



Protestant Lay Ministry

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About the Religious Workforce Project

Building on previous research, the Religious Workforce Project is an effort to understand the nation's religious workforce in a comprehensive way. The Project includes a national meta-analysis and a qualitative study in the Washington, DC, metro area. Funding for the project is generously provided by The Lilly Endowment, Inc. This project seeks to answer the following questions: Given today's changing religious landscape, how are leaders of U.S. congregations adapting? How do these changes shape the staffing, financial models, priorities, and the work of U.S. congregations? And what is the state of the religious workforce today?



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Introduction

Nearly every church movement began as a movement of the laity. Going back to the time following Jesus's death and resurrection, a devoted core of followers traveled throughout the region seeking other believers, forming community in each town, and beginning to organize to support the growing movement. The book of Acts chronicles the movement of key leaders like Paul, Peter, and Barnabas. Most of the leaders were bivocational individuals who simply loved the Lord and desired to build a faith community around their understanding of Jesus Christ. Consider Prisca and Aquilla, Lydia, and the scores of individuals who either housed or hid the disciples as they traveled. Their actions of faith, while working with leather and fabric, cooking meals, or tent making, laid the foundation of the community and provided continued learning about God for all who desired to hear more. Lay people are, and have always been, the backbone of Christianity.

As the church grew into an institution, this form of leadership began to change. Many denominations have a pattern of a lay-movement that becomes a more institutional and clergy-driven church. Laity begin to rely on clergy to not only preach and organize the church, but also to be the face of the church in the community, to build bridges with other groups, even as they provide spiritual and temporal guidance to the congregation. The ministry of the laity has been alive through all these years, but there are new expressions of lay ministry today based on changing circumstances and needs of congregations and denominations.

One traditional way laity have exercised leadership in the church is through governance. This is particularly evident in traditions with a congregational polity. However, even in more hierarchical traditions, there has been an expansion of lay

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participation as calls for more inclusivity and transparency have been heard. Another example of expanded lay ministry is the growing presence of lay professional staff in congregations, who serve alongside the many lay volunteers without which churches could not function. This lay staff presence is evident in both Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions. Vatican II (1962-1965) was a catalyst for change not only in the Roman Catholic Church but in many other denominations. One of the critical changes was the way in which lay people began to be seen as leaders within the church. Prior to Vatican II, few ministry roles in the Roman Catholic Church were assumed by persons other than priests, and women and men vowed to a religious order. Vatican II provided a change that was theological: Laity perform ministry as an expression of their baptism. As a Vatican II report put it, “Sharing in the function of Christ, priest, prophet and king, the laity have an active part of their own within the life and activity of the church.”¹ This shift in the ability of laity to serve more extensively within the Roman Catholic Church can be seen in even more expansive terms among Protestant churches.

Laity in Pastoral Roles

As laity took on more ministry roles within congregations, a new need began to emerge. Again, this need manifests itself both in Roman Catholic and Protestant versions. The Roman Catholic Church faced a severe shortage of priests over the past fifty years. They closed many smaller parishes and linked parishes in ways that included one priest serving two or more parishes. Still there were not enough priests. The development of lay ecclesial ministers had added thousands of lay professionals to ministry staffs with many assuming non-sacramental roles previously carried out by priests. But more parishes needed priests. In some cases, this need has been met by parish life coordinators who oversee virtually all aspects of the parish except for administering sacraments. Arrangements are made for a priest who is not the pastor of the congregation to perform sacramental duties.²

The development of lay ecclesial

ministers had added thousands of lay professionals to ministry staffs with many assuming non-sacramental roles previously carried out by priests.

1 Charles E. Zech, Mary L. Gautier, Mark M. Gray, Jonathon L. Wiggins, Thomas P. Gaunt, *Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 35.

