



Moravian Church in America
Southern Province

STEPS TOWARD ORDAINED MINISTRY IN THE MORAVIAN CHURCH

The Moravian Church Southern Province equips people and congregations to be agents of God's transforming love in the world.

Welcome to the Moravian Church Southern Province! This document provides the STEPS to take if you are seeking to serve as an ordained minister in the Moravian Church. If you are reading this, you have already felt a sense of God's call in your life. Perhaps it was a whisper that you experienced deep within your being. Perhaps it was a shout from God that you felt while at church camp, hiking amid God's awesome creation, while serving a meal at a homeless shelter, or deep in prayer. Perhaps people around you have noticed gifts in you, named them, and nurtured those gifts toward this moment when you are ready to declare a readiness to pursue ordained ministry. The journey toward ordination includes many steps along the way – and involves discernment, education, and assessment. While God calls all people, some people who initially feel called to ordained ministry discern that their call is to another form of ministry. There are many ways to serve God in the Church and beyond. At this, and every step along the way, everyone involved in this process covenants to be in prayer with and for you as you seek God's leading.

STEP 1: Discuss your sense of call.

You may believe God is calling you to be a minister. Calls are discerned within the community of faith – not just in isolation.

- Discuss your sense of call with the significant people in your life. Listen to how your family and friends perceive your call. Consider how your call will touch the people closest to you.
- Speak with your pastor or another Moravian minister about your call and the nature of ministry. Discuss it with lay persons in the Church whose Christian wisdom and maturity you value.
- Speak with the Director on the Commission on Ministry (The Rt. Rev. Lane Sapp, lsapp@mccsp.org or 336-725-5811) or a member of the Provincial Elders' Conference about your journey, procedural concerns, and ministry opportunities.

STEP 2: The process.

Learn about the process of candidacy and the expectations involved. There are three main steps on the journey toward approval as a candidate for ordination.

- The denomination discerns your suitability for ministry at three levels: your congregation, the Commission on Ministry (COM), and the Provincial Elders' Conference (PEC). We start with the people who know you best – in your congregation.
- Once you have submitted some materials that tell us why you seek ordination, the Commission on Ministry, a group of people from around the province -- bishops, pastors, lay people, representatives of the PEC (Provincial Elders' Conference) -- will meet with you, discuss the materials you have shared and learn more about you. If they find promise in your candidacy, they will recommend to the Provincial Elders' Conference that you undergo a Career Assessment/Psychological Evaluation.
- Once the results of that assessment are completed, you meet again with the Commission on Ministry. They will discuss the results of that assessment with you and discern whether or not to recommend that you be approved as a candidate moving toward ordination in the Moravian Church. The Provincial Elders' Conference makes the final decision regarding approval for candidacy.

"As a 'second career' pastor, the acceptance of God's call into ministry was daunting. Despite the challenge, the spiritual, practical, administrative, and academic support from the PEC, MTS professors, and other provincial leadership provided a structure that guided my decisions and enabled my growth. The pathway laid out by the PEC provided me with continued discernment and stability throughout the process."

Rev. Scott Rainey
Moravian Theological Seminary 2021,
Pastor at Unity Moravian Church

STEP 3: Education and the Church



At any step along the way, you may begin applying for admission to theological seminary. The academic process is parallel to the discernment process of the church. That is, the Church may find you suited for ministry but you may not be admitted to seminary. Conversely, you may complete a Master of Divinity degree but not be approved for ordination in the church. The two 'tracks' cooperate at every step along the way but remain independent. The Church is willing to extend financial aid to approved candidates for tuition at Moravian Theological Seminary in the form of a loan that may be paid back through service in the church. That is, if you graduate, are ordained, and serve the Church for a certain number of years, your loan will be forgiven. Similarly, you are eligible for health care in the form of a loan from the church, to be paid back in service. Thus, it is often wise to wait to begin seminary education until you are an approved candidate to save tuition fees.

STEP 4: Begin the process!



You formally declare your interest in candidacy for ordination by submitting a variety of documents to the Director of the Commission on Ministry. These documents are required before the Commission on Ministry meets with you the first time. You will be expected to sign a Release Form that allows the members of the Commission on Ministry and the Provincial Elders' Conference access to all of the information and documents you submit, as well as results from your background check, drug testing, and Psychological and Career Counselling evaluation. These people hold this information in strict confidence and may not share it with anyone outside these groups.

