

Is God calling you into the ministry?

Perhaps you've been wondering for a while if the ministry is for you.

Perhaps you have a strong sense that the ministry is what God is calling you to give your life to.

Perhaps you've never considered it, but someone just gave you this booklet and asked you to pray and think about it!

No matter what your current situation, read on. This booklet will explain to you first steps in the discernment process.¹

A few words about ministry before we launch into the discernment process:

All Christians are called to love God, love & serve others, and use their gifts within the church and the world. The stirring you may be feeling may be God's invitation to you to dive in to your local church or your community and make a difference. That's wonderful! God needs His people on His mission in every aspect of life.

Some Christians are called to specifically lead the church (or portions of the church). These people must have (or develop) the gifts and graces for this task, and it's this group that should consider the ordained ministry.

This booklet is meant to help you figure out which category you might be in during this season of your life.

¹ This particular booklet is being used in the New South Conference of the Free Methodist Church (with special thanks to the Genesis Conference, FMC.) Some of it is specific to our system, but much of it will be helpful to anyone considering a call to ministry.

What is a “call” to ministry?

You may have heard the term “a call to ministry.” Some people think that this means a person has to hear a voice from God or see a sign in the sky. Other people think it simply means “ministry” was what you thought would give you a stable income. Some think it has to do with pedigree (my father was a pastor, therefore...). Others think it’s for people who were Bible majors in college.

The reality is that a “call to ministry” differs for many. You don’t have to have some kind of mystical experience with God to be “called.” (And some people who DO have a special experience with God, may be misreading what that experience is about).

Here’s some questions to pray and journal about. Do you have...

1. A vibrant personal walk with Christ?

*Can you articulate your story of how you have come to follow Jesus? How He has transformed you?

*What does following Jesus mean to you on a day-by-day basis? What is He currently teaching you from your Bible reading? How you are currently walking by faith?

*Where are the places where your walk with Christ is not yet “vibrant” but you want it to be?

Take some time and journal your thoughts here:

Is my personal relationship with God really important?

Yes.

Ministry isn’t simply about preaching, or helping people, or casting vision, or creating plans. Ministry is about being an authentic model to those you lead of what it means to be a fully committed follower of Jesus.

A good question for a pastor to ask themselves is: Am I living the life that I’m hoping those I lead will live?

Do you have...

2. A passion for both God and His people?

Some of what you'll need to be an effective minister includes:

- a passion for people
- a passion for God and building His Kingdom
- a passion for studying and living God's Word (the Bible)
- strong people skills
- good communication skills
- an ability to lead others (understanding that there are many ways to lead).

Ponder each above areas. Where are you strong? Weak? Journal your thoughts here:

Am I a leader?

Sometimes people think they are leaders... when they're not. Other times someone thinks there is a no way they are a leader... but everyone around follows their lead!

How do you know you're a leader?
You influence others. People follow you.

Have you recently organized a group of friends to go do something together? You're leading. Recently seen a need at church and organized a group to handle it? You're a leader. Brought about change in a group or organization? You're leading.

Want a quick way to figure out if you are a leader? Try to get something going. A bible study, an outreach event, a dinner to connect new people at church.
See what happens.

What happens if you really feel called to ministry, but don't yet have experience or ability to lead?

Talk to your pastor or a mentor. Often leadership skills can be learned.

BAD REASONS TO GO INTO MINISTRY...

I went to seminary...
I have to use that
degree for something!

My mom always
wanted a pastor in
the family.

Church is a safe place
for me... I want to
stay safe.

I love to study the
Bible, and I want to
do that all day.

**Do any of these
reasons ring true to
you?**

I like to be in charge. I have
ideas that no one else will listen
to. If I become a pastor I can
make the church follow my
ideas.

I love Jesus and want to
serve Him! (That's great!
All Christians should. But
that's not a call to
ministry.)

What have you learned as you've journaled and prayed? Has the desire to be in ministry grown? Have more questions come to mind? Or have you concluded that this isn't for you? If you think that perhaps ministry may be something God is leading you to, the following pages outline the first steps to take within the New South Conference of the Free Methodist Church towards ordained ministry.

What is ordination?