2 See Roman Catholic Lay Ministers research report by Lovett H. Weems, Jr.



Similar developments occurred in Protestant denominations as the assumption of a seminary trained pastor serving full time became increasingly difficult for many congregations to afford. This was primarily the case among mainline denominations that require a seminary degree for ordination. In some of these denominations, there were already alternate training programs for clergy unable to attend seminary. Now the situation was becoming more critical as the number of very small congregations, including those with 25 or fewer in attendance, proliferated. In some ways, pastoral leadership in congregations among the mainline churches began to resemble the pattern found among denominations that do not require a seminary degree for ordination. In those groups, many clergy have seminary degrees, but the makeup of the entire clergy pool includes a broad range of education, training, and credentials, depending on the needs of the congregations and the availability of persons to serve as pastors.

Therefore, in recent years and across several mainline denominations, more laypeople have stepped into the role of leading congregations in the absence of a clergyperson. We look at this growing phenomenon of laity serving as pastoral leaders within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church. It is good to remember, as Jackson W. Carroll points out, that lay pastors, along with bivocational pastors, are “as old as the Christian church.”³

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³ Jackson W. Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 78.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Theological Education for Emerging Ministries

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has a program for entering the ELCA clergy, including ordination, designed for those who are not able to complete a seminary degree. The Theological Education for Emerging Ministries track (TEEM) is especially created for those from racially and culturally diverse communities often not represented among ELCA clergy. Candidates must be from an emerging ministry context to be considered for the program. TEEM offers a different educational experience from a traditional M.Div. degree. It is through the denominational seminaries but seeks to accomplish theological, intellectual, spiritual, and vocational formation for ministry that utilizes a student’s ministry context in an active way. Using an action/reflection/action pedagogy, one goal is to develop more imaginative models for all preparation for ministry. Seminary professor Moses Penumaka believes, “TEEM is one of the best ways to prepare leaders because through it the whole church engages in teaching and learning and preparation for ministry.”⁴ The program is designed to be much less expensive than a seminary degree program.

A list of ELCA ministers of Word and Sacrament in 2020 who had gone through the TEEM program to ordination showed a total of 268. Fifty-six percent (150) were men, and 44 percent (117) women. This compares to the gender makeup of the total Word and Sacrament rostered list in 2019 of 61 percent men and 39 percent women.

The TEEM program is designed to expand racial diversity among pastoral leaders. Table 1 below shows that those who have been ordained after completing the TEEM program are more diverse when compared to the total pool of Word and Sacrament ministers in 2019.⁵

Table 1. Within the ELCA, the population of TEEM pastors was more racially diverse than the population of Word & Sacrament pastors in 2019.

Pastors’ Race/Ethnicity	All Word & Sacrament	TEEM
African American/Black	2%	12%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0%	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1%	4%
Caucasian	93%	71%
Hispanic/Latino/a	2%	13%
Multi-racial	0%	0%
Other	1%	1%
Total (Rounding may not total 100)	99%	101%

Source: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation

4 Moses Penumaka, “A Kairos Moment for Theological Education in the ELCA: Reflections on TEAC from the Margins,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 18, no. 5 (September/October 2018).

5 Of the 267 TEEM clergy, race was known for all but 43 or 16 percent of the total.



The synods in which the highest numbers of TEEM clergy served in 2020 were Nebraska (19), Metro New York (15), Southwestern Minnesota (12), and Western North Dakota (11). These four synods accounted for 21 percent of the TEEM clergy.

Synodically Authorized Ministers

Facing issues common to other denominations with smaller congregations and lack of sufficient clergy to serve these churches, the ELCA approved in 1997 a designation for laypeople needed to serve in pastoral leadership in the absence of an ordained pastor. When a minister of Word and Sacrament is not available for a congregation, the synod bishop may authorize an ELCA layperson to offer such ministry. Such laity are synodically authorized ministers (SAMs). They are supervised by a minister of Word and Sacrament, trained, and evaluated for renewal annually.⁶ Some synods do not utilize SAMs due either to lack of need or a bishop's preference to provide pastoral leadership in other ways.

