

The Basics for dCOMs

www.txcumc.org

Thank you for serving on your District's Committee on Ministry!

The work you've agreed to do is holy work.

On behalf of your District, the Board of Ordained Ministry, the Texas Annual Conference, and the United Methodist Church, you will be interviewing God's people...
...people God has definitely called for ministry.

You'll be helping discern if they are called to one of the many forms of lay ministry, to serve the church as

- lay volunteers
- lay church staff members
- lay church staff members with specialized certifications
- certified lay speakers
- certified lay ministers

or if they are called, gifted, fit, and ready to be set apart to lead God's people, to serve the church as

- ordained deacons
- ordained elders
- licensed local pastors

You'll be guiding people through "candidacy" (a period of discernment during which people help people discern God's callings) and guiding licensed local pastors throughout their ministry.

Your first step: pray for and with your District Committee on Ministry (dCOM) for God's presence among you as you work, and for God's wisdom and guidance and you make important and sometimes difficult decisions.

Our hope and prayer: that this resource manual will help you in this holy work.

Membership

The following shall be represented in the membership of the dCOM (see ¶665.1):

- the District Superintendent
- at least six other clergy in the District including:
 - women
 - ethnic clergy
 - at least one elder who has completed the Course of Study
 - whenever possible, deacons in full connection
 - whenever possible, at least one clergyperson age 35 or younger
- at least three laypersons shall be members of the committee with limited vote
- interim vacancies may be filled by the District Superintendent
- clergy and lay members shall be nominated annually by the District Superintendent and approved by the District or annual conference
- within 10 days after election, a correct list of dCOM members and officers should be sent to the BOM Candidacy Manager (CM)

Organization

Although the *Discipline* does not prescribe a specific structure, the organization of the dCOM must ensure a close working relationship with the conference BOM and other District committees within the annual conference. Currently, all dCOM chairs serve ex-officio (with voice and vote) on the conference Board of Ordained Ministry to help ensure this close working relationship.

Officers

The dCOM may appoint or elect officers listed below and others, taking care to assign duties and responsibilities for each. Within 10 days after election, a correct list of dCOM members and officers should be sent to the BOM Candidacy Manager (CM).

Chairperson: This office may not be held by the District Superintendent (§422.2). The Chairperson serves ex-officio with voice and vote on BOM; is responsible for effective communication between the dCOM and BOM; and stays in close connection with the CM, BOM registrar, and other BOM officers. The duties are:

- to ensure the members of the committee are properly trained
- to call regular meetings of the dCOM informing each member of the time, place, and agenda
- to preside over meetings or appoint a temporary chair, if necessary—it is the chairperson's responsibility to make sure the committee understands the scope of its duties and fulfills them with care
- to maintain a close relationship with the District Superintendent and district office
- to work with other chairpersons of district committees in the conference to ensure consistent use of procedure

Registrar: The dCOM should elect a person other than the District Superintendent or the chair of the dCOM to act as registrar for the committee. The duties are:

- maintain a list of all candidates under dCOM care (§665.3) and share candidate information and status with CM
- to be the custodian for all dCOM files (all dCOM candidate files, including psychological assessment reports, belong to the annual conference) (see “record keeping” section, which follows)
- to keep a separate file on each person for whom the dCOM is responsible
- to inform the persons responsible what materials are needed for each file/interview, and instruct the dCOM on what actions to take
- to promptly (within 10 days) inform the CM of all actions taken on persons under the care of the dCOM (see One Page dCOM Action Report)
- to transfer individual files to another district or annual conference upon receipt of a written request
- to forward all candidates' files to the CM or BOM registrar when the referents become an associate or provisional member (copies of file material may be sent to the BOM along with any recommendations, without the written permission of the candidate)
- to keep all persons interviewed by the district committee informed about decisions and recommendations promptly (within 10 days) in writing

Psychological Officer: This officer should maintain communication with the BOM Psychological Officer for the receipt, utilization, and return of the psychological assessment report. The duties are:

- Receive the psychological reports from the BOM psychological officer for use in the dCOM process of candidate evaluation
- Review the psychological report for the candidate's potential for gaining sufficient levels of competence and readiness for ordained ministry
- Use the reports appropriately
- Help dCOM members interpret reports
- Honor issues of confidentiality as outlined in the Authorization for Release of Information signed by the candidate

Executive secretary (optional): This office may be filled by the District Superintendent or District Administrative Assistant. The duties are:

- to record the minutes of each meeting and distribute copies to committee members, if a recording secretary has not been assigned this responsibility
- to conduct correspondence and business necessary for the efficient functioning of the committee as directed by the chairperson

Functions of the Committee

Confidentiality

Above all, as a member of a dCOM, you must keep all conversations and all decisions strictly confidential. If there is any question about whether a certain action, statement, or story can be shared with others, assume it to be confidential until you have explicit instructions to assume otherwise.

