

HISTORY OF DISCIPLINARY CHANGES AFFECTING AM's & LP's

History of the Work and Accomplishments of The National Fellowship of Associate Members and Local Pastors of The United Methodist Church

Written by: Donna Alberts in 2012

This history of The National Fellowship of Associate Members and Local Pastors (NFAMLP) of The United Methodist Church is about the work accomplished by NFAMLP in cooperation with the Board of Discipleship, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and the United Methodist Rural Fellowship. NFAMLP has worked hard for all associate members and local pastors since its founding in 1968, the same year The United Methodist Church was formed by the merger of The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church. The work highlighted in this history was accomplished while acting as the voice of all local pastors and associate members by speaking out and writing legislation that affects their life and ministry.

LOCAL PASTORS

Prior to the uniting of these two churches, paragraph 318.1 of the 1960 Discipline of the Methodist Church read: "An unordained approved supply pastor, only while serving as a regularly appointed pastor of a charge, may be permitted to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, if the laws of the state permits to perform marriage ceremony within the bounds of the charge to which he is assigned...."

Following the uniting conference paragraph 349 in The 1968 Book of Discipline read: A lay pastor while serving under appointment as pastor of a charge shall be responsible to perform all the duties of a pastor (paragraph 350) except that he shall not be authorized to administer the Sacraments...."

There was one change in the 1972 Book of Discipline that affected local pastors. Paragraph 342 states: "Lay pastors, other than students.... Their church membership shall be in the charge to which they are appointed, and they shall be members of the Charge Conference, subject to the authorization of the Annual Conference."

In the 1976 Book of Discipline a major change occurred, bringing the rights and privileges of local pastors back to the status they enjoyed prior to the merger. Under the heading LOCAL PASTORS paragraph 408.1 states: "A **local pastor** is a person certified by the district Committee on Ordained Ministry for recommendation to the Board of Ordained Ministry to be approved by ministerial members in full connection and to be authorized to perform all the duties of a pastor (453.2) including the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion as well as the service of marriage (where state laws allow), burial, confirmation, and membership reception, while assigned to a particular charge...."

There were no changes in the 1980 Book of Discipline that effected local pastors.

There was a significant change in the 1984 Book of Discipline. Paragraph 408.5 stated: “Full time local pastors may serve on any board, commission, or committee except the Board of Ministry and the Board of Trustees....”

There was only a working change in the 1988 Book of Discipline. Paragraph 406.1 read: “A **local pastor** is a lay person approved annually by the district Committee on Ordained Ministry and licensed by the bishop to perform all duties of a pastor.....”

Until 1988, the Book of Discipline had been clear that the supply pastor, lay pastor, or local pastor’s membership remained in the local church. This was changed in 1988. Paragraph 412.1 stated: “The Annual Conference is the basic body of The United Methodist Church. The clergy membership of an Annual Conference shall consist of members in full connection, probationary members, associate members, affiliate members, and local pastors under full-time appointment to a pastor charge....” However, paragraph 408.2 continued to state that the membership of part-time local pastors remained in the Charge Conference of their home church.

In the 1992 Book of Discipline paragraph 406.1 the words “a lay person” were removed. In addition there was a new paragraph 406.6 which read: “The membership of local pastors under full-time appointment is in the Annual Conference where they have the right to vote on all matters except constitutional amendments, election of delegates to General, Jurisdictional, or Central Conferences, and matters of ordination, character, and conference relations of clergy.” There was still no change in the relationship of part- time local pastors.

In the 1996 Book of Discipline the following sentence was added to paragraph 340.1: “Local pastors are not eligible for appointment beyond the local church.” Also in paragraph 340.6 part-time local pastors’ status changes: “The membership of local pastors under full-time and part-time appointment is in the annual conference where they shall have the right to vote on all matters except.....”

Prior to 2000, the local fellowships were formed and chartered by the NFAMLP. However, in the 2000 Book of Discipline paragraph 345 changed this. It read: “*Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members* - Each annual conference may organize a Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members. All licensed local pastors and associate members may be members of and participate in the Fellowship. The Fellowship will provide mutual support for its members for the sake of the life and mission of the church.” The paragraph continues in .1 and .2 to describe the specific and limited functions and the fact that the bishop will convene the fellowship and the board of ordained ministry shall coordinate its life and work. Another major change in 2000 was in paragraph 632. It read: *Conference Board of Ordained Ministry* – 1. Each annual conference at the first session following the General Conference shall elect for a term of four years a **board of ordained ministry**. At least six ordained elders and deacons in full connection and, when possible, at least two associate members or local pastors who have completed the course of study shall be included as members of the board with voice but no vote....” This was truly a big step for all local pastors and associate members, and it was also stated in paragraph 343.5, “Local pastors, except student local pastors, may serve on any board,

commission, or committee with voice and vote, except on matters of clergy character, qualifications, status, and ordination, except the board of ordained ministry and the district committee on ordained ministry (632.1).” However, many annual conferences took the statement in paragraph 343.5 to mean exclusion from what paragraph 632.1 stated.