Each synod determines the educational standards for SAMs. Some offer significant training, while others allow a brief training to suffice. As more SAMs are deployed in congregations, there is a growing movement toward the importance of educational support for these laity. Synods who use SAMs on a regular basis tend to have handbooks on their websites explaining the requirements for SAMs. These handbooks can be as short as one page to upwards of 30 pages in length.

A survey of ELCA synods by the Religious Workforce Project in 2019 found 425 SAMs serving congregations at that time. Only six synods did not respond. There were 16 synods reporting ten or more SAMs. The synods with the largest numbers were Metro New York (80), Upper Susquehanna (42), Upstate New York (34), and Northwestern Minnesota (21). These four synods accounted for 42 percent of all the SAMs reported.

6 [Evangelical Lutheran Guidelines](#) – Synodically Authorized Ministries.



Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church has utilized increasing numbers of part-time clergy in recent years as parishes became smaller. Some of these clergy responsibilities can be performed by laity using provisions of Constitution and Canons of the denomination. Each bishop determines the need for such leadership, and all serve under the supervision of clergy.

Pastoral Leaders, Worship Leaders, Preachers, and Eucharist Ministers

A Pastoral Leader is a lay person authorized to exercise pastoral or administrative responsibility in a congregation under special circumstances, as defined by the Bishop. A Worship Leader is a lay person who regularly leads public worship. A Preacher is a lay person authorized to preach. Persons so authorized shall only preach in a congregation. A Eucharistic Minister is a lay person authorized to administer the Consecrated Elements at a Celebration of Holy Eucharist.⁷

These laity are both trained and examined. For example, pastoral leaders must be found competent in the Holy Scriptures, the Book of Common Prayer and Hymnal, the conduct of public worship, use of the voice, church history, the church's doctrine as set forth in the Creeds and An Outline of the Faith (the Catechism), parish administration, appropriate canons, and pastoral care. Such lay leadership in place of clergy is not to be approved if it is determined that the congregation is able and has had reasonable opportunity to secure a resident clergy person.⁸ Each diocese determines the educational requirements for their region. These can be anything from a local training within the church by the deacon or priest, to a diocesan educational schooling, to attendance at a seminary with specific courses pertaining to pastoral leaders, eucharistic ministers or lay preachers.

⁷ Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church (New York: NY: Office of the General Convention, 2018), 102-103.

⁸ "[Pastoral Leader](#)," An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church.



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was formed in 1983 through the uniting of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. The United Presbyterian Church allowed for Commissioned Church Workers and Lay Preachers. While the new denomination did not include either category, those in such roles could continue. However, several presbyteries advocated for some type of lay preacher to meet needs for congregational leadership in their areas. Commissioned Lay Pastors (CLPs)⁹ were approved, with presbyteries given authority to select, train, examine, and commission CLPs as well as allowing presbyteries to authorize CLPs to administer the Lord's Supper.¹⁰

Commissioned Lay Pastors (CLP)

The denominational Book of Order defines a CLP as “an elder of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), who is granted a local commission by the presbytery to lead worship and preach the gospel, watch over the people, and provide for their nurture and service. This commission is valid only in one or more congregations, new church development, or other validated ministries designated by the presbytery.”¹¹ While designed for immigrant, racial ethnic, and geographically isolated small congregations, increasing numbers of CLPs are serving in a broader range of congregations as well as in a variety of other ministries. Commissioned lay pastors may serve for up to three years before renewal.

Training is localized in that presbyteries are to provide instruction appropriate to their needs. The training program typically takes two years, and presbyteries are learning that flexibility is important due to the situations of many participants. These formation programs continue to evolve with some delivered by individual presbyteries, some done jointly among judicatories, and others offered by theological schools. The training is tailored to local needs but contains common elements required by the denomination. Required subjects include Bible, reformed theology and sacraments, Presbyterian polity, and preaching and teaching. Some presbyteries include mentorship for CLPs.