It is a ritual of "the laying on of hands" (1 Timothy 4:14, 5:22, Timothy 1:6) where the church recognizes the call you have to ministry and formally sets you apart (ordains) you for that call. Ordination happens at a special service during our spring Annual Conference.

Becoming a Local Ministerial Candidate (LMC)

As you explore whether or not you have a call to the ordained ministry, it's important to have a mentor to talk to along the way. In the Free Methodist denomination, the first step towards the ordained ministry is to become a Local Ministerial Candidate (LMC). And the first step to becoming an LMC is to meet with your pastor² to talk.

Talk to your pastor about (fill in date completed):

_____ Your sense of call. Perhaps go through your journal notes above. Why do you think God may be inviting you towards the ministry? Is it the ministry of an Elder within the FMC? (box to the right)

_____ What he or she sees as your personality, skills, and gifts, and what they think about your call.

_____ If they are in favor of you becoming a LMC³, put together a "formation plan" (next page) with them on what you need to do to grow or explore your call in the coming year. Then:

Talk to your local church board:

_____ Discuss with them your sense of call. Answer their questions, listen for feedback. (The Book of Discipline gives these questions in Paragraph 8700). If they approve you to become a LMC, then:

Sign up for the ordination candidacy process with both the FM denomination and the New South Conference (the Conference is the regional oversight body within the denomination. New South covers Kentucky, Tennessee and the Carolinas.

_____ <http://fmcusa.org/leadership/>

_____ Contact the New South Conference office: newsouthconference@gmail.com to let us know you are an LMC. (Please note: after getting registered on fmcusa.org, all other correspondence should go through the conference office.)

² We assume that if someone is entering the ordination process with the Free Methodist Church, that they are currently a member of a local Free Methodist Church. If this is not the case, contact the Conference office to find out about options.

³ There are rare cases when one pastor may not recognize a person's call, but another may. If your pastor does not believe you are called, but you still do, contact the Conference office to ask for a second opinion.

Different ministry recognition within the Free Methodist Church:

***Elder:** When the Bishop ordains in the FMC, the ordinand becomes an Elder. An ordained Elder in the FMC is "itinerant," meaning that they are willing to move when God and the church calls. Ordained Elders are also members of the Conference and therefore involved & committed at a Conference level.

***Deacon:** Some people are clearly called to a specific ministry, in a specific place, for a specific time (for example, someone who is leading children's ministry, but has no plan to move and no desire for further involvement at a Conference level). Deacons are consecrated at the local church level. If this fits you, discuss becoming a Deacon with your pastor.

***Ministry lay leader:** Many people are highly committed to ministry, but in a non-pastor capacity. The FMC celebrates our lay (non-clergy) leadership as well as those ordained. Lay leaders have an opportunity to be involved at the Conference level, as all Conference committees are made up of 1/2 clergy and 1/2 laity.

Your time as an LMC is meant to be a time of exploration; of determining whether or not to pursue this call. Most people are LMCs from one to four years. Once certain that you want to move forward, you can begin the process of becoming a CMC (Conference Ministerial Candidate.)

LMC FORMATION PLAN (fill in dated completed):

_____ Take *Free Methodist History and Polity*. Possible ways and places include:

*Both an online & correspondence course is offered through the denomination:

<http://fmcusa.org/leadership/courses/>

*Periodically one of our churches will offer this course. Contact the Conference office.

_____ Read: *The Call* by Keith Drury. Discuss it with your pastor.

_____ Read: (what other book may be helpful at this point on your journey? Your pastor will have recommendations)

_____ Gather a prayer team. Ask a group of people to be praying for you as you go through this journey.

_____ If you aren't yet leading something, ask the pastor where you might start. This could be a Bible study, an event, a class, or a new initiative.

_____ Other items that you and your pastor determine are growth areas to work on before becoming a Conference Ministerial Candidate:

_____ Meet regularly with your pastor to update them on your progress.

Common LMC Questions:

Can you be a pastor as an LMC? Yes. You can be hired onto a staff without being ordained. Or you can be "appointed" to be a lead pastor as an LMC (usually if you have ministry experience) and continue the ordination process while being a part-time or full-time pastor.

