

Frequently Asked Questions About Certified Lay Ministry

The certified lay minister is a new form of leadership in The United Methodist Church, authorized by the 2004 General Conference.

LEADERSHIP

1. What is a certified lay minister (CLM)? A certified lay minister is a qualified United Methodist layperson called to congregational leadership as part of a ministry team under the supervision of a clergyperson. This person enters the certification process, which includes training, support, supervision and accountability while serving in a local church assigned by the district superintendent.

2. What does certification mean? Certification is the process recognized in The United Methodist Church to prepare someone for significant service. In this case, certification provides a layperson with the training, support, supervision, and accountability needed to lead a congregation that either does not have a traditional clergy appointment or one that is developing team ministry. Remember: Certification is intended to be an ongoing process, not an end in itself. So you could honestly say that certification takes a lifetime and begins with a placement!

3. Where is this position mentioned in the *Book of Discipline*? Paragraph 271 in the 2008 *Book of Discipline* explains certified lay ministry, requirements, and service distinction.

4. How is a CLM different from other recognized ministers? A CLM is a unique, recognized lay servant in The United Methodist Church. A CLM is intended for the missional leadership of smaller churches as part of a team ministry under the supervision of a clergyperson. As part of the historic continuation of lay leadership in our church, CLMs resemble earlier exhorters, class leaders, lay preachers, and missionaries. Specific distinctions are offered below to explain (not compare) leadership. A CLM is different from...

a. *An Elder* – An elder is a clergy member of the annual conference ordained for Word, Order, and Sacrament. Under the guaranteed appointment (placement) of a bishop, an elder has usually completed seminary training. His or her sole livelihood comes from a church.

b. *A Licensed Local Pastor* – A licensed local pastor is a *clergy* member of the annual conference who provides pastoral leadership in a local congregation. He or she is *appointed* (placed) by the bishop for nonitinerant ministry in a local congregation. His or her training includes attending a conference licensing (or pastor's) school and completing the course of study program available from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

c. *A Certified Lay Speaker* – A certified lay speaker is a layperson who has completed the basic course in lay speaking ministries and an additional advanced course. His or her certification is renewed every three years upon completing another course. Although lay speakers are intended to serve in the ministry and mission within the local congregation where they are members in good standing, certified lay speakers may serve beyond the local church. They may provide temporary pulpit supply for pastors who are away from the church due to

vacation, a mission project, or a family crisis. Traditionally, lay speakers also speak on Laity Sunday.

5. When is a person actually certified? When the CLM completes the process and appears before the DCOM, he or she will be issued a certificate after a successful review. Remaining certified is dependent on continuing the process: being active in competent service and completing additional courses for recertification. In those cases where a CLM no longer has an assignment due to church discontinuance or merging, the district superintendent is encouraged to assign the CLM to another congregation. This may be his or her own local church or another church that needs missional leadership as part of a ministry team.

6. What attire is appropriate for the CLM to wear during worship? Since the position of certified lay minister is not a clergy position, the CLM does not have sacramental authority at any time. Appropriate attire would be regular, ordinary “go-to-church” clothes. This person leads a congregation in the work of ministry, but is not considered clergy and should not try to appear as such. Therefore, a clergy robe and stole should never be worn. Further, the CLM should not assume the title “pastor” or be addressed as a “reverend”.

7. Why do we need CLMs? Are they really necessary? Rather than using deficit thinking (we have a clergy shortage, lack of funds for traditional pastoral leadership in our small church, use certified lay speakers already...), it is helpful to see CLMs as an asset (an extension of clergy/lay leadership) in missional settings, such as our smaller congregations, faith communities, ethnic/culturally diverse ministries, and other places where team ministry is valued. Although certified lay speakers had been placed in a similar role before the 2004 General Conference, it is now the intent of the church that a CLM be used in those situations. The certification process prepares the CLM to be intentional, holistic congregational leader assigned under the supervision of an equipping clergyperson in a team ministry. The CLM is not intended for occasional pulpit supply.

PROCESS

8. How does a CLM become certified? There are certain requirements that must be met for a layperson to become certified. Refer to accompanying paragraph from the *Book of Discipline*. (Note: *Being completely certified is not, however, a prerequisite for serving as part of a ministry team or being assigned to lead a congregation. In fact, being active in leadership is one way to demonstrate the gifts and graces someone has for the ministry!*)

9. What is the role of conference boards, such as the board of ordained ministry or the board of laity? These groups have a vital supportive role in the training and recognition of CLMs by collaborating in developing a conference policy and practice. These groups are not responsible for certification.

