritual, emotional, and time stresses, ordained ministry can put a strain on family dynamics—more than most imagine until they have entered into full-time ministry. For Elders, add to this the demands of itinerant ministry, relocating at the direction of the Bishop according to the needs of the mission field.

Have you explained to this person about the lifestyle changes that are inevitable for a pastor's family? What was the response?

The bishop asks those about to be ordained a series of historic questions (BOD ¶ 336), including: Are you in debt so as to embarrass you in your work? This question takes on significance in the realization that a

seminary education can cost upwards of \$75,000. Local pastors and certified lay ministers have less weighty financial obligations. All of this should factor in the discussion.

If this person is considering ordination, how is he/she prepared to meet the financial demands of a seminary education?

Does this person understand he/she can attend only a UMC approved seminary?

If this person is not in full-time ministry, is he/she willing to be bi-vocational?

The ordination process is a significant time commitment for completion of education, residency, and gaining an experience base for effective ministry. Please help him/her consider this obligation in relation to their potential years of ministry (noting that mandatory retirement age is 72, while the average retirement age is 65).

What is this person's educational background?

Is this person ready for:

- 4 years of undergraduate studies (if not completed)?
- 2-4 years of full-time graduate studies (depending whether Elder or Deacon) or maximum 8-12 years for Course of Study (for Local Pastors)?
- 2 years of residency?
- Has this person considered how many years will be necessary to develop an experience base for effective pastoral ministry (studies show this is typically 7 years of active ministry)?

How many potential years of ministry does this individual foresee after ordination or credentialing?

What is his/her response to the time involved?

Other comments:

DECISION

When have you prayed for and about this individual's call?

Do you believe this individual is called by God to vocational ministry?

Can you envision this person serving as a colleague? Why or why not?

What type of ministry or ministry setting would best suit the individual?

Pastor:
