

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION ON

## *Theological Foundation and Policies and Criteria for the Ordering of Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*

[For purposes of brevity throughout the following resource  
the above title will be referred to as the “*Ordering Document.*”]

---

### WHY HAS THIS PROPOSAL COME ABOUT? (SIX REASONS.)

- a. Because we lack, and are needful of, a denominational statement concerning the theological and historical underpinnings for the “ordering of ministry” - as we understand it - one that sets-forth our own “Disciples” understanding of how the order of ministry has evolved in our particular history and polity.
- b. Because “unity is our polar star,” clarity about our Disciples’ ordering of ministry, and the beliefs that undergird it, are important elements in ecumenical conversation with sister communions across the life of the Church.
- c. Because of the Licensed Minister’s appeal through the *Nazareth Consensus* we acknowledge that:
  - ~ they desire a means by which those adequately prepared might be ordained;
  - ~ they desire a means by which they might enjoy mobility in the circulating of their papers and references in the church’s “search and call” system;
  - ~ they desire to replace the secular term of “licensed” with a Biblical-based concept of “commissioned;” and
  - ~ they desire to be more highly valued as partners alongside ordained clergy within the whole order of ministry.
- d. Because some Regions already provide an alternative track to ordination, other than the requisite *Association of Theological School*-accredited M.Div. criterion for ordination which is fully recognized and accepted across the life of this denomination, there is a need for Disciples to have a common understanding about alternative ordination processes for which allowances are made, and to provide common standards for such.
- e. Because in the current milieu, we Disciples are facing many exceptional situations (e.g. the number of rural and urban congregations who can no longer afford full-time seminary-trained clergy; the number of licensed ministers who are going the second mile in their preparation/formation to provide quality leadership; the number of individuals who are by either linguistic, economic, vocational, or familial circumstances constrained from pulling-up roots and relocating for seminary - which includes a number of our effective new church pastors) we recognize the need to provide different pathways leading to ordination.
- f. Because of new questions needing address and new circumstances needing our attention in this unique historical moment for the church early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this is an opportune time to do so in a wholistic approach to the Disciples understanding about the Order of Ministry.

### WHAT IS NEW IN THIS “ORDERING” DOCUMENT?

~ A statement of “theological foundations” about our ordering of ministry - one growing out of our Disciples history and polity. (The entirety of Section One)

[PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS NOT MEANT TO BE A COMPLETE THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT ON MINISTRY, BUT ONLY THE IDENTIFICATION OF THOSE PARTICULAR THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS WHICH INFORM OUR DISCIPLES PERSPECTIVE ABOUT THE “ORDERING OF MINISTRY.”]

- ~ Especially significant is our ability to identify the manner in which our threefold offices of ministry (serving, proclaiming, over-seeing) have a clear relationship to the three distinct offices of ministry in the New Testament (diaconate, presbyterate, and episcopate). (I.D.2.a & I.D.2.c.)
- ~ Updated language about personal qualifications for the Order of Ministry. (II.A.2.)
- ~ A change of language from the use of "Licensed" to "Commissioned." (I.D.1 & II.B.1.)
- ~ The description of and criteria for Commissioned Ministry. (II.B.2.)
- ~ Two categories of Commissioned Ministers - those seeking ordination, and those not seeking ordination. (II.B.3.)
- ~ Outline of the Candidacy process for Commissioned Ministers (for the candidate and for the Region) [II.B.4-5]
- ~ The processes and procedures for Ordination. (II.C.1.)
- ~ The delineation of the "Apprentice Track" [AT] and the "Seminary Track" [ST] as preparation for ordination. (II.C.2)
- ~ The educational requirements - competencies in 16 different areas of ministerial practice - are alphabetically listed for the ordination of candidates for ministry in both educational tracks - AT and ST. (The content of each of these areas will be fleshed out by a task force appointed by the General Commission on Ministry in consultation with General Minister and President) [II.C.2]
- ~ The itemization of Regional responsibilities in working with those seeking ordination. (II.C.3.)
- ~ A freshly reworked section on Candidacy for Ordination (including definition, application, criteria, procedures during candidacy and preparations for ordination) [II.D.]