What if I (or my spouse) is divorced? Free Methodist's have a process called "divorce clearance." We will ask questions about your divorce and interview you to insure that you have taken appropriate steps towards healing and healthy relationships. Divorce Clearance must be given before you become a Conference Ministerial Candidate (CMC).

What if I think I'm called to ministry but my pastor doesn't? Take time to understand your pastor's concern. In rare cases, another pastor or the MEG board may disagree with your pastor's assessment. You are free to ask the MEG or another pastor for their thoughts,

understanding that the other pastor or the MEG will want to hear your pastor's thoughts as well.

What if my pastor and my church believe I'm called to Elders ordination, but at my CMC interview, the MEG board disagrees? Again, listen to their concerns. Discuss them with your pastor. If the interview was simply a "bad day" you or your pastor may advocate for another interview.

What if I'm at college (or somewhere else) and can't attend my local FMC? Talk to your pastor. Usually, it's possible to continue your formation plan from afar and check in periodically with your pastor via phone or video conference.

NEXT STEP: Conference Ministerial Candidate (CMC):

See the CMC brochure, available at the conference office or website.

Head:

Three academic courses are required, all are offered by Asbury Theological Seminary, alternating online and on-campus options and through other denominational options. Equivalency is necessary, however.

Heart:

You will journey as a CMC with a Conference Mentor, creating a formation plan similar to your LMC formation plan, with exercises and activities that will prepare you personally for ministry.

Hands:

Through conference and local church ministry, you will learn practical skills for leading a church and developing others.

The CMC process is one where we walk with you as you learn and discern whether or not ministry is your call. The process normally takes a minimum of 3 years. When completed successfully, you become an ordained Elder in the Free Methodist Church.

Local Ministerial Candidate Checklist

Candidate Name: _____ Local F.M. Church: _____

- ___ Discuss your call to ministry with a local FM pastor
- ___ Assemble a prayer team who will pray with you through the process
- ___ Become a member of a local Free Methodist church, if not already
- ___ Declare your call to ministry with a your local FM Board of Administration
- ___ Register with Free Methodist Ministerial Development and Credentialing (MD&C)
- ___ Divorce clearance (where applicable)
- ___ Complete the Free Methodist History and Polity class
- ___ Upload transcripts to conference office and MD&C
- ___ Complete the StrengthsFinder Assessment – sending results to Conference and MD&C

Turn in to Conference Superintendent:

- ___ Ordination Theological Questionnaire (baseline)
- ___ Names of 3 references (Mentor, Layperson, Ministry Peer)
- ___ Completed Spouse Questionnaire (where applicable)
- ___ Written testimony of faith and call
- ___ History and Polity class grade and assessment
- ___ Sample sermon or Bible lesson
- ___ List of most influential books, teachers, mentors
- ___ Complete and current ministry resume

- ___ Interview with NSC Ministerial Education and Guidance Board, which will recommend either:
 - Non-credentialed service
 - Additional discernment
 - Diaconate
 - Provisional CMC status pending AC approval...if this option, then:

- ___ Conference Ministerial Candidate approval at next scheduled Annual Conference

Ordination Theological Questionnaire
Free Methodist Church, USA

1. Explain your understanding of God. What adjectives would you use to describe Him? How would you describe yourself in relation to God?
2. Speak to us about the sufficiency and authority of Scripture.
3. Give an overview of your understanding of the salvation process – what John Wesley called the “order of salvation” from before faith to heaven.
4. What are the key differences between a Wesleyan and Reformed view of salvation? In your answer, help us to know that you understand and “own” a Wesleyan-Arminian perspective.
5. In your own words, describe a Wesleyan understanding of sin and salvation, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the meaning of entire sanctification. How do you evaluate or relate to these understandings?
6. How do the Scriptures understand the church (its nature, composition, and mission)?
7. What is your theology of worship? What are the essentials of the proper worship of God? How do matters of style and preference relate to the practice of worship?
8. Describe your devotional life (methods, resources, etc.). What have you done recently to keep your relationship with God alive and growing?
9. What is your understanding of the NT teaching on the gifts of the Spirit? What is your specific position on “speaking in tongues”?
10. How do you understand the role of the pastor? What are the pastoral essentials in caring for a congregation?
11. Of what significance is ordination? Reflect on its meaning for the church, its mission and its pastoral and lay leadership?
12. Our ordination ritual gives the Scriptures and their witness to Christ a central place in our church. Comment on your intentions relative to the Scriptures and their place or role in your future ministry.
13. What is your view of women in the ordained ministry? How do you interpret the most significant Pauline directives regarding women in the church? How do you respond to the passages that describe

women fully engaged in ministry with Paul and others? Please comment on Galatians 3:28 regarding there being neither “male nor female” as it applies to ministry.