⁹ Known as Commissioned Lay Preachers until 1996.

¹⁰ Mary Miller Curry, [Behold, We are Doing a New Thing](#) (Louisville, KY: Office of Resourcing Committees on Ministry, 2000), 4-6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.



In 2008, Barbara G. Wheeler issued a report commissioned by the denomination in which she was asked to study the training and other aspects of commissioned lay pastors.¹² Her research led her to important observations about CLPs at that time. She found that CLPs were serving to a limited degree in settings originally envisioned for them among immigrant and racial ethnic communities. She found the training that was provided covered the denominational requirements and represented about 130 contact hours plus reading and writing. This level of training is similar, perhaps greater, than that provided by other denominations for laity serving in pastoral roles. However, Wheeler notes that para-professional training courses in other fields are much more extensive.¹³

A survey by Jack Marcum, denominational research coordinator, provided a demographic picture of CLPs at the time of the report in 2011. He reported that 1,039 CLPs were serving PC (USA) congregations at the time, “a 500 percent increase since 2000.” Sixty-two percent were men and 38 percent women. The proportion of women CLPs had increased from 25 percent at the time of the last survey in 1997.

Commissioned Lay Pastors are now known as Commissioned Pastors (also called Commissioned Ruling Elders). The median age was 60 (59 in 1997), and 84 percent were married (86 percent in 1997). By race, 92 percent were white, 3 percent Native American, and 2 percent Black.¹⁴

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¹² Barbara G. Wheeler, *Preparation of Commissioned Lay Pastors: A Study of the Features of Representative Programs* (New York, NY: Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education, 2008).

¹³ Leslie Scanlon, “Commissioned Lay Pastors: Second-tier or top-rung leaders?” *The Presbyterian Outlook*, April 19, 2010.

¹⁴ Jack Marcum, “Who are commissioned lay pastors?” *Presbyterians Today* (May 2011), 7.



United Church of Christ (UCC)

The United Church of Christ (UCC) has faced a shortage of ordained clergy in some of their congregations for multiple decades. In 1983-1984, approval was given for “Licensed Ministers” and “Commissioned Ministers.” Licensed ministers were lay people licensed to preach and lead services in a specific congregation.¹⁵ Commissioned ministers were laity with specialized skills to serve in congregations in nonsacramental roles. These categories were discontinued in 2018 as the church established a new order of Lay Ministerial Leaders.¹⁶

Lay Ministerial Leaders

Lay ministerial leaders are laity authorized with specific pastoral duties in a local church for a designated time, under supervision, and renewable annually.¹⁷ They go before the Committee on Ministry after completing a background check, a psychological assessment, and a self-disclosure form. Each church, with the assistance of the Committee on Ministry, determines the specific continuing education of the lay ministerial leader to fit the needs of the lay ministerial leader and the congregation. This could include courses at a seminary, boundary awareness, anti-bias training, and any other skills the church and Committee determine to be helpful. Lay ministerial leaders are to serve in one setting for a “recommended maximum of seven years.”¹⁸

Denominational reports from 2015 through 2019 show a consistent presence of Lay Ministers (including Lay Ministerial Leaders and those continuing to serve as Licensed Ministers) serving as pastors in 15 percent of reporting UCC congregations (table 2).

¹⁵ “Licensed Ministry,” *Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ* (Cleveland, OH: United Church of Christ, 2018), 76.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68-75.

