

THE EXPECTATIONS OF SPIRITUAL LEADERS IN THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

God's call to service is inherent in each person's baptism. All baptized believers have spiritual gifts to be used for the work of the body and for the glory of God. Some are called to be spiritual leaders in the faith community. Spiritual leaders invite and equip others to become disciples of Christ Jesus and to live out that discipleship in tangible ways. The call for leaders is always a call to **service**, never to status or position or for personal validation. In our denomination, this call is manifested in certified, licensed, or ordained ministry. Each manifestation is God-ordained, spiritually valid, and critical to the life and health of the Church.

It is the responsibility of each District Committee on Ordained Ministry, as an extension of the Board of Ordained Ministry, to assist persons in the discernment of the nature of their call to spiritual leadership, to guide persons in response to their call, and to evaluate readiness for spiritual leadership. Throughout a discernment and training process, the Board of Ordained Ministry looks for evidence of Faith, Fire, and Fruits, and evaluates persons in these areas to determine readiness for spiritual leadership within the United Methodist Church.

While categorical lines are rarely sharp, the signs of **Faith, Fire, and Fruit** include the following:

FAITH

Spiritual leaders believe in the Triune God as revealed in scripture and can speak authentically to the personal and corporate meaning of the basic Christian confession that Jesus is Lord. Additionally, spiritual leaders:

- Are in harmony with the teachings of the Church in the Wesleyan tradition, such as the Wesleyan perspective on grace, the significance of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the experience and hope of the Reign of God.
- Demonstrate spiritual maturity in their personal lives.
- Are of sound moral character.
- Exemplify psychological and emotional wellness.

FIRE

Spiritual leaders have a passion for ministry and the discipline necessary to sustain fitness for the work assigned. Spiritual leaders:

- Are able to speak definitively about their call from God to service.
- Practice effective stewardship in life including self-care as well as caring for others, financial discipline, and practicing the spiritual disciplines. (Physical wellness, though potentially beyond the control of the candidates, is necessary for the response to some calls to spiritual leadership.)
- Hold to the connectional and conciliar polity of the Church recognizing the corporate mission of the larger body.
- Are committed to a vision of God's reign.

FRUIT

Spiritual leaders recruit and develop disciples. They equip these disciples to then recruit and develop other disciples. Fruits of spiritual leadership thus include:

- Proven ability to communicate the Faith theologically, ethically, and biblically within the Wesleyan tradition as demonstrated in preaching, teaching, and congregational leadership.
- The skill to discern and cultivate the spiritual gifts in others.
- Evidence of disciple-making, such as new confessions of faith, increased participation of the congregation in outreach ministries, small group ministries, and spiritual development opportunities, congregational growth in financial and life stewardship, and increased worship attendance.

Evidence of these sign of Faith, Fire, and Fruit serve as the guidelines for the District Committee on Ministry and Board of Ordained Ministry for the evaluation of readiness for certified, licensed, or ordained ministry.

BUILDING SPIRITUAL LEADERS

It is the responsibility of the church to build spiritual leaders in order to be faithful to our mission “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” This responsibility lies in three distinct areas: the local church, the District Committee on Ordained Ministry (DCOM), and the Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM). Every baptized Christian is blessed with spiritual gifts and is called to be a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some are called out of the people of God for particular and unique forms of ministry: Certified Lay Minister, Local Pastor, Ordained Deacon, and Ordained Elder. A process of spiritual discernment is to take place not only in those seeking to investigate their calling but in the local church (through the Staff Parish Relations Committee and Charge Conference), the DCOM, and the BOOM. At each of these levels, interviewers are encouraged to discern evidence of Faith, Fire, and Fruit indicative of the

nature of each candidate's calling. It is not the responsibility of these bodies to determine who may or may not serve (for all are called to serve), but rather what is the optimal place of service for each candidate. Active service as a lay person in a local church is in no way a negation of the authenticity of God's calling to service in a person's life. It is the responsibility of the local church, DCOM, and BOOM to discern evidence of the kind of Faith, Fire, and Fruit which is required of those who would seek to serve as spiritual leaders as licensed or ordained ministers in the life of the Church.

A local church is often excited and proud to have someone from their body "answer the call" and may be quick to move that person forward in process without really testing this call. Unless significant discernment takes place at the local church level, this can result in persons being placed into ministry settings which are not appropriate for them or in being turned down at the DCOM or BOOM level after a significant expenditure of time and money. Therefore, it is necessary for the local church not only to **hear** a person's call, but to **see** evidence of this call in the early stages of his/her candidacy. Having a clear understanding of the expectations we have for spiritual leaders (Faith, Fire and Fruit), will enable local churches to make informed and valuable decisions regarding the service potential for each candidate. It is the responsibility of the DCOM to arrange for training for each local church prior to Staff Parish and Charge Conference decisions.

It is fundamentally important that both the local church and the District Committee on Ordained Ministry take seriously the work of discerning each candidate's evidence of Faith, Fire, and Fruit in determining their suitability for licensed and ordained ministry. Persons who are not ready or suitable for these forms of Christian service should not be moved forward in the process. Doing so becomes a disservice both to the candidate and the Church. Instead, it is our prayer that local churches, District Committees on Ordained Ministry, and the Board of Ordained Ministry will continue to help those called by God to become strong spiritual leaders who will help us be faithful to our mission "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." (*The Book of Discipline, 2016, ¶120*)

THE DISCERNMENT OF CALL

We believe that the discernment of the call to licensed or ordained ministry is a fundamentally spiritual process involving the individual, the local church, the District Committee on Ministry and the Board of Ordained Ministry. All are partners in discerning the nature of each

person's calling. Truly, as we believe that every baptized Christian is also a minister, we also believe that God has endowed spiritual gifts upon every believer. Therefore, all are called to ministry, but not necessarily to the ministry of licensed or ordained local pastors, Elders, or Deacons. Some will experience the call to ministry as a call to the work of a Certified Lay Minister, doing important ministry within the life of the church as part of the laity.

We reject the idea that the call to licensed or ordained ministry is of a higher or more important nature. Truly, the United Methodist Church understands the nature of this call as one to servant leadership. What makes the call to licensed or ordained ministry distinct is that it is a call to provide spiritual leadership within the life of the church, discernable through the evidence of Faith, Fire, and Fruit.