14. What is the responsibility of a 21st Century and congregation to the Great Commandment and Great Commission? How do you envision leading a congregation in fulfilling the Great Commandment and Great Commission?

15. What is your view of pastoral “authority”? What is your understanding of how a pastor works with and relates to the lay leaders and the Board of Administration of the congregation to which you are assigned in bringing change in mission, vision or styles of worship? How do you relate to those in authority over you?

Theological Proficiency Assessment: Situational Responses

The purpose of these questions is to provide an opportunity for you to articulate your understanding of some of the basic tenets of Wesleyan theology and their implications for ministry. Using Holy Scripture, Wesley’s sermons, and the teachings of the Free Methodist Church, please respond as fully and clearly as possible in 500-1000 words per item.

For each of the following categories, please select and respond to either 1 or 2. Include at least one 1 and at least one 2 in your final submission. In other words, please do not respond to only 1s or only 2s.

Category 1: The Nature of Scripture

1. The teaching of the historic church regarding the nature of Jesus Christ as the revealed/living Word is that he is fully God and fully human. The church has also taught that Scripture is the written Word, and, analogously, is also fully divine and fully human. Reflect on the nature of Scripture as fully divine and fully human. In your response, be sure to include your thoughts on at least the following items:

- the sufficiency of Scripture to reveal the way of salvation;
- the dangers of those understandings of the nature of Scripture that over-emphasize either the divine or human aspects; and,
- how this understanding of Scripture informs the practice of ministry.

2. You have just settled into your new pastoral appointment and receive an invitation to the monthly ecumenical clergy gathering that meets in your town. Thankful for the opportunity to meet other pastors, you decide to attend. Over lunch, a rather passionate discussion about the nature of Scripture ensues that reaches an awkward conclusion with the following exchange:

Susan: Well, the truth is that every religious tradition has its own scriptures or sacred texts to which they look for the teachings of their own faith. But all of them are essentially the same: they are all expressions of the basic human impulse to name and understand the divine. It doesn’t ultimately matter which sacred texts one follows; what matters is whether one’s interpretation and practices lead to the common good of all people.

Jim: Really?! Why would anyone ever want to come to your church, Susan? In our church, we believe that the Holy Bible, comprised of books of the Old and New Testaments, was dictated by God to human authors who wrote precisely what God told them to write. The Bible is fully inerrant and is the only true Scripture. The so-called sacred texts of other religions contain no truth and are only an instrument of Satan to deceive to keep people from coming to living faith in Christ.

Juan: Our church teaches that the Scriptures include the books of the Old and New Testaments, but also include additional sacred writings often called the Apocrypha. All of these are means through which we learn God's truth. But, in addition to the Holy Scriptures, we firmly believe that God authoritatively guides the church through the passing on of Sacred Tradition.

At this point, your new colleagues turn to you and ask, so what does the Free Methodist Church teach about the nature of Holy Scripture?

Write a response in which you articulate to your new friends the helpfulness of an incarnational model that sees Scripture as both fully divine and fully human. In your response, be sure to include your thoughts on at least the following items:

- the sufficiency of Scripture to reveal the way of salvation;
- the dangers of those understandings of the nature of Scripture that over-emphasize either the divine or human aspects; and,
- how this understanding of Scripture informs your practice of ministry.

Category 2: The Way of Salvation

1. Sketch as clearly as possible your understanding of the key tenets of a Wesleyan theology of salvation. While your response may include more, it must include a discussion of prevenient grace, justifying grace, regeneration, and sanctifying grace. What is involved in each component? How does Wesleyan theology make a difference in your practice of ministry?