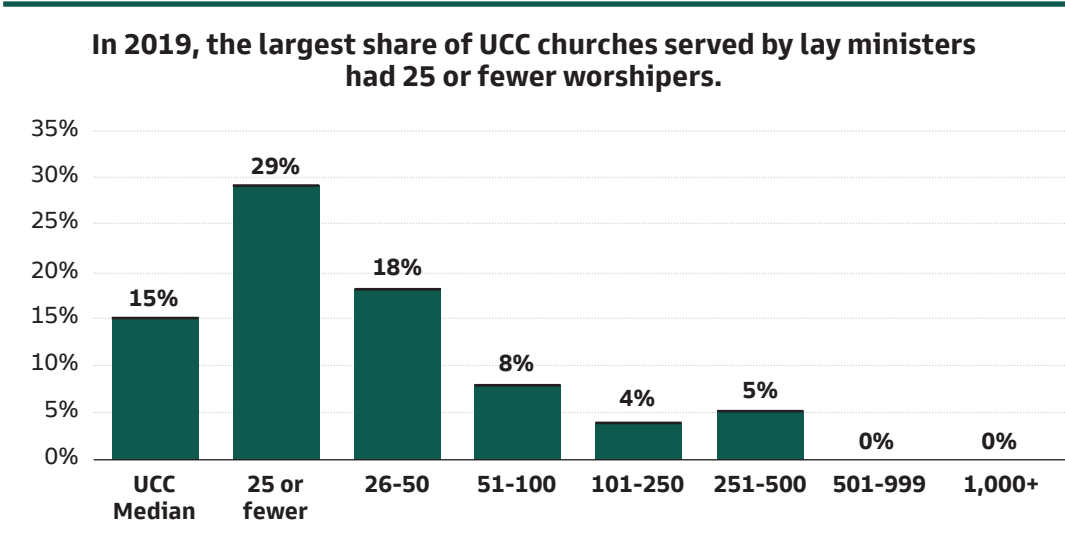


Table 2. The percentage of UCC churches led by ordained clergy and lay ministers remained the same from 2015 to 2019.

Years	Number of Churches	Number Ordained	Percent Ordained	Number of Lay Ministers	Percent Lay Ministers	Total reporting	Leader Status Missing
2015	5,055	3,340	85%	578	15%	3,918	1,137
2016	5,080	3,333	85%	591	15%	3,924	1,156
2017	5,030	3,271	85%	591	15%	3,862	1,168
2018	4,952	3,192	85%	577	15%	3,769	1,183
2019	4,918	3,116	85%	553	15%	3,669	1,249

Source: Center for Analytics, Research & Development, and Data (CARDD) of the United Church of Christ

As one would expect, most of the Lay Ministers served in smaller congregations, particularly in congregations with 50 or fewer average worship attendance (figure 1). Two-thirds of Lay Ministers served churches with 50 or fewer attendance in 2019. Churches of this size represented half of UCC congregations in 2019.



Source: Center for Analytics, Research & Development, and Data (CARDD) of the United Church of Christ

Figure 1. Share of UCC congregations served by lay ministers by average worship attendance range



UCC Conferences making most use of Lay Ministers in 2019 were Heartland¹⁹ (58 lay ministers), Iowa (32), and Indiana-Kentucky (31). Another eight conferences had 20 or more Lay Ministers. Two-thirds were men, and one-third women. Whites made up 81 percent, Blacks 11 percent, Asian/Pacific Islanders 5 percent, and Hispanics 2 percent.

Ages are available for just over half of Lay Ministers serving in 2019. The median age was 63, and the breakdown by age tiers was:

Younger than 35	3%
35-54.....	21%
55-72	60%
Older than 72.....	15%

The median tenure of these lay ministers in 2019 was five years. The average was 7 years. Ten percent were in their first year of placement with another 10 percent in their second year. On the other end of tenure, 29 percent started their ministry assignment ten or more years before.²⁰

United Methodist Church

The Methodist Movement was founded by John Wesley, who saw great potential in lay people meeting spiritual and ministry needs. In small groups, laity gained leadership experience that would serve this grassroots movement well. They were taught by Anglican priests and other lay preachers. As their knowledge increased, they were given more opportunity to serve.²¹ In the United States, the Methodist Episcopal Church was formed in 1784. This was a lay movement with a handful of clergy (called circuit riders) traveling amongst vast miles of land to preside at the sacraments. In the interim, lay leaders of various types served these same churches when the clergy person was traveling between parishes.

