

a generational thing. I think there was a time when everyone understood that responding to God's call to serve the church could mean that your children would not be with their grandparents on Christmas morning. Aunts and uncles would not be there to attend junior's baseball games. Cousins would not endure their cousin's piano recitals. It was understood. Folks knew that sometimes, in fact, you might be called to a church that was near the family home ground, but those occasions would be rare.

2. as a denomination, we have failed to be imaginative and consistent in our encouragement and blessing of lay ministry so that many folks who express being called to the ordained ministry are really being called to lay ministry but don't feel any acceptance

of such a ministry. About half the people I speak with, I think, are being called to a new kind of leadership within their congregation and are desperate for training and affirmation from their church.

This document will be a helpful resource as the church continues to encourage and assess those who are feeling called to the ordained ministry. If this is a work still in progress, I would encourage the writers to include some call to peace and justice issues, to more explicit evangelism and to the prophetic nature of the ordained ministry.

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Reply

Betsy Reed Bombick

I first want to say "thank you" to each of the respondents for their review and comments on the "Expectations of the Provincial Elders' Conferences, North and South to Insure Readiness for Ordination" (RFO) document. While reading your thoughts I was reminded of the old parable about the 6 blind mice each trying to describe an elephant. We each have our perspectives that arise from our individual experiences, and the whole is much greater than the mere sum of the parts

(sounds like confessional 'government!'). Your perspective and contributions are most helpful.

First let me be clear: I am not "officially" responding on behalf of the PECs; I am responding as an individual who is serving on the PEC (Southern Province). These are my personal reactions to your responses. I won't be able to address every point or issue raised here, although I will cover as

much as I can. I want to say upfront that I don't see this document as a "policy" set in stone, or as a "done deal" but as an interactive tool, a process, and a living document that we can use to inform us all as we work together to develop and support candidates for ordained ministry. I'll first make some general comments, then specifically address each respondent.

The impetus for this document came from ongoing PEC discussions about the candidacy process, "readiness" for ordination, and oversight of the call process and pastors. Those discussions frequently arise both out of looking at the "big picture" (what is our theological understanding of our practices?) and looking at specific situations (what is working well, what is not working well, what could be improved upon?). It is our hope that this document (or a future version of it) might be helpful to individuals discerning the nature of a call, to candidates preparing for ministry, and to those who help prepare candidates for ministry (seminaries, congregations, pastors, teachers, etc). We began by asking ourselves some questions: what skills, abilities and gifts would be helpful or "ideal" for someone beginning parish ministry? What personal qualifications, characteristics, and practices enhance/enable an ordained minister to serve effectively? Another way to look at it is this: you are a member of a church board ready to issue a call to someone who has completed all the requirements for ordination. What are your "expectations" of that soon-to-be ordained minister? As a result of our

discussion and reflection, we came up with expectations in four major areas: spiritual, pastoral, leadership, and denominational. The Southern and Northern PECs reviewed, revised, and adopted this document. I want to stress this next statement: **it doesn't end here.** This document may serve as a foundation for PEC, for candidates, for seminary faculty, etc to then ask the following question: "what kinds of education and experiences will provide candidates with the opportunity for growth in these areas?"

A lot of these "expectations" are "no-brainers," as some of you point out. I would invite you to think about our context today: what would lead the PECs to think that this document would be helpful or even necessary at this time in the life of our denomination? What is changing in our church, in our culture, that prompts these discussions? I would invite you to follow Neil Routh's lead and access the Alban Institute website (www.alban.org), specifically the lead editorial for the September/October 2001 issue on leadership. The Moravian Church is not alone in facing challenges today

My own assessment of this document at this point in time (having had the benefit of reading and thinking about these responses!) is that it provides a solid framework for discussion, with room for improvement. I look forward to working with the PECs to address some of the concerns raised in this Hinge.

Of course no one individual will meet all these "expectations" equally well. Some

individuals are more detailed oriented than others. Some individuals are more gregarious than others. Some will enjoy administrative tasks while others will see them as at best necessary drains on their time and energy. Some individuals are visionary, while others are more grounded in the immediate present. These expectations are meant to be more of a goal than of a standard. And we do need to be mindful that none of us are “finished products”—we are all “works in progress”, developing in maturity in Christ. (Thanks to Barbara for making this point).

