




A Theological and Pastoral Reflection on Candidature in the Context of the Methodist Church Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The need for ministerial training has been debated for some time now. On the one hand is the view that when one receives ministerial gifts from God, the person is already equipped for ministry and does not need any formal training. On the other hand is the contention that having ministerial gifts alone does not make one ready for ministry; there is a need for formal training to prepare one for effective ministry. This paper argued for the necessity to formally train people for the ordained ministry using the Methodist Church Ghana as a case study. The paper examined selected aspects of the process of candidature into the ordained ministry and then demonstrated how each step prepares the candidate for ministerial efficiency. The paper used a literature-research approach to gather data from books, articles and dissertations/theses on the subject. The main finding was that the process of candidature in the Methodist Church Ghana involves series of stages, each of which is meant to scrutinize one's call and/or to prepare the candidate adequately for ministry. The paper recommended that each individuals or groups who are part of the candidature process must be effective and unbiased in their scrutiny in order to ensure that only those who are truly called are accepted into the ministry. The paper contributes to scholarship on practical theology, specifically the area of pastoral ministry.

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INTRODUCTION

The introduction of Christianity into the Gold Coast (now Ghana) dates back to the 15th century when Portuguese Catholic missionaries arrived at Elmina for socio-political, economic and religious reasons.¹ Methodism was planted in 1835 through the efforts of Rev. Joseph Rhodes Dunwell who was sent by the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in response to a request made by some Ghanaian indigenes for Bibles.² Initially, the ordained ministers in the Methodist Church Ghana were foreigners and most of them died shortly after their arrival. Later, Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman was trained as the first black minister to work in the Gold Coast. He survived the African weather and recruited other blacks to help him. This recruitment strategy became necessary because the European ministers who preceded Freeman did not survive the African environment; they died a few weeks or months after

¹ J. Kofi Agbeti, *West African Church History: Christian Missions and Church Foundations 1482–1919* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 4.

² Richard Foli, *Christianity in Ghana: A Comparative Church Growth Study* (Accra: Trust Publications, 2006), 27-28.

their arrival. Rev. Freeman enjoyed long life and service in Africa (from 1838 to 1890), substantiating Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton's assertion that "The ills of Africa could be remedied by calling forth Africa's own resources, both human and material."³ This helped the Methodist Church to grow across the length and breadth of the country.

In the early 1920s, the expansion of the Methodist Church Ghana that resulted mainly from the missionary endeavors of Prophet Sampson Oppong (*Sebetutu*), the first Ghanaian indigenous prophet and a native of Dormaa-Akontanim (in the present-day Bono region), necessitated the establishment of the Wesley College (now Wesley College of Education) to train teacher-catechists to exercise pastoral oversight over the young growing church.⁴ Later (in 1942), the Trinity College was established by the Methodist Church Ghana, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana as a place for training ordained ministers.⁵ In 1962, Trinity College was relocated to Legon-Accra where it is presently located.

After many years of being under the British Conference of the Methodist Church, Ghana Methodism became autonomous in 1961. The autonomy marked the beginning of self-governance which requires the provision of adequate human and financial resources for the growth of the church. Since then, the Methodist Church Ghana has taken up the full responsibility of recruiting and training its own ministers based on laid down principles. Among other things, the candidate's religious experience and his/her awareness of the call into the ordained ministry and the confirmation of this call by the Christian community is crucial for the acceptance of candidates into the ordained ministry. The reason for ensuring that only believers are accepted into the ordained ministry is that one cannot be a witness to something that he/she has not experienced.

Debates surrounding the need to train people to become ministers of the gospel have prompted this paper which, among other things, seeks to discuss the theological and pastoral reflection on candidature in the Context of The Methodist Church Ghana. The discussion focuses on the call, the requirements by the Methodist Church and examinations (oral and written), and factors affecting the number of candidates selected for the ordained ministry. The paper also offers a theological and pastoral reflection on the subject matter.

With the above introductory notes, the next section discusses the issue of calling into ministry.

