

The Vocational Discernment Coordinator

The Study of Ministry Commission also recommended the implementation of a new BOM office called the vocational discernment coordinator. The BOM names this person to “coordinate the candidacy mentoring process” (§ 635.1c). Responsibilities include working with the BOM, dCOMs, and DS to coordinate, implement, and strengthen the candidacy process throughout the annual conference. This includes recruiting, training, and assigning mentors to new candidates.

The Vocational Discernment Coordinator allows for:

- The BOM to be involved in and coordinate candidacy mentoring among all districts in the annual conference.
- Naming one contact person who makes the candidacy mentoring process effective, and who can answer questions about the process.
- Building connections among dCOMs, BOMs, and district superintendents that ensure consistent sharing of information while making it more likely that candidates will receive helpful information when needed.

While some of the candidacy process focuses more on application for ministry (steps such as background checks, meeting with the dCOM, and completing written requirements), much of candidacy is meant to focus on vocational discernment as the candidate explores how to respond to God’s call in The United Methodist Church.

Selection and Assignment of Candidacy Mentors

Mentors shall be recommended by the cabinet, and selected, trained, and held accountable by the BOM (§ 349.1).

- The candidacy registrar, DS, and vocational discernment coordinator review the need for candidacy mentors in each district.
- The DS, in consultation with the dCOM and district leadership, suggests clergy to be trained as candidacy mentors.
- The candidacy registrar and vocational discernment coordinator administers the training for candidacy mentors, and confirms those who have been trained.
- The DS assigns a candidacy mentor after receiving and approving a new candidate’s request for admission into the candidacy process (§ 310.1b).

Criteria for Effective Candidacy Mentors

Whether the annual conference chooses to implement group mentoring or assign candidates and mentors to one-on-one relationships, criteria and standards common among effective mentors should be maintained.

It is important for candidacy mentors to represent a variety of backgrounds and experiences, and to include deacons, elders, and local pastors. Different family life styles, ages, genders, and ethnic groups should also be represented. This variety provides opportunities for candidates to be in contact with church leaders who may represent the community’s wider diversity, while also giving candidates access to mentors with whom they can relate to more closely.

Effective mentors have a mature faith, model effective ministry, and possess the skills needed to help individuals discern their call in ministry (§349.2). As mentors are selected and trained, the following standards are helpful in deciding who should be invited to serve as a mentor.

- Spiritual maturity demonstrated through a deep and continuing commitment to God and to growing in grace and love.
- Calling and commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ as lived through the church’s ministry and the person’s appreciation of the varieties of lay, licensed, and ordained ministry.
- Vocational development that shows the person has learned to cope constructively and to grow through opportunities and challenges in life and ministry.

Candidacy Mentoring & the Vocational Discernment Coordinator

Legislation and Discipline References

¶ 349 Mentors -1. Mentors shall be recommended by the cabinet, selected, trained and held accountable by the Board of Ordained Ministry. ...

a) Candidacy mentors are clergy in full connection, associate members, or local pastors who have completed the Course of Study trained to provide counsel and guidance related to the candidacy process. Candidates will be assigned to a candidacy mentoring group, wherever possible, or to a candidacy mentor by the district committee on ordained ministry in consultation with the vocational discernment coordinator (wherever named) and the district superintendent (¶310). Candidacy mentors will work with the candidate until that candidate begins serving in an appointive ministry as a local pastor or a commissioned minister.

¶ 635.1c) – Board of Ordained Ministry – The board shall organize by electing from its membership a chairperson, registrars, and such other officers as it may deem necessary. A vocational discernment coordinator may be named to coordinate the candidacy mentoring process.

Candidacy Mentor Role and Responsibilities (See Fulfilling God's Call, pp. 12-14)

- Co-discerner with candidates
- Represents the annual conference by knowing process and explaining next steps
- Holds content of conversations in confidence
- Permission from candidate required to release content of conversations

Candidacy Mentor – Some Considerations

- Preparation of mentor reports – how will this be completed with a higher candidate to mentor ratio?
- Confidentiality of mentor relationship – how will that be honored in group setting?
- If candidacy mentors currently participate in the certification interview how will group mentoring affect that process?
- Online Candidacy Application System (OCAS) – who reports?
- Ongoing relationships after group ends
- What if a candidate needs more individual attention?

Vocational Discernment Coordinator (VDC) – Some Considerations

- How will the VDC relate to the Group Candidacy program?
- Will this be an additional member for the BOM or will this responsibility be assigned to a current position?
- Will these responsibilities be assigned to an annual conference staff person or to a BOM member?
- What will be the VDC's responsibility in enrolling candidates, training candidacy mentors, and relating to district superintendents?