

Guidelines for Consideration of Behavioral Health for Professionals in Ministry

Prepared by the Michigan Board of Ordained Ministry

Introduction and Purpose

In the process of discerning candidates for ministry, the District Committees on Ordained Ministry (dCOM) and Boards of Ordained Ministry (BOM) are tasked with identifying each potential candidate's "gifts, evidence of God's grace, and usefulness" (§301.2, see also §605.6, 2008 Discipline). The overarching pastoral concern for both the Church and candidates is to maximize effectiveness in ministry while minimizing ineffectiveness and harm to all involved, both presently and in the future.

The United Methodist Church's District Committees on Ordained Ministry (dCOM) and Boards of Ordained Ministry (BOM) aim to identify leaders and ministers within our denomination who have been called by God to follow Christ and will diligently lead by example in guiding others to be transformed by Christ as they move towards perfection. This involves adherence to the concept of prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace by turning away from sin, seeking forgiveness, and striving to live lives that reflect Christ's teachings.

Therefore, these guidelines on mental and behavioral health have been established to describe the boundaries of healthy functioning. The aim is to address concerns that could pose problems for the church, its ministry, and the individuals involved. Central to these guidelines is consideration of how experiences impact a person's inner being or spirit and how a person's inner spirit influences behavioral patterns. Concerns about a person's mental, emotional status, and behavioral patterns, including mental processing, emotional states, identity, personal boundaries, and responses to stress, are integral to our pastoral concern in our shared ministry.

While most professionals will meet these standards, some may exhibit behaviors or conditions that require further exploration. Questions and appropriate actions are provided to facilitate this exploration. If concerns persist, the Board or Committee may take action, such as postponement of the candidacy process for further exploration or remediation, or in some cases, permanent disqualification.

This document is meant for use by the Michigan Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM) and by District Committees on Ordained Ministry (dCOM). For these groups, its purpose is to provide guidance regarding appropriate topics of mutual exploration with candidates and ministers. **No single standard is to be interpreted as a hard criterion for termination from candidacy and professional ministry.**

The document is particularly important for use by Candidates for Ministry. For candidates, one purpose is to provide clarity on the types of questions and discussion topics that they should expect as they pursue United Methodist credentials in the Michigan Conference. A second purpose is as a guide for personal reflection and self-interrogation. The questions included here can be thought of as follow-ons to, “How is it with your soul?”

Interviews with candidates on the topics in this document are not the sole criterion used by BOM and dCOM in assessing a candidate’s behavioral health. The required psychological assessment and legal background check are relevant sources. In addition, all public communications, including postings on social media, provide information about a candidate’s ability to exercise self-control, to understand the representative role of the ordained person, and to communicate in a manner that is constructive and respectful.

Framework

For each section that follows, Wesley’s Three Simple Rules provide the organizing framework:

- General Rule #1: **Do no harm.** Ministers should seek ways to avoid doing harm to themselves, others, and their relationship with God.
- General Rule #2: **Do good.** Ministers should be intentional in living a God-directed life.
- General Rule #3: **Attend upon all the ordinances of God and stay in love with God.** Ministers should consciously work to sustain a lifelong call.

Definitions

Category: A general area of concern.

Standard: An indicator or description of desired and acceptable behavior.

Rationale: An explanation of the standard.

Exploratory Question: A recommended question to the candidate/minister which may assist in assessing whether further exploration of the standard may be necessary.

Candidate: Refers to a person seeking any change of status in Early and Advanced Candidacy.

Minister: Any licensed professional in ministry under the supervision of BOM or dCOM

Marriage/Covenanted Partnership: a relationship bound by God and in community

Category: Physical Health

Standard: The candidate/minister has addressed any physical health conditions, including chronic health concerns, that might prohibit vibrant ministry.

Rationale:

Responsible preventive health care maximizes the functional abilities of the individual, representing holistic care of the self.

Exploratory Questions:

1. Do No Harm: How do you prioritize maintaining your physical health? What practices do you engage in to ensure your well-being? When did you last seek medical guidance for your health?

2. Do Good: Are there any ongoing health concerns or conditions you are managing? If so, how do you actively address them?

3. Stay in Love with God: Reflect on how your physical health influences your capacity to serve as a minister. How do you integrate self-care practices into your ministry to ensure your effectiveness and longevity in service?

Category: Management of Personal Finances

Standard: The candidate/minister is fiscally responsible and not in debt in ways that may impede duties or tarnish the Church's reputation.

Rationale:

While this may not, on the surface, seem to be a behavioral health issue, personal financial management has to do with general maturity, including the ability to set priorities, maintain discipline, and delay gratification. Difficulties in this area raise concerns about judgment and impulse control.

Exploratory Questions:

Do No Harm: Are there any financial obligations or concerns that might compromise your ability to meet your basic needs or demonstrate responsible financial management within your ministry community?