Course of Study

In the first one hundred years of American Methodism, the issue of an educated ministry was a subject of great debate and controversy. A college was established in

19 Heartland Conference includes churches in Ohio, West Virginia, and northern Kentucky.

20 Center for Analytics, Research & Development, and Data (CARDD), United Church of Christ. Percentages are based on those for which data were submitted. Missing data entries by topics were: conferences 2 percent, gender 13 percent, race 32 percent, age 46 percent, and starting year 2 percent.

21 John Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 33.



1784, but fifty years later, American Methodism still did not have a theological school. These years saw heated debates over the question of seminary education. For many it seemed perfectly clear that American Methodism could thrive very well under the leadership of a ministry of limited education. In the end, those advocating an “educated ministry” won the day. Clergy with seminary degrees became more common until by the mid-20th century, many assumed the day would come when all churches would be served by a seminary graduate.

From the early days of American Methodism, there was a Course of Study (COS) program that permitted pastors to follow an alternate educational program. One scholar called the Course of Study “the most fundamental aspect of Methodist ministerial education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”²² Course work extended over several years, and the program was updated and refined as time went by. By the 1960s, the numbers enrolled in Course of Study were declining steadily. The Course of Study remained the official entrance to ministry until 1955, with even seminary graduates required to complete the program until the early 1900s.²³ The decline in COS numbers served as confirmation that a seminary degree was becoming the standard educational path to pastoral ministry. Then, the trends reversed in the later decades of the century, and the number of “local pastors” (as Course of Study pastors are called) increased (see table 3).

Table 3. The percentage of UMC churches served by local pastors increased between 2000 and 2019.

Year	Churches Served by Local Pastors (Number)	Churches Served by Local Pastors (Percent)
2000	9,330	26%
2019	11,717	38%

Source: United Methodist Church General Council on Finance and Administration

Lay Pastors and Certified Lay Ministers

The certified lay minister position was created by the 2004 United Methodist General Conference following many false starts toward regularizing a role for laity in pastoral leadership while they remained lay. The goal is to provide qualified laity to serve in small membership churches, on large church staffs, and in community ministries.²⁴ Certified lay ministers must complete four modules that cover church polity, biblical study, worship, administration, preaching, and spiritual gifts. One goal of this preparation is to build a

22 Louis Dale Patterson, “The Ministerial Mind of American Methodism: The Courses of Study for the Ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church, The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church, 1880-1920” (PhD diss., Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, 1984), 4.

23 Ibid., 5-7.

24 “Certified Lay Minister,” *The Book of Discipline* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 268.



mutual ministry team for guidance and support. Policies on how the training is offered and overseen vary considerably. In 2019, of the 4,109 churches served by a lay person, only 356 or 8.6 percent were served by a certified lay minister.

Lay-Supply Ministry

A far older practice in Methodism is the deployment of what are commonly referred to as “supply pastors” or “lay supplies,” though neither term is used in the current denominational Book of Discipline.²⁵ These laity served increasingly as membership and attendance declined beginning in 1966. They are willing to serve as pastors of the smallest of churches, though they are not clergy. The Discipline provides that when “a pastoral charge is not able to be served by an ordained or licensed minister, the bishop, upon recommendation of the cabinet, may assign a qualified and trained layperson, lay minister or lay missionary to do the work of ministry in that charge.”²⁶ The training and oversight are left to annual conferences. This equipping varies, though is far less than provided through the Course of Study and sometimes virtually nonexistent. A relatively recent requirement is that lay pastors are only to serve for one year before beginning a clergy candidacy process or becoming a certified lay minister. It is too early to know how effective this requirement will be in moving lay pastors into a more structured educational program. It has traditionally not been uncommon for such “supply” pastors to serve the same congregation for many years, with some serving twenty or more years in the same place.

