

Professional Certification in the Virginia Conference, The United Methodist Church

Professional Certification is designed for persons who are called to professional ministry in the church in an area of specialization. Professional ministry means that you desire to serve as a staff person in a local church or agency. “Staff person” is defined by job description, supervision, and accountability, and continuing education. Usually a salary is involved, but a stipend is acceptable.

1. At least one year of membership in The United Methodist Church is required prior to enrollment for certification.
2. Professional Certification requires an undergraduate degree, completed prior to taking graduate courses. (Paraprofessional Certification is the path for those without an undergraduate degree.) Two options are available for meeting the advanced educational requirements for professional certification:
 - Graduate Degree – A graduate degree (master’s, doctor of ministry, master of divinity, masters of theological studies) from a seminary approved by the UMC, including a concentration in the area of specialization and a course in United Methodist Studies.
 - OR
 - Completion of five certification courses in the area of specialization. The specific courses must be approved as a graduate level certification course by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Approved courses are offered at United Methodist seminaries and some colleges. The closest seminary offering these to VA students is Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. Three of the five courses may be completed on-line.
3. The five certification courses include courses in United Methodist Studies, Bible, Theology, and two additional courses in the area of specialization (unless otherwise specified). Courses must be taken for academic credit. For persons who qualify for enrollment, a subsidy of \$200 per semester hour is available from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry for each certification course. In addition, the Virginia Conference Board of Ordained Ministry offers additional scholarship assistance for those demonstrating financial need (up to \$300 per year).
4. In addition to the educational requirements, professional certification requires two years of effective supervised experience with full responsibility in the area of specialization at the time of professional certification.
5. Finally, following completion of the above requirements, applicants for professional certification complete an application and interview process with the Virginia Conference Board of Ordained Ministry that includes references, writing a paper, background checks, a psychological assessment, and an interview. Please contact the Center for Clergy Excellence for the application packet in July of the year prior to the annual conference at which you wish to be certified. Please note that the Virginia Conference application process is different from that on the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry web site. Please contact the Center for Clergy Excellence first before beginning any work on an application.

The following are the areas of specialization currently offered by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry:

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| • Christian Education | • Music Ministry |
| • Children’s Ministry | • Camping and Retreat Ministries |
| • Youth Ministry | • Older Adult Ministries |
| • Evangelism | • Ministry with the Poor |
| • Spiritual Formation | • Urban Ministry |

Please contact ClergyExcellence@vaumc.org for more information. You will also find additional information at this web site: <http://www.gbhem.org/ministry/certification-studies>.