Understanding the Call

H. Richard Niebuhr gives a four-fold definition of the call into ministry, including the general call to salvation, the call to make disciples, the inner call and the outer call which serves as a confirmation to the inner call.⁶ The first call is the general call by God to follow and obey Christ. It is the invitation to fellowship with God through the grace of God expressed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This call requires one to acknowledge his/her sinful state, express faith in Christ, repent of his/her sin and confess them for forgiveness based on the atoning sacrifice of Christ. It demands holiness and surrender of one's will to the lordship of Jesus Christ. The second call, the call to make disciples, is "that inner persuasion or experience whereby a person feels directly summoned or invited by God to take up the work of the ministry."⁷ The inner call is an inner burning and longing to be used by God. By this call, every believer is invited to join God in his redemptive mission in the world. It may also mean an invitation to partake in the redemptive work of Christ. Every believer is called to be used by God to reach out to others by making disciples and being witnesses. This inner call enjoins anyone who claims the name of Christ to take up seriously Jesus' mandate in Matthew 28:19.

³ F. L. Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 19.

⁴ Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, "Let the Prophet speak: A study on trends in Pentecostal prophetism with particular reference to the Church of Pentecost and some neo-Pentecostal churches in Ghana" (PhD dissertation: University of Cape Coast, 2009), 45.

⁵ Isaac Boaheng, *From Sebewie to Sebetutu: A Theological and Missiological Analysis of the Life and Ministry of Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong* (Accra: Noyam Press, 2021), 86.

⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956), 64.

⁷ Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry*, 64.

The third call, the providential call, “is that invitation and command to assume the work of the ministry which comes through the equipment of a person with the talents necessary for the exercise of the office and through the divine guidance of his life by all its circumstances.”⁸ The last call, the ecclesiastical call, is God’s “summons and invitation extended to a man by some community or institution of the church to engage in the work of the ministry.”⁹ This is the call to be trained to be a minister for the church. It is this call that makes one choose ministry as his/ her vocation though some can engage in other occupations and still be in ministry. The Methodist Church Ghana refers to this category of ministers (those who do other work in addition to ministry) as auxiliary ministers, equivalent to tent ministers in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. When a believer surrenders to God’s general call, it places the believer in God’s team. On the other hand, surrendering to God’s specific call places a believer in a specific role in that team. “The specific call of God acknowledges your place on the team and asserts your role in God’s redemptive plan. God offers his vision of your future and invites you to participate. The call invites you to accept God’s perspective on your potential.”¹⁰ For instance, Paul and Peter were generally called to follow and proclaim the risen Christ (Matt. 4:18-20; Acts 9). That notwithstanding, both Peter and Paul fulfilled this general call through the specific task of proclaiming the gospel to the Jews and to the Gentiles respectively. Thus, “The special or ordained ministry brings the multi-faceted ministry of the whole church to a sharp or concentrated expression in such a way that all Christians may be stimulated and enabled to exercise the church’s ministry.”¹¹ David Fisher posits that, “The call of God to any form of vocational ministry is a combination of conviction about God’s truth and concern for people.”¹² According to Howard F. Sugden and Warren Wiersbe, “The work of the ministry is too demanding and difficult for a man to enter without a sense of divine calling . . . nothing less than a definite call from God could ever give a man success in the ministry.”¹³

The call into ministry refers to an urge or a burning sensation in one’s heart that causes the individual to offer him/herself for the ordained ministry. The importance of the call is explained by Paul K. Boafo (the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana) as follows: “It is the conviction of the Methodist people that the office of the Christian ministry depends upon the call of God. It has therefore always stressed the primary need for a call. This call to the ministry is first or else the ministry a man or a woman can offer is but a mockery.”¹⁴ He continues to explain what the call means: “This calling is explained to be that the candidate for the ministry is one who has within him a feeling of divine compulsion to share the glory of the Christian Gospel with others through the ministry rather than through any other vocation. This inner conviction John Wesley designated as an extraordinary call. The authority of the minister then originates from God who calls.”¹⁵ Boafo’s point is that one should not enter the ordained ministry without first of all having a clear sense of God’s calling. This point is very important because the ministry is God’s and not human’s; therefore, to enter without God’s invitation will lead to failure and shame. Boafo uses the expression “divine compulsion” not only to express the source of the call but to underline the “force” with which the call normally comes. Until one feels this strong inner urge to enter into the ministry, one has to wait.