This practice means that over 90 percent of the churches served by laity have a pastor who does not have the educational and support resources tailored to their responsibilities, except in those cases where a judicatory supervisor or agency ensures that such resourcing is available. Many churches and their members have laity as pastors. In 2000, laity served 3,551 churches or 10 percent of all churches (table 4). By 2019, the number of churches served had increased to 4,109, and the percentage of all churches to 13 percent.

Table 4. The percentage of UMC churches served by lay pastors increased slightly between 2000 and 2019.

Year	Churches Served by Local Pastors (Number)	Churches Served by Local Pastors (Percent)
2000	3,551	10%
2019	4,109	13%

Source: United Methodist Church General Council on Finance and Administration

25 Anne L. Burkholder and Thomas W. Elliott, Jr., *Quick and Easy Guide to United Methodist Polity* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2018), 119-120.

26 "The Local Church," *The Book of Discipline* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 205.4.



Authorization

Each denomination offers different levels of authorization for sacramental authority and for the basic acts of a clergy. Table 5 below reflects the differing authorizations, with choices of yes, no, or local. The term “local” means the decision is left to a bishop, judicatory, or congregation.

Table 5. Levels of authorization for sacramental authority across denominations.

Tradition	Title	Credentialing	Eucharist	Baptism	Wedding	Funeral
ELCA	Synodically Authorized Ministers	Licensed	Local	Local	Local	Local
Episcopal	Pastoral Leader	Licensed	Local	Local	Local	Local
PC (USA)	Commissioned Pastor	Commissioned	Local	Local	Local	Local
UCC	Lay Ministerial Leaders	Authorized	Local	Local	Local	Local
UMC	Local Pastors (Course of Study)	Certified by district, licensed by bishop	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UMC	Certified Lay Ministers	Certified by district Lay Servant Ministry	No	No	No	Yes
UMC	Lay-Supply Ministry	Assigned, not appointed	No	No	No	Yes



Findings

Factors Leading to the Growth of Lay Ministers

- While it is common for denominations to have fewer churches than twenty years ago, most have more very small congregations than twenty years ago.
- There is a decline in full-time, ordained clergy serving congregations in some denominations.
- The U.S. population is overwhelmingly located in urban and suburban areas while many smaller Protestant congregations are in rural areas and small towns.
- Increasing numbers of churches are dependent on laity to serve in pastoral leadership in congregations, even in denominations that typically have stressed an educated ministry and required a seminary degree for ordination.
- While sharing an ordained pastor is a common approach for serving very small congregations both for Roman Catholics and United Methodists, it is of limited use among other traditions.

Responses to the Need for More Lay Pastors

- Some Mainline Protestant denominations are drawing from their early histories when educated and ordained clergy were not available in sufficient numbers to meet the pastoral needs.
- Other traditions, especially Evangelical Protestant and Black Protestant, have historically provided for alternative avenues for persons to qualify to serve as pastors, thus not requiring new regulations. These groups are also seeing increases in part-time and bivocational pastors who share many characteristics with laity serving now as pastors in Mainline Protestant churches.