As I read through your responses, I had several reactions, including the following:

“Yes, that’s what we were trying to express, and it sounds as if it came across clearly. Good!”

“That’s true—that’s not addressed adequately (or at all!) in this document.”

“That’s a good point/very important issue—which I think is beyond the scope of this particular document.”

“Ouch!”

“What??”

“No, that’s not what I think we meant to convey—does that need to be said differently?”

A few “common themes” really jumped out at me. Some of you commented on the section of the Document that talks about “minister as pilgrim.” Most of it is taken directly from The Book of Order of the Moravian Church in America, Southern Province. The language in that section is

somber and perhaps somewhat ponderous. The reality today is that many clergy are in situations that make it difficult and/or painful to move, and that accepting some calls may involve significant sacrifice (personal, financial, etc) on the part of the pastor and her/his family. However—the reality also is that the church is asking the ordained pastor to “keep an open mind and spirit toward this concept of pilgrimage”. The church asks that each call be received and approached with careful deliberation and prayer, no matter how significant the obstacles to accepting that call. I do think it is important to be clear here: I don’t assume that a pastor “should” or will accept any call to ordained service throughout the Moravian Unity, but I think that it is crucial that an ordained minister be willing to consider any such call. From my perspective as a PEC member, I can assure you that calls are not issued lightly. PEC members know that each call issued has significant ramifications for many people. PEC considers the congregation’s needs and the specific gifts and abilities that a pastor brings, and tries not to hinder the work of the Spirit.

Some of you raised questions about the context or the bigger picture. Bob reminds us of the theological framework in which we work, beginning with the Scriptural context for ministry and stating that “it’s time to talk about the meaning of ordination.” Neil discusses some of the context in which clergy serve today, and emphasizes the crucial importance of covenantal relationships between PEC and candidates/clergy, and clergy and boards. These

contextual matters are extremely important to our understanding of “where we come from” and “where we are”.

And more than a couple raised questions about the tone—this document came across as a “personnel policy” or statement. That’s an interesting observation that deserves more attention and consideration. PECs are called to provide leadership and oversight of the provinces between synod. There’s much discussion today in the business world of the differences between “management” and “leadership.” Both are necessary; it’s important to find the best balance between the two, as well as finding the appropriate balance between being “reactive” and “proactive.” I believe this document is an attempt to be proactive in providing a clear description of characteristics that serve one well in ministry. At the same time, I do see how it can come across as a “management policy” more than it does a leadership vision. From that perspective, too, I think it bears a closer look by the PECs.

Now for some specific reactions to each of you individually:

Response to Barbara: Your reflections on your experience as a seminary student/new candidate were helpful, and I agree wholeheartedly with your comments about the necessity of the “whole process of education and experience.” This was one place where I wondered if the document needed to be more specific—the intent of the document is to provide a ‘snapshot’ of what the individual

might look like after having had that “whole process of education and experience,” not to describe a new candidate. What jumped out at me most of all from your comments was the concept of joy. You state “It’s hard to find a sense of joy in these paragraphs,” and your ending paragraph beautifully lifts up the spiritual expectation of joy. While I think some of that is assumed in the document when it describes a “vital and living relationship with Jesus Christ,” you state it much more directly and eloquently. You also stress the importance of growth. I agree wholeheartedly. Thank you for your emphasis on loving guidance and direction.

Response to Will: Will also points out something that is missing in this document: an emphasis on evangelism and outreach. This comment especially resonated with me: “Let’s expect those who believe they are called of the Lord to demonstrate that they know that the Lord calls his people to minister to the world and to reach the lost.” AMEN, Will! You also raise the issue of “maintenance ministry,” something we were trying to get at under “Leadership Expectations” when we describe pastoral leaders as “called by Christ to move beyond the status quo,” who can “inspire and challenge congregations to move forward and find their vision.” It sounds as if this is lost amidst all the other expectations discussed in this document.

