
LOCAL CHURCH LAY LEADER ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

An effective Lay Leader functions as the primary representative and role model of Christian discipleship and faith lived out in the church and in daily life. The main task of the Lay Leader in a local church is to connect the people of the church, the leadership of the church, and the local community. This connection is multi-directional. The Lay Leader works with the pastor(s) to fulfill the mission and vision of the congregation. As a member of important church leadership teams, the Lay Leader represents the laity and provides crucial insight into the wider community's needs. In the other direction, the Lay Leader helps to engage the people in the church's ministries.

It's important to note that you are in this position to work for Jesus - not to enhance yourself. You need to help your church focus on where God is leading. When people join The United Methodist Church, they promise to support it through prayer, presence, gifts, service, and witness. As your church's Lay Leader, you should intentionally embrace these promises in your own life. Doing so will help sustain you and your community. ***Because of the example of discipleship and mentoring expected of the Lay Leader on any level – local church, district or conference, the decision to accept the position should only be made after much prayer and discernment, trusting where God is leading.***

Paragraph 251 of ***The United Methodist Book of Discipline – 2016*** tells us that the Local Church Lay Leader:

- Is the primary lay representative of the laity in the local church.
- Must be a professing member of the local church.
- Is elected annually by the charge conference

There shall be one Lay Leader for each church on a charge. The use of Associate Lay Leaders is encouraged to assist with fulfilling responsibilities and to mentor future leaders. Always remember that your goal is to multiply and coach leaders. Associate Lay Leaders must also be elected by the charge conference.

There is no term limit in the ***BOD***, but it is strongly suggested that the local church commit to term limits and a rotation of leaders (generally after 3 years of service).

Before we look at actual responsibilities listed in the ***Book of Discipline***, there are general leadership skills needed for the role of Lay Leader that we need to list. These skills are necessary in any lay leadership function. Those in lay leadership in the church must be able to:

- Listen well.
- Demonstrate one or more of these spiritual gifts: compassion, discernment, faith, helping, leadership, and servanthood.
- Communicate with people of all ages and backgrounds.
- Show evidence of working well with both clergy and laity and with various teams and task groups.
- Keep a broad view of separate parts of the congregation such as leadership committees, small groups, and specialized ministries while helping all to work together toward the mission of the church.

- Work collaboratively to connect the congregation and the community and inspire the congregation to care for those beyond the walls of the local church
- Be a living example of one who “loves God and loves neighbor,” emulating the servant ministry of Jesus.

The Book of Discipline gives us the job description for Lay Leaders. These responsibilities are lived out with a great deal of variation among local churches and individuals. As Lay Leader, your responsibilities are as follows.

Foster awareness of role of laity

- Emphasize the culture of call
- Encourage laity to discover and use their gifts, skills, talents, treasure, and witness to love and serve God and neighbor.
- Represent the laity of the church in the community
- Help laity of all ages recognize that they represent the church in the larger community and workplace
- Recognize and celebrate the ministry of the laity
- Advocate for the laity and promote Laity Sunday
- Assist with local church communications and networking: personal letters, e-mail groups, newsletter articles, website resources and other forms of communications

Meet regularly with your pastor

- Meet and talk with the pastor regularly to understand their hopes and dreams for the congregation and for the Lay Leader’s role in advancing toward the vision for ministry. Ask how you can engage in shared ministry for a more vital congregation. Each pastor and Lay Leader must discern the way to accomplish goals in your unique setting. Develop as close a working relationship with your clergy counterpart as you can, not only to discuss needs and make plans, but to vision and pray together. Meetings out of the regular location and format can go a long way in helping you get to know one another better.
- You and your pastor are a team, sharing responsibilities. Identify opportunities to share, such as leading special events, visiting the sick and homebound, or contacting visitors to your church.
- An effective relationship begins with open minds and mutual respect. You must respect each other as people as well as the importance of the roles. Above all, both must recognize that the Church is God’s Church. It doesn’t belong to the laity or the clergy. Egos and agendas must be put aside. Congregations respond in a positive way to pastor-lay leadership when they see that both are spirit-filled and working in harmony for effective ministry. This kind of partnership ministry, with the whole congregation involved, becomes very important when pastoral leadership changes.
- Serve as confidant and sounding board for how ideas, vision, and plans of the clergy might be received by other laity.
- Filter multiple messages from the congregation into those things that the pastor should hear to help them prioritize where to act.
- Encourage teamwork between the pastor(s) and lay leadership and work to strengthen the relationship between the pastor(s) and the congregation.

Engage in continuous learning and study

- The Lay Leader should be a growing Christian disciple who understands that we never stop learning and growing in our faith. You will be seen as an example for the rest of the congregation. Model an attitude of continual learning.

- Study the mission of the church and learn about United Methodist polity and heritage.
- Engage personally in spiritual practices that build attentiveness to God’s will and direction. Ministry is not just a job; it is spiritual endeavor. A Christian leader must be in a healthy, dynamic, and active relationship with God.