2. Your new ministry is going well and you are grateful to have several new people in your newcomers' class. During a session on the church's understanding of the biblical teaching about salvation, you ask the group to share any teaching they've had in the past or perspectives they may currently hold. Among the responses are the following:

Jamal: I was always taught that some people are chosen by God for salvation and some people are not. I think they called it the doctrine of election or predestination . . . or something like that. I have to admit that it never seemed very fair to me, but the people were genuinely loving and Christ-like, and truly had a beautiful sense of comfort from knowing in their hearts that they had been chosen by a sovereign God for eternal salvation.

Mary: I'm really not so sure about the whole idea of salvation. I mean, what is it salvation for or from? What I really get when I come to church is encouragement and support to be a good person. It's so good to hear stories about the real-life struggles of people in the Bible and, especially, the example of Jesus who just amazes me every time I learn more about him. He really shows us how to live a good life that truly pleases God and helps others.

Natalie: For me, salvation was firmly connected to being a part of the church. In fact, as a child I was consistently taught that being a part of the church was an act of faith and trust that would ultimately lead to an eternity with God. I'm not sure whether I still believe this, but it does trouble me that so many branches of Christianity really seem only to emphasize an individual relationship with a personal Jesus with or without the church as Christ's Body on the earth.

Jaden: It seems like all I ever heard was legalism. It was either about a particular set of beliefs one had to hold or about a holy life a person had to achieve. Either way, the message was clear: if you failed, you were surely doomed to an eternity in hell, a place of fire and everlasting torment. None of it seemed very loving to me, so I just walked away from it all.

Write a response in which you seek to articulate a Wesleyan understanding of the doctrine of salvation and how it might bring clarity to the broad range of perspectives in your newcomers' class. Be sure that your response includes a presentation on prevenient grace, justifying grace, regeneration, and sanctifying grace, and what is involved in each component.

Category 3: The Sacraments

1. Wesley understood the means of grace as those outward signs, words, or actions that are ordained by God to be the normal channels through which God conveys prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace. In your response, discuss the nature, role, and efficacy of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, including the place of infant baptism and believer's baptism, the significance of the Lord's Supper, and the implications of a Free Methodist understanding of the sacraments for local church ministry and practice.

2. A young couple in your church asks you if they could schedule a time to meet with you to talk about baptizing their new baby. You are excited about the opportunity and schedule a time to visit them in their home the following week. During the meeting, they ask for your pastoral perspective on a dilemma in which they find themselves. Having come to a recommitment in their faith while attending your church, they both would like the baby to be baptized as an infant. Javier is far more comfortable with infant baptism due to his Roman Catholic background, but because of his newly recovered personal faith in Christ he doesn't want it to be merely perfunctory. Makayla would also prefer that the baby be baptized but has already begun to experience resistance from her father who insists that infant baptism is not valid because the baby cannot possibly have faith in Christ for herself. Further, Makayla's father argues that the whole notion of "sacraments" is a religious myth very much akin to magic. There are no sacraments, he says; rather, baptism and the Lord's Supper should be called ordinances because they are nothing more than human responses to God's grace. Because they were commanded by Christ, our obligation is simply to obey as a sign of our response. Javier and Makayla feel trapped: both families live in the area and will certainly be present on the Sunday of the baptism. They ask you to help them understand the church's theology of the sacraments in hopes that they will be able to respond to their family members on both sides.

Write out the main lines of your response to Javier and Makayla, noting the nature, role, and efficacy of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper in the Free Methodist Church. In your discussion, include the church's understanding of the place of infant baptism and believer's baptism, the significance of the Lord's Supper, as well as implications for local church practice.

Category 4: The Ministry

1. Discuss your understanding of the church's teaching regarding the general ministry of all believers by virtue of faith in Christ/baptism and the representative ministry of some believers by virtue of ordination. What are the similarities and differences of focus between these two aspects of the ministry of Christ's church? What are the particular roles and functions of each? Describe your sense of calling and what ordination means for the ministry to which you feel called. Your discussion should include your understanding of the place and function of ordained ministry in the Free Methodist Church and what it means to submit to the authority and guidance of the church with regard to pastoral appointments and ministerial service.