Emmanuel Asante (Past Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana) on the other hand describes the call as an event that cements the relationship between God and the one who is called. He puts it this way; “At the root of every genuine ministry is the call event. The call event established an intimate relationship between the one who was called, and the one who did the calling, that is, God.

⁸ Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry*, 64.

⁹ Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry*, 64.

¹⁰ Kristopher Barnett et. al., *Now That You’ve Been Called to Ministry* (Anderson: AUMinistry Press, 2015), 19.

¹¹ Wainwright Geoffrey, *The Ecumenical Movement: Crisis and Opportunity for the Church* (London: Grand Rapids, 1983), 99.

¹² David Fisher, *The 21st Century Pastor: A Vision Based on the Ministry of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 93.

¹³ Howard F. Sugden and Warren W. Wiersbe, *When Pastors Wonder How* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), 9.

¹⁴ Paul K. Boafo, *Keeping the Charge* (Kumasi: Great Impressions, 2014), 1-2.

¹⁵ Boafo, *Keeping the Charge*, 1-2.

He lives solely for the ministry to which he had been consecrated.”¹⁶ This relationship creates a support system for the minister and a vehicle on which God’s mission runs.

Before one can become a minister, the person needs to first of all be a Lay Preacher. The next section considers the ministry of the Lay Preacher.

Becoming a Lay Preacher

Lay Preachers are lay persons of the Methodist Church Ghana who have been trained and authorized to preach in Methodist chapels. The Lay Preachers augment the clergy in terms of preaching. However, Lay Preachers cannot administer the sacrament of Baptism and Eucharist. In defining who Lay Preachers are, Casely B. Essamuah gives a succinct definition, “Local Preachers are laymen and laywomen who have passed oral and written examinations and are thus licensed to preach in Methodist Churches.”¹⁷ To become a Lay Preacher, one undertakes courses in Old Testament, New Testament, Methodist Studies, Doctrine, Liturgics and Church and Society at two levels, Part I and Part II, each studied and written in a year. There are always ongoing schools for training and examining candidates to become Lay Preachers. In addition, one has to undertake a trial service at which he conducts the liturgy and preaches and is also examined by ministers and experienced Lay Preachers. The importance of becoming a Lay Preacher in the process of becoming an ordained minister is expressed by Essamuah in his assertion: Becoming an accredited Lay Preacher is “the first step for anyone who intends to become a minister. One needs to be a Local Preacher for at least a year and be evaluated before one is formally allowed to proceed with the process.”¹⁸

The Constitution and Standing Orders (S.O.) of the Methodist Church Ghana spell out the conditions and requirements for Lay Preachers. These requirements are as stated in S.O. 631, (2)a as follows:

Every prospective candidate for the office of Local Preacher shall be interviewed by the Circuit Superintendent, who, if satisfied as to character and gifts, shall give the candidate a ‘Note to Preach’, authorizing him/her in the first instance to assist in conducting service and afterward to preach in the presence of a Local Preacher. This Note to Preach shall be valid for six months but may be renewed. The Circuit Superintendent shall report such authorization to the next Local Preachers’ Meeting. Having been on the “Note to Preach” status for not less than three months, the person appears before the Local Preachers’ Meeting which examines the person and decides whether or not the person should be made a Lay Preacher-On-Trial. The Lay Preacher-on-Trial pursues such studies as are laid down by the Conference and takes examinations prescribed by Conference. The Lay Preacher-On-Trial conducts a service in the presence of at least two Local Preachers and, if possible, a Minister. A written report shall be made on the conduct of service. After a period of not less than a year on trial, the candidate appears before the Lay Preachers’ Meeting. The Meeting considers the examination results and reports on the person’s trial service and if appropriate confirms him/her as an accredited Lay Preacher.