Advise church council on needs

- You are in the unique position of being able to feel the “pulse” of the congregation and the community because you are a part of both. You sense the pulse and learn of needs as you support the church through participation in worship, attendance at events, and fellowship. You model the gift of “presence” through involvement in congregational activities.
- The Lay Leader works with the pastor and other leaders to launch or strengthen ministries that build discipleship. Help the church council and the church ask the hard questions about ministry and vision.
- There are several committees or teams you will serve on because you are the Lay Leader. The key reason for you to participate on all these bodies is your perspective. You provide an important connection between these groups. You help ensure that each group is pulling in the same direction. You or an Associate Lay Leader(s) should be present at each meeting. If the Associate Lay Leader(s) share in these responsibilities, you must make sure there are clear plans to communicate with one another. Regular meetings may be the most helpful way to coordinate work and share information.
- By virtue of being Lay Leader, you are a member of the following.
 - Charge Conference which has ultimate authority for directing the mission and ministry of the local church. You are a voting member of the charge conference which generally meets once per year.
 - Church Council, as the administrative agency for the charge conference, is the congregational group that does planning, goal setting, implementation, and evaluation of ministry to fulfill the mission and vision of the congregation. *The leadership team may be called the administrative board, church council, or council on ministry.* As Lay Leader, you are tasked with bringing the broad perspective of the laity in implementing mission and vision, and then to interpret to the congregation plans and decisions of the council.
 - Finance Committee proposes a budget; then raises, manages, and distributes the financial resources of the congregation to support and strengthen the mission and ministry of the congregation. Lay Leaders should have a role in interpreting the importance of apportioned funds to the congregation. Lay Leaders have a unique role in modeling tithing and stressing the importance of supporting the ministries of the church from the pew to the General Church level. A part of your role is also to assist the church in focusing on a holistic model of stewardship: prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.
 - Nominations and Leadership Development: The role of the Nominations and Leadership Development (NLD) Committee is in calling others to leadership and service. The Lay Leader’s vision and overall knowledge of the congregation is especially needed on this committee to help with gift discovery. You need to speak out for efforts to raise up new leaders, mentor, and equip leaders. This is a great place to demonstrate your shared ministry with the pastor as co-leader. As Lay Leader, you should ensure that people receive training and support for their ministries. This training and support are tasks of the NLD Committee. Also encourage the celebration of lay ministries. People tend to do what is rewarded and valued. If we don’t treat lay ministry as if it matters, it doesn’t.

- Staff-Parish Relations Committee works to build a strong positive relationship between pastor, other staff, and congregation so that the congregation carries out its mission of making disciples. This committee will work with the lead pastor and other staff to fulfill legal and ethical responsibilities related to personnel. As Lay Leader, you represent interests of laity, including those laity who may be feeling a call to ordained or specialized ministry.

Inform and attend training events

- Take advantage of training opportunities. These trainings provide a great opportunity to connect with Lay Leaders from other congregations and the District Lay Leader to share ideas and provide mutual support.
- Local church Lay Leaders have the role of introducing the laity in their congregations to all kinds of learning and training opportunities at the conference or district level and elsewhere. As you hear of good workshops and training sessions, encourage others to attend. Pass the word along about upcoming events.

Train to be Certified Lay Servant

- It is recommended in the **BOD** that the Lay Leader become a Certified Lay Servant. There is more to come about Lay Servant Ministries later in this handbook.
- Lift up and support leadership development through Lay Servant Ministries.

Serve as Lay Member to Annual Conference

- To be better equipped to serve as an interpreter of the actions and programs of the annual conference and the general church, it is recommended that the Lay Leader also serve as a Lay Member of annual conference from your local church. However, this has not been the tradition in most of our churches. If the Lay Leader and Lay Member to Annual Conference roles are not filled by the same person, you need to confer and work together as you both have responsibility for:
 - Interpreting the actions and programs of the Annual Conference and the General Church to the local church and
 - Communicating the vision and needs of the local church to the Annual Conference and general church.

Each Lay Member has the responsibility to:

- Attend the annual conference orientation session whether held in-person or virtually.
- Attend all the sessions (in-person or virtual) of the annual conference.
- Become familiar with the organizational structure and existing programs of the annual conference, parliamentary procedure and the conference standing rules as printed in the annual Book of Reports.
- Read pre-conference reports in the Book of Reports available to download and print from the conference website and become familiar with specific programs and items that might be presented during the sessions. Dialogue with others ahead of time if there are issues for which you need additional information or insight.
- Participate fully in the work of the annual conference policy-making decisions.
- Form your own opinions on issues and vote your convictions.

Sources: *The United Methodist Book of Discipline – 2016*; *UM Discipleship Ministries at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/lay-leader>*; *Central Texas Conference UMC and Upper New York Conference UMC Lay Leader Handbooks*