Do Good: Can you identify any extenuating circumstances that may have contributed to your current financial situation? Examples could include significant medical expenses or personal challenges like divorce. How are you using your material resources to bless others in your daily life and ministry?

Stay in Love with God: Reflect on how you handle financial difficulties and how they align with your commitment to ministry. How do you intend to navigate and overcome these challenges while maintaining integrity and trustworthiness in your role as clergy?

Category: Mental Wellness

Standard: The candidate/minister has addressed mental health conditions that might impede fruitful ministry.

Rationale:

Effective ministers need to maintain healthy personal boundaries and care for their psychological well-being. They must have an ability to act in the interest of the common good. They must not use the platform of ministry unknowingly or primarily as a salve for unresolved personal pain. Inquiring about a candidate's/minister's self-care practices is a means of fulfilling the clergy covenant to be in Beloved Community as partners in ministry.

Exploratory Questions:

Do No Harm: Do you notice in yourself unconstructive or highly emotional responses to conflict? Do you notice in yourself a tendency to seek out ministry situations that address your own needs for healing, perhaps lessening your focus on others? Have you suffered past experiences (abuse, trauma) that you believe may be impacting the quality of your relationships or your effectiveness in ministry? Would your peers or those closest to you agree with your self-assessment? What barriers do you face in addressing these issues?

Do Good: Reflect on the challenges you encounter in prioritizing rest, seeking support from a community, and establishing healthy boundaries to prevent burnout and maintain compassion in ministry. What routines or practices do you engage in to maintain your psychological well-being? Are you currently or have you already done work to understand the role of past pain in how you deal with the issues of life and ministry? What about overcoming counterproductive habits and responses? How can you sustain and expand on the benefits of this work?

Stay in Love with God: Are you equipped with the necessary resources and knowledge to seek professional help for any mental health concerns you may face? How do you plan to integrate self-care and professional support into your ministry journey to ensure your own well-being and effectiveness as a clergy member? If you have faced significant mental health challenges, can you share your story and approaches?

Category: Substance Use Disorders and Addictive Behavior Disorders
(Includes disorders involving use of alcohol, marijuana, opioids, stimulants, sedatives, cocaine and hallucinogens, and addictive behaviors such as gambling.)

Standard: The candidate/minister has addressed any misuse or abuse of addictive substances or behaviors.

Rationale:

Substance use disorders and addictive behavior disorders are chronic neurobiological diseases, evidence of which is seen in marked impairment in any or all of the following areas: social, behavioral, physical, school/employment, decision making, and safety. Candidates/Ministers who suffer from these disorders will have greatly limited effectiveness and are at much greater risk for professional misconduct.

Exploratory Questions:

Do No Harm: Reflect on the role that alcohol, drugs and/or gambling play in your daily life and its impact on your well-being and relationships. Do you have a history of disordered or problematic use of substances or of gambling? Can you honestly affirm that you strive to do no harm to yourself or others, including avoiding behaviors that may lead to addiction or harm? Would your peers or those closest to you agree with your self-assessment?

Do Good: Can you attest to your commitment to do good to yourself and others, including seeking help when needed and walking in the path of healing and restoration? Are you currently in recovery, and if so for how long? What are you currently doing to maintain your recovery? Can you outline your ongoing efforts to stay on the path of righteousness, including practicing self-care, engaging in healthy habits, and nurturing your spiritual and emotional well-being?

Stay in Love with God: How does your relationship with alcohol, other substances and addictive behavior align with your spiritual values and your call to ministry? How do you integrate principles of sobriety and self-care into your spiritual practice and ministry work? If you are in recovery, consider sharing your journey towards recovery and remission.

Category: Family and Interpersonal Conflict

Standard: The candidate/minister consistently works to resolve family and personal conflict in a grace-filled manner.

Rationale:

Leaders in representative ministry are responsible for modeling assertive, non-violent means of conflict resolution. It is helpful to ascertain the candidate's ability to remain emotionally regulated and to resolve interpersonal conflicts successfully.

Exploratory Questions:

Do No Harm: Do you sometimes respond to interpersonal frustration with difficult-to-control emotions, or in ways that people around you interpret as overbearing, coercive or threatening? Would your peers or those closest to you agree with your self-assessment? Have you ever been involved in a legal process centered on family conflict that involves you? Is there a history of violence in your immediate or extended family? What was your role in that violence? Can you confirm your commitment to do no harm, striving to create an environment of peace and safety within your family and community?

Do Good: Can you assure us of your dedication to do good, actively seeking reconciliation and resolution in any familial or interpersonal conflicts or legal matters you may be involved in? Reflect on your ability to cede control within interpersonal relationships and to recognize the sacred autonomy of others. If this has been a struggle, what has been helpful to you?