Interviewing

Most of each committee's time together is spent interviewing candidates. dCOMS are responsible for many different types of interviews. Of course, the purpose and expectations of each interview is shaped by the decision asked for in any interview. For example, the purpose of interviewing a candidate for certification is different from the purpose of interviewing a candidate for provisional membership.

In general, when interviewing candidates for...

- ...**certification**, you are trying to determine **fitness** for ministry.
- ...**commissioning**, you are trying to determine **readiness** for ministry.
- ...**recertification**, you are trying to determine continued **fitness** for ministry and **progress** in completing theological education.
- ...**relicensing**, you are trying to determine continued **fitness** for ministry, **readiness** for licensed ministry, and **progress** in course of study.

In this resource manual, you'll find a section covering each type of interview and listing the purpose and expectations for each. Each section includes simple steps to take before, during, and after each type of interview.

However, the following guidelines apply to all interviews.

Hospitality

A candidate or local pastor coming to meet with your committee for certification, recertification, or relicensing is a stranger in your midst and should be treated as the Bible teaches us. As the committee, you are the hosts; the candidate or minister is the stranger; you should **extend hospitality**.

1. Reminding yourselves and your guests that the work you will do together is holy work, take care to **create a hospitable space**.
 - Consider setting up a simple **altar** space on the table with cloth, cross and lit candles to represent God's presence among you.
 - Consider sitting in a **circle** with your guest; not facing your guest in a line.
 - Consider breaking your committee into smaller interview teams, as necessary, so that each candidate or minister meets with a small group of **no more than eight** committee members.
2. Because you will probably meet with multiple candidates one after the other, appoint one or more representatives of your committee to serve as **host**.
 - A host should stay with the candidates waiting to interview with the committee, **welcoming** them, offering beverages and/or healthy snacks, answering any questions, and making them feel at home.
 - A second host (or a candidate's home pastor or mentor) should accompany each candidate into the interview, introducing the candidate and staying with the candidate to serve as **silent advocate**.

If a committee member asks **inappropriate questions**, either the chair or host should feel free to invite the committee member to ask another question or to ask the question in a more appropriate way.

Prayer

Begin and end each interview with prayer.

Psychological Testing Results

One of the tools the committee will use during certification interviews to help discern fitness for ministry is a summary report of psychological testing results written by a professional evaluation team after written recommendations and assessments are completed. In the Texas Annual Conference, this summary report assigns each candidate one of three categories.

Type 1 Candidate. Nothing in the testing indicates this candidate should not be in ministry. Helpful growth areas on which the candidate might focus are often listed. Note: a Type 1 designation does not mean a candidate has the gifts and graces to be effective in pastoral ministry.

Type 2 Candidate. Candidate is not ready for pastoral ministry. Candidate may have psychological issues, poor recommendations, or vocational interests that vary widely from those of successful clergy. Specific requirements are usually listed (i. e., psychotherapy, clinical pastoral education, pastoral care specialist program, working in some capacity on a church staff, etc.). One year later, after

requirements are complete, the candidate may be retested and may move to Type 1 status.

Type 3 Candidate. This individual should not ever be in professional ministry because he or she might damage himself or herself or do damage to parishioners in the church. While this category does not call into question a person's faith, such a designation means, in the opinion of the evaluators, this person should not be in ministry in the Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Follow-up

After every committee meeting, within 10 days, a dCOM representative (registrar, chair, DAA or DS) should:

1. report all committee actions to the CM on the "one page dCOM action report" page and
2. write a letter to each candidate and his or her mentor, clearly indicating the committee's decisions and any recommendations or requirements. If the candidate will continue to another step in candidacy, include a copy of the checklist for that next stage in candidacy with the letter.

Regardless of decisions made, the candidate should know the committee to be a caring community of Christians. When a difficult decision is made and the candidate is not encouraged to continue, a personal contact should be planned for the days that follow. Vocational alternatives can be explored with the candidate and assistance given in locating other employment. Candidates who experience difficulties in dealing with the board's decision should be informed about any available pastoral care options.

Record Keeping

The district committee shall maintain a service record and file on every local pastor and candidate for the ordained ministry until the individual becomes an associate or provisional member of the annual conference. A copy of the files shall then be forwarded to the CM or BOM registrar.

The records and files of the committee are kept on behalf of the annual conference and shall be maintained under guidelines provided by the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) (see ¶665.7).

In the Texas Annual Conference, we are moving toward a network-based paperless Candidacy Record system in Dove. During this transition, while working to help candidates upload files in Dove, all dCOMs should keep paper files for each candidate.