In the 2004 Book of Discipline a statement of the 1996 Book of Discipline was reversed. Paragraph 316.1 in 2004 stated: “Those licensed for pastoral ministry may be appointed to extension ministry settings where approved by the bishop and the board of ordained ministry.”

Also in the 2004 Book of Discipline the confusion in some annual conference continued, as the working in paragraph 318.5 restated paragraph 343.5 of the 2000 Book of Discipline, still referencing another paragraph (634.1) which read: “...At least six ordained elders and deacons in full connection and, when possible, at least two associate members or local pastors who have completed the Course of Study shall be included as members of the board.” Please note that the statement “with voice but no vote” was omitted in 2004.

In the 2008 Book of Discipline there was a major change in The Constitution, Section VI. Annual Conferences, Paragraph 32. Article I – “The annual conference shall be composed of clergy and lay members. The clergy membership shall consist of deacons and elders in full connection, provisional members, associate members, and local pastors under appointment....” Until then it only stated clergy members, with no definition of who clergy members were.

Also, in order to clarify the confusion in the previous two disciplines, paragraph 635.1 in the 2008 Book of Discipline describing the make-up of the Board of Ordained Ministry read: “...At least six ordained elders and deacons in full connection and, when possible, at least two associate members or local pastors who have completed the Course of Study shall be included as members of the board with voice and vote....”

Despite this change, the section regarding local pastors is still confusing the issue. Paragraph 316.6 still read: “The membership of local pastors under full-time and part-time appointment is in the annual conference where they shall have the right to vote on all matters except constitutional amendments, election of delegates to general, jurisdiction, or central conferences, and matters of ordination, character, and conference relations of clergy.”

Each time a change is made in one part of the discipline, it seems that at least one other part is missed that also should have been changed. This is part of the work of NFAMLP, to write clean-up legislation so that there is no question about the intent of the previous discipline.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

In the 1968 Book of Discipline we find this about associate members:

Paragraph 322. *Associate Member*. – An associate member of an Annual Conference is in the itinerant ministry of the Church and is available on a continuing basis for appointment by the bishop. He offers himself without reserve to be appointed and to serve as his superiors in office shall direct. He shall be amenable to the Annual Conference in the performance of his ministry and shall be granted the same security of appointment as probationary members and members in full connection.

1. An associate member is eligible for ordination as a deacon but may not be ordained elder unless he qualifies through probationary membership for membership in full connection in the Annual Conference (314.2).

2. An associate member shall have the right to vote in the Annual Conference on all matters except the following: (a) constitutional amendments; (b) election of delegates to the General and Jurisdictional or Central Conferences; (c) all matters of ordination, character, and conference relations of ministers.

3. An associate member may serve on any board, commission, or committee of an Annual Conference except the Board of the Ministry. He shall not be eligible for election as a delegate to the General or Jurisdictional Conferences.

4. An associate member shall be subject to the provisions governing sabbatical leave, supernumerary relations, location, retirement, minimum salary, and pension.

The only change found in the 1972 Book of Discipline was the word HE was changed to THEY.

In the 1976 Book of Discipline paragraph 427 *Eligibility and Rights of Associate Members* had a slight change. 427.4 was added: "Ordained ministers of Methodist or United Churches in other countries serving as missionaries within the bounds of the Annual Conference are associate members of the conference, without prejudice to their relationship to their churches or origin.

Again in the 1980 Book of Discipline changes were made. Paragraph 419 *Eligibility and Rights of Associate Members*. – had the following additions:

1. *Pastors from Other Denominations*. – On recommendation of the Board of Ordained Ministry the ministerial members in full connection may approve annually ministers in good standing in other Christian denominations to serve as pastors in charge while retaining their denomination affiliation; such ministers may be granted voice and vote in the Annual Conference on all matters except the following: (a) constitutional amendments; (b) election of delegates to the General or Jurisdictional or Central Conferences; (c) all matters of ordination, character, and conference relations of ministers; provided that they shall agree to the satisfaction of the Board of Ordained Ministry to support and maintain the doctrine and polity of the United Methodist Church while under appointment. Their ordination credentials shall be examined by the Board of Ordained Ministry and upon its recommendation may be recognized as valid in The United Methodist Church while they are under appointment.

2. *Ministers Serving in Ecumenical Ministry*. – Ministerial members of other denominations in good standing with their denominations who serve in an ecumenical ministry in which a United Methodist Church is involved, or who serve in an administrative position in an ecumenical program where The United Methodist Church is a sponsor, shall not thereby be required to surrender their rights and privileges as ministerial members of their denominations, and they shall, when the Board or Ordained Ministry certifies that their credentials are at least equal to those of associate members, be accorded all the duties and privileges of associate members of the Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, except security of appointment.

In the 1980 Book of Discipline paragraph 419 was once again changed by omitting the two new sections

1 and 2 that were added in 1976. There were no other changes. There were no changes related to associate members in the 1984 Book of Discipline.

In the 1988 Book of Discipline there was a change in paragraph 419.4. "Ordained ministers of Methodist or United Churches from nations other than the United States serving as missionaries certified by the General Board of Global Ministries within the bounds of an Annual Conference may be **affiliate members** of the conference, without prejudice to their relationship to their churches of origin (1431.5a). There were no changes in the 1992 Book of Discipline regarding associate members.