Response to Hilda: Hilda, you distill all these words into a simple, deep phrase: “unite in service, go to the world, and love one another.” I like your point that “good

leadership skills build trust.” The opposite is certainly true—it’s difficult to trust a pastor who fails to follow through, who takes too much on (doesn’t delegate), who doesn’t communicate well, who is consistently late to appointments or meetings. These sometimes seem like small details, but they can get in the way of a pastor’s ability to minister effectively. You also capture well the discernment process involved in ‘testing’ a call: “deeper insights come when individuals listen to other believers and examine personal beliefs.” That is clearly one of our hopes for this document.

Response to Neil: Neil points out the exclusive focus of the document on the candidate, rather than on the relationship/covenant between candidate & PEC and others, i.e., educators, church boards, congregations, etc. The focus was intentional. With that in mind, it is crucial to affirm that this document and these expectations are not the whole story by any means. We want to see the whole forest, as well as the trees! We do affirm a covenantal relationship, represented in part by the covenant signed by candidates and the PEC, and in part by the liturgy for service of ordination. Your comments reflect a question that is crucial to the church. “...in the past these expectations have been clearly conveyed by seminary teachers, bishops, and collegial mentors. What has changed in our network of relational ministry to now make these “lived norms” into a “policy”? I agree wholeheartedly with your emphasis on the importance of relational connections.

Response to Keith: Keith’s comments are more focused on the steps beyond candidacy and ‘readiness for ordination’ rather than on the individual candidate/clergy. The issue of trust that you raise is pivotal. The process begins to break down without trust, without faith, hope and love. Without the belief that the Lord is indeed at work through our call processes (and without our doing everything we can to not get in the way), the process becomes a sham, a game of strategy.

I am troubled that you feel that “the calling isn’t really determined by the candidate and the Lord, but it is determined by a group of professionals entitled the Provincial Elders Conference.” That’s a point where there needs to be open discussion, reflection, and prayer. It’s not the intent of the PEC to determine the call, but rather to assist the candidate and the church in the discernment process of testing and understanding the nature of the call.

Bob Rierson: Bob begins by laying out the context in which we serve. I’m grateful for Bob’s “big picture” view, and for calling us to give attention to the foundation beneath us. Bob, you suggest that the institutional church seems to be emphasizing clergy persons & their fitness for ministry rather than the call from God—and this document has a similar bias. You are correct—there are a lot of “musts” in this document, and perhaps we need to look at our language! I don’t mean to play editorial games, however. Rather than a list of “musts,” I see these as a list of characteristics,

or skills, abilities, and gifts that will enhance the ordained person's ministry.

Kay Ward: Perhaps Kay felt the same frustration I have had: there's so much here to discuss! I appreciate her focus on the "Spiritual Expectations" and her calling the Moravian church to task. Many of us feel a "call to ministry"—and we need the support and wisdom of the Christian community to discern faithfully what form that ministry might take. (This is where small groups and spiritual gifts discernment can be so helpful). You also point out a few things lacking in the document: any emphasis on peace and justice issues, explicit evangelism, and the prophetic nature of the ordained ministry. Peace/justice, evangelism, and the prophetic role: these are serious matters that deserve the church's attention. I also found your comments about "pilgrim language" to be helpful.

Finally, several of you raised critical questions which are beyond the scope of the "Readiness for Ordination" document. What is the nature of a call? How do we discern whether a call is to the ordained ministry or to some form of lay ministry? What is our theological understanding of, basis for ordination? What can ordained ministers ideally expect from the PEC, from the church board, from the congregation? What is the nature of the relationship between us? What are the

discrepancies between the way the call process is "supposed" to work out versus how it may work out in reality, and how do we address those discrepancies? Some of these questions go right to the heart of our confessional system, which is very different from other denominations around us. I think these are all part of the discussions that should take place during the entire candidacy process—and far beyond. Sometimes it's easier to focus on the 'tasks' before us, and not spend enough time discussing the context, the big picture, the deeper questions. How do we make those kinds of discussions possible? I think it is up to all of us—PEC, candidates, clergy, laity, educators, etc, to raise these questions. During the last weekend of 2002 Southern Province PEC members and approved candidates met for a retreat at Laurel Ridge. Time was spent getting to know each other better and having substantive discussions about many aspects of ministry. PEC members and students who were able to be there gave up some precious family time over the Christmas holidays for very helpful and productive conversation. More of these kinds of opportunities would be welcome and encouraged.

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