1. In general, there is much more specificity throughout the "ordering document" to provide assistance to Regional Commissions on Ministry
2. Regions will have the option about whether to utilize the alternative pathway to ordination for Commissioned Ministers - the Apprentice Track. The policy assumes that most all will do so, but does not make it a mandatory requirement for every Region to do so. (II.C.3. uses "encourage" language.)

In the section on Standing (II.F.) there is more clarity about

- Protocol and clarification regarding jurisdictions for certifying Regional Standing (making clear which Regions have the responsibility under what circumstances); [II.F.1.c. and II.F.2.e & f]
- Clarifications regarding certification for Standing by the General Church; (II.F.1.d.)
- Good protocol in Regional and General communications with each other when working with a person of color (good two-way consultation between the Region and the National Pastor/Leader of Racial Ethnic communities); [II.F.2.d. also at lines 670, 803, 1006, 1114 and 1381]
- A new section pertaining only to retired ministry - particularly delineating the status and requirement for active retirements (serving in retirement) and inactive retirement (retired and no longer serving); [II.F.3.] and
- New wording that differentiates what happens when Standing is removed, surrendered or lapsed. (II.F.4-6)

Nothing has been altered in Section G on "Recognition and Reconciliation of Ordained Ministries" since that is language which has been mutually adopted by previous General Assemblies of our partner denominations - the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The *Ministerial Code of Ethics* which once stood apart from the Ordering document, is now incorporated in Section I of the Ordering document.

## DOES ORDAINING THE NON-SEMINARY TRAINED LEAD TO A LESS COMPETENT MINISTRY?

Some have opposed the ordination of licensed ministers believing that ordination has only/mostly to do with a level of education and skill development characterized by a certain period of time and work accomplished in a particular kind of educational setting. While that is certainly part of the criteria for ministry, it is clear that throughout the centuries persons with diverse levels of education in varied kinds of educational settings have been enormously effective in God's service as ordained clergy. Years and hours of preparation have not been the only criteria.

While the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will always place a premium on an informed and prepared clergy leadership, the times in which we find ourselves are clearly leading us to broaden our sense of where and how that formation for leadership can happen. In the "ordering document" there is a clear and preferential option for seminary trained leadership - wherever and however that is possible. Note the references in section II.C.2. lines 722-724.

In the historical life of the church there has always been the ordination of well-respected, broadly-authenticated and spiritually-effective persons who did not necessarily have seminary training as we know it today. The premise behind this "ordering document" is trust - faith that God can well-utilize both a SEMINARY approach and an APPRENTICE approach for ordination in this church today. A truly inclusive church must begin to live its way into ever more inclusive ways of calling forth and setting apart its ordained leadership. It is our sense that this church will actually be enlivened and blessed by providing these two tracks to ordination.

## WHAT IS THE TIMELINE ENVISIONED FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS POLICY?

Prior to the General Assembly the General Board directed that the "ordering document," the resolution for its adoption, and the accompanying "Frequently Asked Questions" be circulated across the church for reading and study.

In July 2009 the General Assembly will provide a forum on this "ordering document" for discussion and clarification.

In July 2009 the General Assembly will vote on the adoption of this "ordering document."

If the resolution "to adopt" is affirmed:

- The church will embark on a period of time for the transitions necessary for its implementation.
- The date for implementation - the day on which the new policy becomes effective - is August 1, 2011.

During the period of transition:

- The General Commission on Ministry in consultation with the General Minister and President will immediately appoint a task group to flesh out the content expectations for the 16 areas of ministerial competency and to develop a template or model curriculum for Apprentice Track educational programs.
- The General Commission on Ministry will work with the General Church office of ministry to effect procedures to identify Ordination AT (Apprentice Track) and Ordination ST - (Seminary Track) designations on paperwork for Regions and congregations in the Search and Call process.
- Each Region will make intentional efforts to inform their ministry commission in regard to the implications of the new "ordering document" for their work and oversight of ministry.
- Regions will decide whether they (alone or in concert with other entities - II.C.3., footnote 12) will develop a Commissioned Minister Apprentice Track for Ordination. But all Regions will come under all of the other guidelines, prerequisites and implications of the "ordering document" on August 1, 2011.
- Regions will utilize the present nomenclature for clergy ("Licensed" instead of "Commissioned") until this policy takes effect on August 1, 2011.