Stay in Love with God: Can you share how you endeavor to stay in right relationship with yourself and others? If you have wrestled with issues of past or current experiences of abuse, can you share how you seek healing and restoration, while also working towards forgiveness and reconciliation where possible? If you have struggled with issues of interpersonal frustration and control, within your family or in other relationships, can you share what has helped? How does it relate to your understanding of your role in ministry?

Category: Marriage/Covenanted Partnerships and Fidelity

(The use of Marriage includes covenanted partnership, with recognition of the many years that covenanted partnerships were not recognized as valid and as being marriages)

Standard: The candidate/minister articulates and demonstrates an understanding of the significance of the quality of their marriage/covenanted partnership.

Rationale:

If the candidate/minister has been divorced, or if there is evidence of infidelity, the candidate must have done sufficient exploratory and reparative work to

demonstrate and/or articulate the impact of the health of covenanted life on the quality of ministry.

Exploratory Questions:

Do No Harm: Have you experienced damage to a marriage/covenanted partnership? Have you experienced the dissolution of this partnership? *Note: The ending of a relationship invites both partners to understand that each partner bears a role and a wound in the ending of that covenant.* Can you reflect on your commitment to do no harm, including seeking understanding of your role in the dissolution of your relationship and taking responsibility for any actions or behaviors that may have contributed to it?

Do Good: Can you share how you have endeavored to do good by actively engaging in a healthy grief process, seeking support and guidance as you navigate through this challenging time? Can you affirm your commitment to maintain fidelity in your marriage/covenanted partnership, or if fidelity has been compromised, can you explain the steps you have taken to understand your actions and decisions, seeking reconciliation, forgiveness, and growth in order to honor current and future covenanted relationships?

Stay In Love with God: How have you been able to use your experiences in intimate relationships to reflect God's love for all people? Can you share your efforts to stay in right relationship with yourself and others, including identifying and addressing any dysfunctional patterns in your intimate relationships, in accordance with Wesley's call to stay in right relationship with God?

Category: Sexual Integrity

Standard: The candidate/minister lives with integrity in their intimate relationships and professional life relationships. The candidate/minister has no history, complaints, or charges of improper sexual conduct. See addendum for definitions of improper sexual conduct.

Rationale:

Candidates/Ministers must model in their personal life and behavior a healthy and sacred view of sexuality so as not to misuse the clerical office.

Exploratory Questions:

Do No Harm: Are you able to practice self-monitoring and self-awareness when faced with sexual temptations? Have you ever had a complaint or charge (either formal or informal) of sexual harassment or misconduct brought against you? (If so, describe the circumstances.)

Do Good: Can you reflect on your commitment to do no harm, including recognizing and acknowledging any past instances where harm may have occurred through actions or behaviors that resulted in a complaint or charge of sexual harassment or misconduct?

Can you share how you have sought to do good by taking responsibility for your actions, seeking understanding of the impact they may have had, and actively engaging in efforts to promote safety, respect, and dignity for all individuals within your sphere of influence? Are you a part of a clergy covenant relationship or other confidential group that promotes mutual accountability and support?

Stay in Love with God: Can you discuss your commitment to stay in right relationship with God, yourself and others? What measures have you taken to prevent any occurrence of sexual misconduct, such as seeking education, training, accountability, and ongoing reflection and self-awareness? Have you sought professional counseling and/or spiritual direction to work on residual guilt or shame?

ADDENDUM

Definitions of Improper Sexual Conduct Include, but are not limited to the following modalities: physical contact, phone, text, or Internet

1. Sexual harassment

Includes solicitation, physical advances, or verbal or nonverbal conduct consisting of a single intense or severe act, or of multiple persistent or pervasive acts, by a candidate toward another individual, that are sexual in nature and occur whether in connection with the candidate's clerical activities or personal life, and that are unwelcome, offensive, or create a hostile environment for the affected individual.

2. Sexual impropriety

Sexual impropriety (in person, by phone, text, or internet) is deliberate or repeated comments, gestures, or physical acts of a sexual nature that include but are not limited to:

- a) behavior, gestures or expressions which may reasonably be interpreted as inappropriately seductive or sexually demeaning,
- b) making inappropriate comments about an individual's body,
- c) making sexually demeaning comments to an individual,
- d) making comments about an individual's potential sexual performance,
- e) in a counseling relationship, requesting details of a person's sexual history when not clinically indicated for the type of consultation,
- f) requesting a date,
- g) initiating conversation regarding the sexual problems,

preferences, or fantasies of either party,

h) kissing of a sexual nature,

i) sharing or displaying pornographic material with another person.

3. **Deviant sexual behaviors**

Deviant sexual behaviors include, but are not limited to, behaviors such as pedophilia, exhibitionism, or other paraphilias, and preoccupation with pornographic materials for sexual stimulation and gratification.