ACCOUNTABILITY

10. How is the CLM placed for service? The CLM can be assigned by the bishop in consultation with the cabinet or by the district superintendent to a congregation to provide

preaching, care ministry, program leadership, and witness to the community as part of a mutual ministry team.

11. How are the sacraments celebrated in a congregation served by a CLM? Only clergy have sacramental authority in The United Methodist Church. Baptism and Holy Communion are the two sacraments celebrated by our denomination. CLMs do not have sacramental authority, but they may conduct weddings and funerals, according to the laws of the state and with permission of the annual conference.

12. To whom is the CLM accountable for his or her leadership? A supervising clergy person with equipping gifts is essential to the CLM's effectiveness. The mutual ministry team from the local congregation served is also part of the accountability process. A local church served by a CLM still has a pastor-parish relations committee and a charge conference to communicate the CLM's effectiveness and support.

TRAINING

13. What is the coursework required? The General Board of Discipleship and The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry have worked together to develop the basic coursework to prepare leaders for this form of ministry. The required coursework has four modules:

- a. *Call and Covenant for Ministry* - Description: Understanding of theology and call for ministry, exploring spiritual gifts, and developing a ministry covenant. Minimum time: 10 hours.
- b. *The Practice of Ministry* – Description: Four Sections: Leading worship, Preaching/Sharing Faith, Discipleship Ministries, and Caring for a Congregation. Minimum time: 8 hours per section.
- c. *Organization of Ministry* – Description: Focus on the leader's task of organizing a congregation for mission and ministry. It provides specific guidance on topics central to a congregation's health. Minimum time: 8 hours.
- d. *Connection for Ministry* – Description: United Methodist theology, practice, and polity are explained with the roles of the local congregation, district, conference, and general church. Minimum time: 8 hours.

The times given above may vary according to the ministry setting/context and format chosen to complete the material (local church small group, district peer group, or conference academy). The point is to take an adequate amount of time to complete the coursework so that it can be used effectively in ministry.

Please note: This coursework is not intended to compare with traditional training, such as certified lay speaking schools/courses, licensing school, course of study, or even seminary. It is designed to prepare a CLM for effective pastoral service as part of a ministry team that should include leaders who have completed traditional training or theological education.

14. Where can a person get the training to become a certified lay minister? Training may be offered by the conference or district. Those interested are encouraged to check with the

district superintendent for available opportunities. The coursework (4 modules) provided by the General Board of Discipleship as downloads can also be used as a group-study with the supervision or a clergy person and the support of a mutual ministry team (key leaders) of the congregation being served by the CLM. Whatever the format chosen, it should include work/interaction with people in the local congregation being served.

SUPPORT

15. Whom should people contact regarding their interest in this role? People should be in contact with the pastor and district superintendent. Interested people may also email the General Board of Discipleship at clm@gbod.org.

16. What are some creative ways to use the CLM? There are many ways that the service of a CLM can enhance the mission of the church. Specifically:

a. The CLM may be assigned as a congregational leader in a small church that needs consistent, affordable pastoral care.

b. The CLM may serve as part of a pastoral ministry team on a larger circuit or parish under the supervision of a lead pastor (appointed elder or licensed local pastor) to increase the pastoral care in the area.

c. The CLM from a specific culture or ethnic group can help an existing congregation reach out as a new faith community. Indigenous leadership can be essential in this situation!

d. The CLM can extend the reach of clergy into an area experiencing decline or shrinking resources.

e. A CLM can be helpful in a larger church that is forming a pastoral ministry team to provide adequate services to its members.

17. How are CLMs compensated? A CLM is a layperson serving out of his or her baptism as a disciple of Jesus Christ. CLMs are not intended to be reimbursed as are full or part-time clergy. Therefore salary, health care or other clergy benefits are not appropriate. CLMs are encouraged to have their main source of livelihood beyond the local church. Most will serve in the churches they grew up in or ones nearby their homes. The assigned congregation may offer support for mileage, resources, training, and other items deemed vital for ministry after negotiation that includes the CLM and the district superintendent.

Important: consult your federal and state tax codes to learn the impact of reimbursement or other support provided to a CLM, including living in a parsonage. These items may need to be legally declared as income.

This article was prepared by Julia Kuhn Wallace and Sandy Zeigler, staff of the General Board of Discipleship. Copyright © 2006 General Board of Discipleship, Nashville TN and edited and retyped by Bernie Bliss, Administrative Secretary, Rocky Mountain Conference, 2012.