Anytime one talks about Lay Preachers, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers comes to mind. This doctrine asserts that all humans have access to God through Christ, the perfect High Priest, and thus do not need any other priestly mediator. This introduces a democratic element in the functioning of the church; that means all Christians are equal. The ordained clergy thus become representatives of the entire congregation and are obliged to administer the sacraments. However, with regard to preaching and administration, the clergy work side-by-side with the laity. Believers are called “kings and priests” and a “royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:5, 9) as a reflection of their privileged status as heirs to the kingdom of the Almighty God and of the Lamb. Because of this privileged closeness with God, no other earthly mediator is necessary (as noted earlier). Believers are called “priests” because salvation goes beyond the escape from hell to being commissioned as a priest to offer up spiritual sacrifices (Rom. 12:1-2). As priests of the living God, believers are all to give praise to the One who has given them the great gift of His Son’s sacrifice, and in response, to share this wonderful grace with others.

¹⁶ Emmanuel Asante, *Gems from the Preacher’s Pedestal* (Accra: SonLife Press, 2017), 17.

¹⁷ Casely B. Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian: A History of the Methodist Church Ghana, 1961-2000* (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 2010), xiv.

¹⁸ Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian*, xiv.

Confirming the Methodist Church Ghana's stand on the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, Asante asserts, "The Methodist Church Ghana believes in the priesthood of all believers but has Ordained Ministers who have to perform a special assignment such as the sacrament of which the laities are not permitted to perform."¹⁹ The lay are exempted from the administration of the sacrament irrespective of the circumstance. The Constitution of the Church authorizes the clergy to execute that role. Asante argues that, "Even though we have underscored the concept of the priesthood of all believers as the perspective from which ministry is to be considered, this emphasis is not intended to play down the significant role of the ordained ministry regarding the mission of the Church."²⁰ This is to say that without the lay there can never be the clergy but without the clergy, the lay can exist but only as a flock without a shepherd. The ordained exist to guide, lead and spearhead the mission of the church. Lay Preachers are God's providence of raising up a group of men and women to proclaim the gospel of Christ under the direction of the church. One of the reasons for the Reformation was to change the church from a more clerical to lay involved church. In an emergency situation, Lay Preachers may be permitted to perform one of the functions of the clergy, preaching the Gospel; but they are not clergymen/women.

The ordained ministry is an appointment by God not humans, even though humans have to confirm the call. This assertion agrees with Asante's opinion that, "The ordained ministry has meaning only in relation to the Church."²¹ Thus, people are called to serve in the church of God. Asante affirms that "priesthood is never used in the New Testament in respect of the ordained ministry. However, the New Testament also defines the church as priesthood. All members of the Church are understood as priests."²² It is on this premise that the Methodist Church Ghana involves the lay in the proclamation of the gospel. These lay involved in preaching are referred to as Lay Preachers.

Examination of Candidates for the Ordained Ministry

For the authentication of one's call, screening and selection purposes, several examinations are conducted. The required examinations are discussed below.

Written Examinations

According to S.O. 54 (4&13), a recommended candidate from Quarterly Meeting shall take the following tests under the direction of the Board of Ministries. a. A written examination on the Bible; (Old Testament and New Testament) b. A written examination on General Knowledge; c. A written examination to test candidates understanding of English and Mathematics. Candidates who are passed forward by Synod will take a written examination under the direction of the Board of Ministries in Christian Doctrine and Pastoralia. In all, candidates under S.O. 54 take seven (7) written examinations. On the other hand, candidates under S.O. 55 write three (3) examinations. As stated in S.O. 55 subclause 4(e) "he/she shall take written examinations in Bible Knowledge, Methodist Doctrine and Pastoralia under the direction of the Board of Ministry." With the current development of the Church, the mode of examination has changed effective 2022/2023. Examination for the S.O. 54 will include, Doctrine and Pastoralia. S.O. 55 exams will include; Doctrine, Pastoralia, Bible knowledge, English and General Paper.

Trial Service

As part of the process for the candidature, the candidate is expected to take a complete service, usually in the candidate's own language under the oversight of the Bishop of the diocese. The service should be supervised by four people appointed by the Bishop to be present at the service. One of the four shall be a lay person; at least one of the four shall be a minister in Full Connexion. A report of the service shall be given to the Bishop of the diocese. There is usually a discussion with the panel after the service

¹⁹ Asante, *The Call to Serve*, 158.