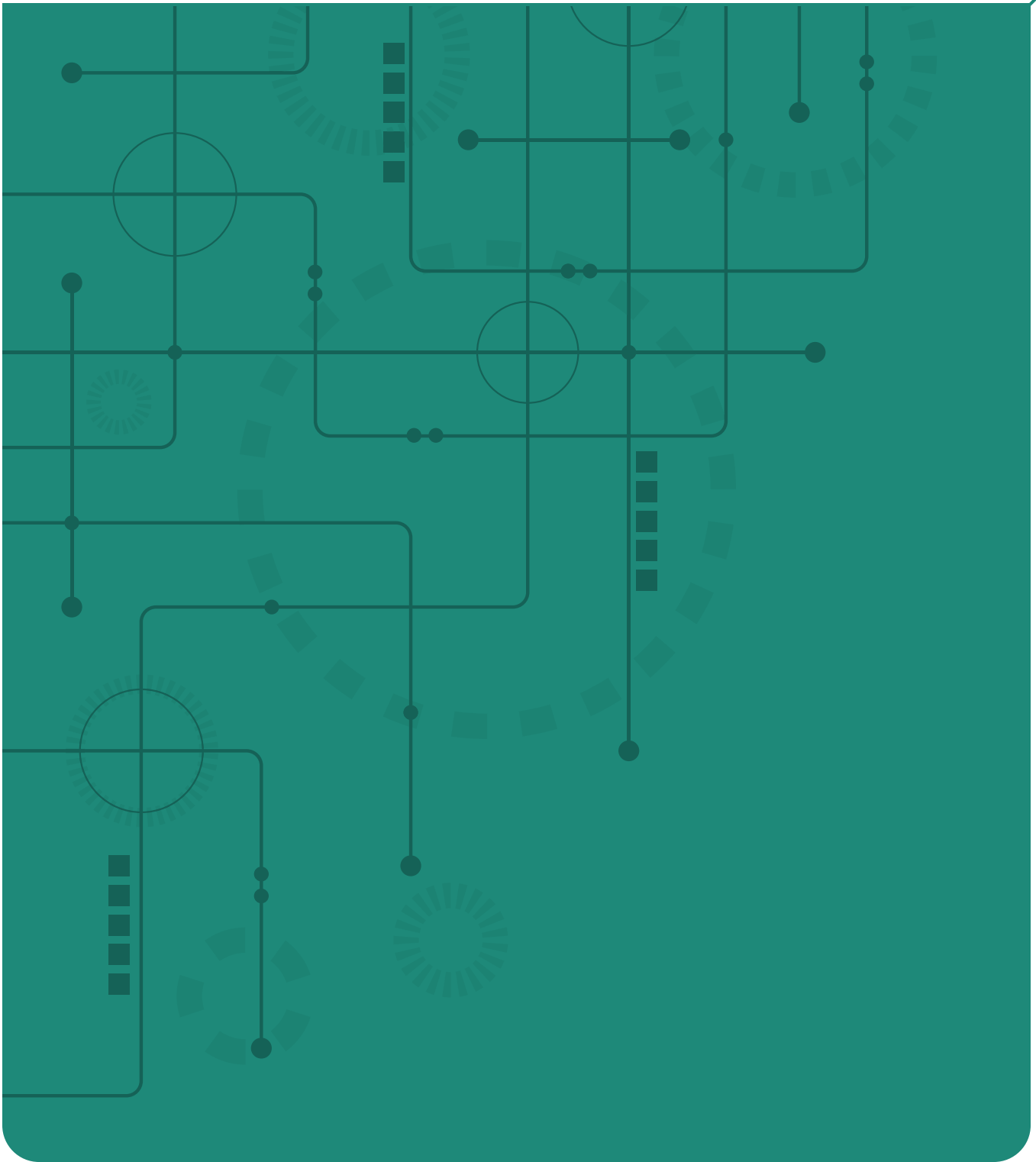
Common Characteristics of Lay Ministry

- Denominations normally give regional judicatory officials or congregations the decision-making and terms-setting authority for the use of lay ministers.
- Lay ministry varies considerably by region, based on the need and sometimes the preferences of the judicatory or its leader.
- Lay ministers normally have authority in a specific setting of ministry with no ministerial standing in other settings. Their status is typically not transferable to another judicatory.



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- Responsibilities for selection, training, and supervision are left with regional or local bodies.
 - Most lay ministers are older, often retired.
 - The scope and quality of education and training vary considerably, sometimes even within the same denomination.
 - The typical education for Protestant lay pastors is much less than the typical education for Roman Catholic lay workers and much less than for paraprofessionals in other professions.
 - While often envisioned for the benefit of marginalized communities, lay pastors often serve primarily elsewhere. 🌿

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