

Education Expectations for Ministers Serving in Western District Conference of Mennonite Church USA

A. Premise:

Ministers called to ministry in Western District Conference are urged to embrace life-long learning as a professional goal and spiritual discipline. The Master of Divinity degree is the normative educational preparation for full-time, credentialed ministers in the Western District Conference. In cases where this is not appropriate or feasible, ministers are encouraged to pursue alternative educational paths. (See “Educational Qualifications,” pp. 28-29 in *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership: Polity Manual for Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA*)*

B. Education Requirements for ordination:

Persons Licensed Toward Ordination are required to obtain minimum educational requirements for ordination corresponding to the Six Core Competencies and Education Grid for Ministerial Credentialing in Mennonite Church USA:

- Biblical story
- Anabaptist/Mennonite story, theology, convictions
- Christian spirituality/discipleship
- Self-awareness and emotional health
- Missional engagement
- Leadership

In each of these areas of competency, classes must be taken for credit (degree or certificate) unless auditing is approved by the WDC Ministerial Leadership Commission. Classes should include:

- A Bible survey course
- A Bible thematic or study book study course
- A course in Anabaptist/Mennonite history and theology
- A course in ethics
- A course in worship and preaching
- A course in pastoral care and family systems, preferably CPE unit
- A formation course (vocational discernment, personality assessment, spiritual direction)
- A course in theology
- A course about the church’s witness (evangelism, church planting, missional church, peacemaking)
- A course in leadership and organizational systems

C. Education Requirements for License for Specific Ministry

Persons Licensed for Specific Ministry are encouraged to obtain education and training corresponding to the Six Core Competencies and Education Grid for Ministerial Credentialing in Mennonite Church USA (see above). Requirements will be determined in consultation with the Ministerial Leadership Commission, taking the specific ministry assignment into consideration.

D. Avenues to work toward minimum education requirements:

These are possible programs by which to develop a course of study for approval by the WDC Ministerial Leadership Commission with Conference Minister recommendation:

- Master of Divinity degree at an accredited seminary
- College degree plus WDC minimum requirements (if not met in college)
- Journey Missional Leadership Development Program at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS)
- Missional Leadership Certificate program at Hesston College
- Hispanic Pastoral and Leadership Education (HPLE) -
 - IBA - Instituto Bíblico Anabautista (Anabaptist Biblical Institute)
 - SeBAH - Seminario Bíblico Anabautista Hispano (Anabaptist Biblical Hispanic Seminary)

E. Commitment of WDC:

- Work collaboratively with Mennonite Church USA-related colleges and seminaries and other MC USA area conferences to develop courses, options, and procedures regarding minimum educational expectations;
- Provide experienced Mennonite mentors for ministers in their first two years of ministry;
- Offer continuing education events and resources for ministers and lay leaders, and continuing education grants for credentialed ministers. Inform MC USA of our policies; participate in the formation of guidelines for all of MC USA and adapt WDC policies to denominational expectations.

F. Credentialing and educational expectations (see separate documentation for credentialing process)

1. For ministers new to WDC and already holding an ordination credential, transfer of credential will be requested by WDC, and an orientation to WDC will be provided by the Ministerial Leadership Commission and Conference Minister. In some cases, continuing education will be required or recommended for the minister to fulfill minimum education requirements.

2. Continuing education is the expected standard of practice for all ministers. Ministers should maintain their credential by submitting an annual Accountability Plan to the WDC Conference Minister and receiving Healthy Boundaries training according to WDC protocol. Healthy Boundaries training is recorded by WDC on MennoData (the ministerial data base for Mennonite Church USA). To add other continuing education information to their MennoData record, ministers should contact the WDC office.

***From the section on “Educational Qualifications,” pp. 28-29 in *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership: Polity Manual for Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA*:**

Since ministry involves both an inner and an outer call, some leaders will begin ministry with pastoral training while others may have little or no formal pastoral training as their call begins

with the congregation's outer call. Although leaders come with diverse levels of educational preparation, specific training for pastoral ministry remains important.

The Ministerial Credentialing, Competencies and Education document names six areas of leadership formation that all Mennonite pastors are to develop throughout their life of ministry. The six core competencies are biblical story, Anabaptist theology, Christian spirituality, self-awareness, contextual awareness, and leadership. While the master of divinity degree is the recommended standard for pastoral ministry, it is equally important for a pastor to be willing to grow and learn. Continuing education is the expected standard of practice for all pastors. It is vitally important to sustain ministry.

During the credentialing process, the area conference will identify growth areas and will provide educational opportunities or point the candidate to specific courses offered by one of our schools. The schools of Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA provide pastoral-ministry training programs and a variety of excellent continuing-education opportunities. Seeking out such opportunities is a practice of healthy, active, and growing pastors.

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