- A biographical form and photograph
- A letter of reference from the Board of Elders (Unified Board) of the Moravian congregation where you hold your membership.
- A spiritual autobiography: In 2-3 pages, offer us a glimpse of your faith journey and what led you to this place in your life. This piece should indicate why – of all the vocations that you could choose to share your gifts with the world – you wish to be an ordained minister in the Moravian Church. In this document, tell us why you seek ordination and not another form of ministry, and why you wish to serve in the Moravian Church in particular. What is it about ordination – and what is it about the Moravian Church – that compels you to offer your life in service in this way?
- A letter from your Medical Care Provider stating that you are healthy enough to sustain the rigorous schedule and life of a pastor. The Church does not need to see the results of a physical, just the letter from your Medical Care Provider.
- *Official* academic transcripts from all educational institutions beyond high school. In many cases, this means you will need to contact those colleges and institutions to have them issue an official transcript. Copies are not acceptable.

STEP 5: Theological Education



Ministry in today's world is an intellectually and professionally demanding vocation. It is essential for the good of the Church, for the people of God, and to the mission of Christ that ministers receive a comprehensive, quality education to prepare for ordained ministry.

The Master of Divinity degree from an accredited theological seminary approved by the PEC is required for ordination, except in special circumstances. The Master of Divinity degree is a three-year (full-time) program of study beyond the bachelor's degree. Candidates for Moravian ministry are strongly encouraged to attend Moravian Theological Seminary (MTS). While it is preferable to attend seminary in residence in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, you may receive your entire degree from MTS online.

Some candidates, because of personal circumstances, choose to attend another seminary. In this case, the seminary under consideration must be accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (<https://www.ats.edu/>) and approved by the PEC. The student will need to meet all requirements listed in "Expectations for the Theological Education of Candidates for the Ordained Ministry," including successful completion of coursework required for ordination that is taught only through Moravian Theological Seminary (Moravian history and theology, Worship and Polity, etc.).

Being a candidate for the Moravian ministry, however, does not guarantee admission to Moravian Theological Seminary. The admission process to seminary is separate from the candidacy process and should be initiated directly with Moravian Theological Seminary. MTS offers housing for students at below-market rental rates. Speak with the Admissions Director, Allison Berger (bergera02@moravian.edu or 610-861-1516) to learn more.

The Church requires some courses that are not required for graduation. It is your responsibility to work with your seminary academic advisor to make sure you are meeting the requirements for graduation and ordination. Failure to attend to the scheduling of the required courses throughout your seminary career may delay graduation.

STEP 6: Financial Aid



Approved candidates for the ordained ministry who are Master of Divinity students at Moravian Theological Seminary are eligible for financial assistance from the Church. The assistance usually covers the cost of tuition at Moravian Theological Seminary and comes in the form of a loan which may be paid back in service to the Church after ordination. Candidates sign a Financial Covenant agreement pledging to repay loans with interest if debt cannot be repaid through service. Candidates are also eligible for health care, through the province, in the form of a loan similar to tuition.

Approved candidates attending other seminaries may be eligible for some financial assistance. The PEC will review requests on a case by case basis.

STEP 7: Ongoing Preparation



Once you are approved as a candidate moving toward ordination and are enrolled in seminary, the Commission on Ministry will meet with you periodically throughout your seminary education and will review with you the materials you generate in seminary – course evaluations, field placement evaluations where you are “practicing” ministry as a student pastor, letters you write about your ongoing personal journey, and more.

Being approved as a candidate does not guarantee that you will be ordained. At any step along the way, the Church may find that you are no longer suited for ordained ministry and will end your candidacy. Likewise, you may discern that your call is not to ordained ministry. At this point, you may continue your theological education. After a grace period of one year, your student loans will come due.

STEP 8: Special Circumstances



Not everyone who pursues ordination or theological education is alike.

- You may have started your theological education before sensing a call to ministry in the Moravian Church. If you have already completed some education at a seminary other than Moravian Theological Seminary, it is your responsibility to learn what courses, if any, will transfer, and what other courses will be required for both graduation and ordination.
- You may be sensing your call to ministry later in life and may not be able to attend seminary and serve the church long enough to retire your student loans before the mandatory retirement age of 70. Don't give up! Speak with the Director of Ministry about some exceptions that are considered on a case-by-case basis.
- You may not have completed a Baccalaureate Degree from a college or university but have life experiences that you believe have prepared you for Masters level theological education. Don't give up! Speak with the Admissions Director at Moravian Theological Seminary. Some exceptions are possible. It is wise to make sure you would be approved for candidacy before you seek an academic exception.

For more information, please contact:

The Commission on Ministry

The Rt. Rev. Lane Sapp, Director
lsapp@mcsp.org
336-725-5811
459 S. Church Street
Winston-Salem, NC 27101