2. Tamika is a member of your congregation who is home from college on spring break. She tells you that she is really wrestling with a call to ministry and asks if you would be willing to give her some pastoral and vocational guidance to help her discern her calling. As a pre-med major, she was surprised when she began to feel an internal nudging toward ordained ministry. She now wonders whether her desire to be a medical doctor was in reality a calling to help people become spiritually whole. She asks you if you could clarify the differences between the general ministry of all believers by virtue of faith in Christ/baptism and the representative ministry of some believers by virtue of ordination.

Write a reply in which you articulate how you would respond to Tamika's struggle. Seek to help clarify her understanding of the nature of ministry, as well as what ordained ministry in the Free Methodist Church might mean for her, should the Lord lead in that direction.

Category 5: Human Equality

1. Articulate your understanding of the teaching of Scripture on the full equality of all humanity as created in the image of God, with particular attention to the roles of women in church, home, and society. In your discussion, include your thinking on how the teachings of Scripture and the Free Methodist Church reflect your own perspectives, as well as some of the implications there might be for your own practice of ministry.

2. After several pastoral conversations with Tamika and much soul searching on her own, she has come to a place of confidently affirming God's call upon her life to pursue ordained ministry. When she comes to tell you the news, you are able to sense both the clarity of her calling as well as a troubling overtone of concern in her voice. Asking her if everything is okay, she begins to explain that several of her friends and family members—people she deeply respects—have told her in no uncertain terms that Scripture is crystal clear in its teaching that only men can be ordained to Christian ministry. They tell her that they certainly believe in the equal rights of all people, but that even though men and women are equal in the eyes of God, they were never created to be equivalent in the area of roles and responsibilities. They argue that it is radical feminism that has caused some branches of the church to stray from a biblical view of manhood and womanhood. Tamika's family and friends firmly believe Scripture teaches that men were created to be leaders in the church and in the home. Women, on the other hand, were intended to be supportive and to function in their God-given, complementary roles in relation to men as leaders. Moreover, as an African American woman, Tamika shares privately with you that she is deeply troubled by what appears to her to be yet another chapter in a long journey of feeling oppressed by people in power. She tearfully asks, "Is there really a place for a person like me in the Free Methodist Church?"

Write a response in which you seek to help Tamika understand the teaching of Scripture on the full equality of all humanity, with particular attention to the roles of women in church, home, and society. Be sure to include a direct response to Tamika's poignant question in which you are honest both about the warts and aspirations of the Free Methodist Church with regard to women in ministry.

Category 6: Human Sexuality

1. Please write on the use of grace and truth in ministry to those who identify as LGBTQ.

Questions to consider:

- How can we embody courageous love toward all others?
- How may we also walk faithfully with the scriptures which give guidance on sexuality and marriage and that were breathed out by the same God who breathed out the cosmos?

Write out a plan for the local church board and ministry leaders that navigates the turbulent waters of faith, sexuality and gender that is both theologically orthodox in understanding and grace-filled in practice.

2. You are leading a small group on the local University campus with students, a faculty member, and an administrative assistant of one of the departments. The topic of human sexuality and practice has come up with the following exchange:

Mike: I think that all the gender classifications are out of control. I mean, what someone does in their own home is up to them, but I shouldn't have to memorize new classifications that we all know are not in the Bible.

Janice: Jesus never explicitly mentioned homosexuality in the four gospels of the New Testament. He talked about fornication, adultery, lust, marriage, divorce, and other aspects of sexuality. But he never mentioned same-sex sexual relations. So why shouldn't we accommodate different sexual practices as long as they are monogamous? Love is love.

Steve: Is being gay a sin? I have an uncle who is, and he is always good to me. I was taught by my parents that he is a good man, but not living as God desires. My mom said our attractions and orientations don't make us sinful or holy—it's what we do with our attractions and orientations that counts in the eyes of God.

Jack: So gang, I have leanings both ways sexually... I like all experiences. Can I still come to this group? You have invited me to your church; can I still come? What if I want to join your church, pastor?

Write a response in which you articulate the orthodox theological understanding of scripture on the subject of sexual practice, gender designation, and marriage. Include what your response will be to Jackson in regard to welcome, inclusion/non-inclusion, and membership in the FMCUSA at your local church.