In the 1996 Book of Discipline paragraph 602.1 stated: "The clergy membership of an annual conference (364) shall consist of deacons and elders in full connection (324), probationary members (318), associate members, affiliate members (335.4, 559.4), and local pastors under full-time and part-time appointment to a pastoral charge (342). In addition, in paragraph 365.2 stated: "Persons with the status of associate members in good standing as of January 1, 1997, may, upon the recommendation of the conference board of ordained ministry and election by a two-thirds vote of the clergy session, be elected full members of the annual conference and ordained elders. This option shall be available until December 31, 2000. The following qualifications shall be fulfilled prior to the board's recommendation to the clergy session: (a) fulfilled the provisions of paragraph 304. (b) Received the recommendation of the cabinet. (c) Have completed or demonstrated that they have completed a minimum of twenty-four semester hours of the basic graduate theological studies of the Christian faith; including the areas of: Old Testament, New Testament; theology; church history; mission of the church in the world; worship/liturgy; and United Methodist doctrine, polity, and history. This requirement may be fulfilled in either a school of theology approved by the University Senate or in a special course of study provided by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. (d) Provide a written statement demonstrating an understanding of the theology of the ordination of deacons and elders and a willingness to fulfill the purposes of those ordinations."

It was apparent in 1996 that following the addition of a deacon in full connection, the associate members who had been ordained as deacons were being phased out of The United Methodist Church. There was no longer a section on associate members.

The only change in the 2000 Book of Discipline was in Section XVI. General Provisions. Paragraph 365.1 stated: "The annual conference is the basic body of The United Methodist Church. The clergy membership of an annual conference shall consist of deacons and elders in full connection (320, 324), probationary members (318), associate members, affiliate members, and local pastors under full-time and part-time appointment to a pastoral charge (342). All clergy are amenable to the annual conference in the performance of their duties in the positions to which they are appointed. Paragraph 602 also has basically the same statement along with a listing of those who have the right to vote and on what items.

In the 2004 Book of Discipline **Section V. Associate Membership** was reinstated. Paragraph 321 states: *Eligibility and Rights of Associate Members* – Associate members of an annual conference are in the itinerant ministry of the Church and are available on a continuing basis for appointment by the bishop. They offer themselves without reserve to be appointed (and to serve as superiors in office

direct). They shall be amenable to the annual conference in the performance of their ministry and shall be granted the same security of appointment as probationary members and members in full connection.

1. Associate members shall have a right to vote in the annual conference on all matters except the following: (a) constitutional amendments; (b) election of delegates to the general and jurisdictional or central conferences; (c) all matters of ordination, character, and conference relations of clergy.
2. Associate members may serve on any board, commission, or committee of an annual conference. They shall not be eligible for election as delegates to the general or jurisdictional or central conferences.
3. Associate members shall be subject to the provisions governing sabbatical leave, leave of absence, location, retirement, minimum salary, and pension.

Paragraph 322. Goes on to list all the qualifications for election as an associate member. Then in 322.3 it states: "Associate members may retire under the provisions of paragraph 359 of the *Discipline*. They shall retain their license for pastoral ministry for service in the local church and maintain their relationship as retired clergy members of the annual conference. Although the status of associate member was returned to the *Discipline*, all new associate members would be licensed pastors instead of an ordained deacon as was the case prior to 1996.

There were no changes to **Section V. Associate Membership** in the 2008 Book of Discipline. However, just as in the case of local pastors, there was a change in The Constitution, Section VI. Annual Conferences. Once again, it reads: "The annual conference shall be composed of clergy and lay members. The clergy membership shall consist of deacons and elders in full connection, provisional members, associate members, and local pastors under appointment...."

There were several changes proposed at the 2012 General Conference which may or may not affect local pastors and associate members. Until the judicial council has reviewed and ruled on these changes and the 2012 Book of Discipline is published, we cannot know what all the changes will be. We are aware that the guarantee of appointment for associate members, irregardless of the outcome regarding that same guarantee for elders, will be omitted.

In addition to all the changes sited in this history, the NFAMLP has worked with others in beating back the Ministry Studies of 2004 and 2008 which attempted to take away the sacramental authority of local pastors; helped to gain retired clergy status for local pastors; and helped in getting the constitutional amendments passed which gave associate members, local pastors, and provisional member who have finished their education requirements the right to vote for General Conference and Jurisdictional Conference delegates.

Notes:

All of the changes improving the ministry, rights, and privileges of local pastors and associate members are due to the persistent work by the National Fellowship of Associate Members and Local Pastors and

the United Methodist Rural Fellowship working with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Thanks to all who have worked so hard in this endeavor.

This accounting is by no means complete. For example, the number of years in Course of Study has changed from four to five along with the years to complete this work has also changed from one year of study each year for full-time local pastors to the current requirement of up to eight years to complete all five years of the courses. It would have been a very long history if every single word of all the changes were quoted. Therefore, only those changes that had a major impact on the ministry were brought to this history.