

Is God calling you into the ministry?

Perhaps you've been wondering for awhile 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.*

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.

* This particular booklet is being used in the Genesis Conference of the Free Methodist Church. 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!

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

My mom always wanted a pastor in the family

Any of these reasons ring a bit true?

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.)

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

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 Genesis 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 Annual Conference in May.

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 pastor† 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 LMC‡, 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 Genesis Conference (the Conference is the regional oversight body within the denomination. Genesis is in NY and PA.):

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

_____ Contact Katrina Wilkins at the Genesis Office: katrina@genesismc.com to let her know you are an LMC. (Please note: after getting registered on fmcusa.org, all other correspondence should go through Katrina at the Genesis office.

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).

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

‡ 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.

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/>
*NES (Northeastern Seminary) in North Chili will periodically offer this course.
 (585) 594-6800.
*Periodically one of our churches will offer this course. Contact the Conference office or
check the Conference website to learn more.

_____ 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.

Here's the LMC full checklist. Have a plan to get it all done!

- _____ Register with ministerial credentialing (<http://fmcusa.org/leadership/mcs-signup/>)
- _____ Be an active member of a local Free Methodist Church
- _____ Talk to your pastor, then the church board about your call to ministry. Pastor & board affirm call.
 (With church board, respond to LMC questions from FMC Book of Discipline, par. 8700).
- _____ Determine LMC mentor (usually the lead pastor).
- _____ Assemble a prayer team to support you through this process.
- _____ Send Transcripts of any college credits/courses to the Conference office.
- _____ Divorce Clearance (when applicable). *(If you or your spouse has been divorced, request the
paperwork needed to begin the divorce clearance process.)*
- _____ Create LMC Formation Plan (above) and meet monthly with mentor to discuss.
- _____ Complete FM History & Polity Course.
- _____ Do Spiritual Gifts and Strength Finders tests. *(Katrina will send links once you register as an LMC)*

- _____ Complete Spiritual Autobiography (write out your spiritual journey. Share with your mentor)
- _____ Complete the LMC theological proficiency assessment (Appendix. Please note: the assessment is simply to get a sense of the candidate's current understanding. This is not something to study for.)
- _____ Pastor/Mentor signs off on LMC checklist & **gives a reference the Conference**
- _____ Request MEG interview (request by Dec 1 for Annual Conference in May)
- _____ Interviewed and approved by Conference MEG
- _____ Received as CMC at Annual Conference (attendance is required)

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 Methodists 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 or the Genesis Conference website for more details.
www.genesisfmc.com

Head:

Six theological / academic courses are required. All are offered by Northeastern Seminary, alternating online and on-campus options. Courses do not have to be taken at Northeastern, however, and there are other denominational options. Equivalency is necessary, however.

Heart:

You will journey as a CMC with a Conference Mentor in a group with other CMCs. You will create a formation plan similar to your LMC formation plan, with exercises and activities that will prepare you personally for ministry. Spiritual formation will also be a focus in these groups.

Hands:

Through attending the Genesis Conference Elevate Coaching program, 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, you become an ordained Elder in the Free Methodist Church.

LMC Theological Proficiency Assessment

Note: This is not something to “study for” or stress about. This is just to let us now what you need to learn. If there are things you don’t know, just mark them “don’t know”.

Make it easy on yourself: answer one question each week.

1. List 7-10 significant Old Testament events, in chronological order, and briefly explain why each is important.
2. List 7-10 significant New Testament events and briefly explain why each is important.
3. In 100-200 words (a couple of paragraphs), explain what Christians mean when they describe the Bible as “God’s inspired Word.”
4. What genres, or types of literature, do we find in Scripture? Why does knowing this matter?
5. Below are statements future congregants might say to you. Please write a 100-200 word (1-2 paragraphs) response to each.
 - Jews, Muslims, and Christians all serve the same God.
 - If someone isn’t healed, it’s because they lack faith.
 - Although the Old Testament provides useful background for the New Testament, it isn’t relevant today.
 - Since Jesus said the poor will always be with us and most of them are poor because of bad choices they’ve made, I shouldn’t bother with them.
 - Jesus was a really good person, or maybe a prophet, but he wasn’t the Son of God.
 - Scripture forbids baptizing infants.
 - The Bible prohibits women from leading in the Church unless they have the covering of a man.
 - Speaking in tongues is proof that someone has received the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - The King James Version is the only accurate version of the Bible.

- If I make a decision to accept Christ, I am certain to go to heaven regardless of how I live my life.
 - If my good works outweigh my sins, God will accept me into heaven.
 - My son is gay and wants to get married. You'll do his wedding, won't you?
6. In 100-200 words, how would you explain salvation to someone who asked about it?
7. In 100-200 words, how would you explain the role of the Holy Spirit to someone who asked?
8. In 100 words or less (each), explain why the following groups/people are important to our history as Free Methodists:
- The Early Church
 - Martin Luther
 - John Wesley
 - B.T. Roberts
9. In addition to those listed in #5, what are some other common false beliefs you have heard, inside or outside of the Church? How would you respond to them?
10. What two sacraments does the Free Methodist Church recognize?
11. How would you explain the following theological terms to your (future) congregation? If you quote another source, please cite it.
- Salvation
 - Justification
 - Regeneration
 - Sanctification
 - Glorification
12. Why does it matter to know what these terms mean?