- Regions developing an Apprentice Track will submit their specific program design to the *General Commission on Ministry* for evaluation and feedback.
- Regions (after the completed work of the GCOM's Task Force to develop a template for the Apprentice Track program addressing the 16 competency areas) will determine how work done in previous LICENSED MINISTRY CONTINUING EDUCATION applies to any of their present Licensed Ministers who either might be considered for grand-parenting in, or might be seeking the Apprentice Track for Ordination.
- Regions will then review the status of each current Licensed minister to determine which category of Commissioned Minister is most appropriate for their designation.
- The Region would revise as necessary any Regional policies to facilitate this transition.

## HOW WILL THIS AFFECT THE CURRENT PRACTICE?

~ All Licensed Ministers will become Commissioned Ministers in August of 2011.

If they are serving with Standing, without intent of completing the required AT competencies, they will be designated ***Commissioned Ministers, not seeking ordination.***

If they are serving with Standing and working on accomplishing the Apprentice Track requirements they will be designated ***Commissioned Ministers, seeking ordination.***

If they are serving with Standing, and working toward the seminary requirements for ordination, they will be designated ***Commissioned Ministers, seeking ordination.***

~ Candidates for ordination will be designated as AT if they are working on accomplishing the Apprentice Track requirements of the Region, and ST if they are working toward a Master of Divinity degree at an ATS accredited seminary.

~ Ordained Clergy will be designated Ordained (AT) or Ordained (ST).

~ Search Committees will have the appropriate designations clearly indicated on the clergy's *Ministerial Profile*.

## WHAT KIND OF PREPARATION HAS PRECEDED THIS RECOMMENDATION?

What you have before you is the composite outcome of six years of work. Literally thousands of man and woman hours of effort have culminated in the "ordering document" that is coming before you. This copy is Draft 11.1. Many drafts have preceded this one, none of which made their way to the General Board and then to the General Assembly. That should indicate something of the massive effort of research, study, writing, re-writing, prayer, deliberation and worshipful work that have gone into it.

In the last two meetings prior to the accomplishment of this final recommended draft, over 300 different pieces of feedback were received from laity, clergy (licensed and ordained), Regional ministry commissions, General church leadership and higher education bodies. Every single piece of feedback has been carefully considered, and for the most part incorporated into this final rewrite. Then your General Board gave it one last bit of careful scrutiny before sending forward to you, for the consideration of the General Assembly.

Still it is a living document which can, and likely will, be amended in future General Board and Assembly gatherings as new circumstances present the church in a changing time with new issues for consideration. But at the present time this comes to you as a gift - a labor incorporating the finest efforts of hundreds of people who love this church and care about its ministries.

Setting the stage for our work a special Theological Task Force compiled the data which is now reflected in Section One of the "Ordering Document." Those who served on this Task Group included: Robert Welsh, chair; Carolyn Higginbotham, Newell Williams, Toni Bynum, John Imbler, Tom Jewell, Joyce Knauff, Janice Legg, Rick Spleth, and Carmelo Alvarez. Then the overarching compilation of the "ordering document" was assigned to and developed by the entire *General Commission on Ministry* comprised of Ben Bohren, Chair, Susanne Blix, Dani Loving Cartwright, Elsie Ferrer, Lari R. Grubbs, Timothy M. James, Sandra Michael-Bowers, Howard M. Ratcliff, Donggook "John" Roh, Don Shelton, Richard O. Sparrow. Sharon Watkins and Howard Bowers are ex-officio. Additional members of the *General Commission on Ministry* include the drafting team who had the primary task of writing: Richard Guentert, chair, Carolyn Higginbotham, Joyce Knauff, and Sotello Long - plus the chair of the GCOM, Ben Bohren, who met throughout with the draft team, as well.