

# OPEN FORUM

Hooray for Bishop Michael J. Coyner's article "A Simpler Day A Simpler Way" in the July/August edition!

In my position at Candler School of Theology in which I work with Local Pastors, as an elder in the North Georgia Conference and as a former deacon in full connection, Bishop Coyner has suggested four relatively simple steps that would make the *BOD* section on the Ordained Ministry a much more understandable and inviting section. We've made good shifts in our orders of ministry, but we must work to clarify their titles and functions in such a way that laity (and clergy) can be more clear. Our chance to do this is coming up soon. Thank you for suggesting possibilities!

### **Beth Luton Cook**

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I just finished reading "A Simpler Day—A Simpler Way" by (Bishop) Michael J. Coyner. Interestingly, as an Ordained Elder in Full Connection, I cannot support any of his four points. His suggestions were offered to clean up a "mess" that supposedly exists for the Board of Ordained Ministry, but as far as I can see, would only create a larger mess for local churches.

Point 1: "Every person who is appointed...should be ordained." He suggests we call Local Pastors "Local Elder," ordain and give them the same responsibilities they currently have with their Local Pastor License so the sacraments can be administered by an ordained individual. Is this really an issue for local churches? When I was a Local Pastor I was very clear with my church members about my role for them as pastor and why

it was different from the Elder at the next church.

Point 2: "Anyone who is ordained should be given sacramental privileges..." He offered as an example Full Member Deacons. The problem I have with this is that most Deacons I know became such because they did not feel called by God to the practice of Word, Sacrament, and Order. Some I know did feel a call to this aspect of ministry after serving as a Deacon, and made the proper steps towards Full Elder's Orders. But Bishop Coyner would suggest that we forget the differences in these orders for the purposes of the sacraments. I don't get it. Also, he said, "...no one should be ordained who does not need that ordination to provide sacramental ministry." OK, all currently ordained Elders serving as professors at our UM Seminaries, turn in your orders now! Should we also consider Bishops and District Superintendents as well?

Point 3: "Only those willing to be fully itinerant would be eligible to be Full Members..." He went on to decry Deacons, pastors who consider their spouses' employment, and Local Pastors who can only serve in a certain area as such who should not be given Full Membership. I know a pastor who limited his eligibility geographically because his wife was fighting cancer and needed to be by a good cancer hospital. Things change, and so does one person's eligibility to move. What I find so interesting about Bishop Coyner's objection here is that while he is willing to change the Methodist heritage where Local Pastors and Deacons are concerned, he wants to cling to his old world notion of itinerancy. The churches that are growing in our country, including those that are UM, are not doing so because they get a new pastor every 3-5 years.

Point 4: "...shorten the time it takes...to be moved through our examination process..." As one who spent nine years in the process, I agree, but I would not want to see the bulk of examination to be limited to the three criteria he listed. In my opinion, theology and practice of ministry are the vital aspects needed for today's UM pastors. And if it takes ten years to produce good, biblical and Wesleyan pastors for tomorrow's church, I say take the time. I may not have liked them, but my nine years did not kill me. All the time I was still involved in ministry while God, and the Board of Ordained Ministry (did I say that?) were honing me for the work I am doing today.

If the work is a "mess" for the Board of Ordained Ministry, so be it. Let's not change titles and play word games for the sake of the sacraments. Let's not weaken our examination for new ministers. But I would recommend we examine the whole concept of the itinerancy and its place in the 21st century.

**J. Scott Allred**  
Wasco, CA

Bishop Coyner, (July/August) in my opinion, raises two very important concerns in his article: 1) reconnecting ordination and sacramental authorization; 2) simplifying the credentialing process for clergy leadership. However, his suggested remedies cause great concern for me.

Bishop Coyner decries the disconnect between ordination and sacramental authorization. I agree. The problem, however, is not that we don't ordain local pastors, but that in the 1970s we decided that the sacraments belong not to the Church, but to the church (the local congregation.) This congregationalism led immediately to the authorizing of any person appointed to a charge and licensed for pastoral ministry for sacramental ministry. This was not always the case and I suggest that here is where the problem of disconnect lies. Sacramental authorization belongs to the ordained elder (as does the authorized teaching/preaching function. There are ways other than "local elder ordination" of bringing the sacraments to the congregation and of assuring the legitimacy of teaching and preaching in all our congregations.

The question is not should deacons become elders, but should local pastors

be authorized to function as elders in their congregation. There are various gifts and distinct ministries that are important and necessary for the ministry of the Church. This may be "The Baptist Moment" in American religious history, but I, for one, chose to be a United Methodist, not a Baptist, on purpose. Methodism has much to offer our world and I am concerned that we are sliding into the radical Reformation and congregationalism, where practicality and "simple" solutions are proving too tempting to resist.

Bishop Coyner suggests that itinerancy be the qualification for Full Conference Membership. I concur. Full commitment to the ministry of the conference (including the commitment to itinerancy) should be the measure of Full Membership and tenure (tenure meaning that the Conference makes a full commitment to those who make a full commitment to the ministry of the Conference.) Elders who refuse to itinerate should be placed on Honorable Location, which affects their membership, not their orders.

Bishop Coyner further suggests that the process leading to ordination be shortened. I disagree. The process could, however, begin at an earlier stage (perhaps when half of the work toward an M.Div. has been completed). Waiting until the completion of the M. Div. extends the process and is unfair to inappropriate candidates who have already invested many years and many dollars in preparation. The "ministry of redirection" is an important part of the work of the DCOMs and BOM and should be done seriously and early.

Finally, Bishop Coyner suggests that effectiveness be the main criterion by which the decision for ordination is made. Jim Jones, by the measure of making "disciples" was clearly effective (including convincing his disciples to drink poisoned Kool Aid). He sought ordination in The United Methodist Church and was rejected. Effectiveness without faithfulness is dangerous. Effectiveness, of course, already is one of the criteria used in making ordination decisions. I'm not certain it ought to be the chief criterion, but I am positive it should not be the only one.

I do not believe that Bishop Coyner's suggestions will do anything but alienate us further from the tradition of the Church and bring more confusion to an

already complex and confusing system.

**Douglas F. Spencer**  
Buffalo, NY

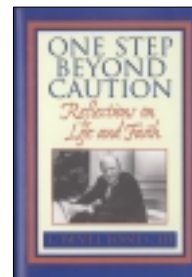
I would like to say, "Amen" to the view of James R. Cox (Open Forum, Sept./Oct.). I am a retired associate member of the North Alabama Conference. I am serving a small church in retirement.

Before 1968 the system made provision for "accepted approved supplies" to become a member of a conference. It is very difficult to explain to my lay members of conference why I cannot vote in full at conference.

I am thankful to the United Methodist Church. It has been good to my family and me.

Are we a united church? Only time we tell.

**Joseph Maples**  
Bessemer, AL



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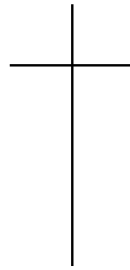
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