²⁰ Asante, *The Call to Serve*, 157.

²¹ Asante, *The Call to Serve*, 158.

²² Asante, *The Call to Serve*, 158.

for the candidate to point out the candidate's strengths and weaknesses. The results of the said examinations are published in the Ministerial Agenda of Synod every year. This service tests the candidate's knowledge of the Bible, preaching and liturgy. The act of preaching is assessed in areas like appearance, communication skills, confidence and fluency in the dialect used in conducting the service (usually one's mother-tongue).

Booklist and Synod Interviews

Candidates have to read five books of which three are prescribed and two are chosen by the candidates. Candidates appear before a committee appointed by the Synod to examine them on the books, their calling and other issues. This is called the Book List Interview. In addition to the book list interview, candidates appear before the Synod to give an account of their Christian experience and call into the ministry, and to be examined orally their knowledge of the Bible and doctrine and their attachment to our doctrine and discipline. This is called the Synod interview. The book list interview precedes the Synod Interview so reports and results will be featured in the Synod agenda. Marks shall be awarded for this examination, for the book list as stated in S.O. 54 (5). Candidates are expected to appear before a panel set by the Synod—which is mostly chaired by the chairman for the Coordinating Office for the Ordained Ministry of the Diocese with other senior ministers of which some of them may be past Bishops—to be interviewed as stated in S.O. 54 (6) and (7)a: Submit book list to the Bishop of the Diocese. b. Submit a written sermon to the Connexional Candidates' Secretary who will send a report on it to the Bishop of the Diocese. The purpose of these interviews include assessing the confidence of the candidates, the fluency and expression of the candidate in the English language, how quickly the candidate processes data and responds to issues, and the temperament of the candidate.

Connexional Interview (Final Interview)

After the candidates have passed through all the written and some oral examinations, the successful candidates appear before a panel which is made up of the Presiding Bishop being the Chairman, the Lay President, the Administrative Bishop, all the Diocesan Bishops, General Director of Ministries and some Directors of the Church's Boards, among others. Questions about one's call into ministry, Christian experience, and others are asked. The call has been fundamental with the ministry and most of the question is focused on it. The answer from the candidate helps the panel to analyze their grammar and expression. There are also Bible-knowledge questions and questions in Methodism. Usually, the result of this examination is not published as compared to the written examination which is always published for candidates to see and assess their performance. In most cases, the successful candidates are informed by their Bishops.

Factors that determine the Number of Candidates considered for the Ordained Ministry Yearly

Though it has generally become a norm that the church absorbs new candidates into the ordained ministry, the Methodist Church Ghana does not just admit or absorb candidates into the ordained ministry of the Church. There are determining factors that account for the number of candidates to be absorbed yearly. Here are the key factors enumerated by Kwasi Alexander Boateng.²³

Availability of Funds

The training of a candidate in the Methodist Church Ghana takes five to six years. This is divided into two; the first two or three years is either residential training at Trinity Theological Seminary Seminary (Legon, Accra) or Sandwich program through Theological Education by Extension (TEE). The Church (the Head Office) sponsors about 80% to 90% of the fees of candidates who undergo residential training. In addition to the tuition fees, the church also pays an allowance to the students based on number of days spent on campus per semester. Again, the church pays for two square meals for each Seminarian daily (except Saturdays and Sundays). Those who are trained through TEE are fully

²³ Kwasi Alexander Boateng, *The Challenges Involved in Candidating for the Ministry Of The Methodist Church Ghana: A Case Study of the Kumasi Diocese* (Project Work: Christian Service University, 2022), 40.

sponsored 100% by their respective Circuits and/or Dioceses. The financial status of the Church at a given time, therefore, serves as a key determinant regarding how many people can be selected and trained as ordained ministers.

Availability of Accommodation at the Seminary

The Trinity Theological Seminary faces accommodation challenges. The rooms in the four halls of residence, which were built to take one or two students, are now taking three or four. Despite the adjustments in accommodation arrangements in rooms, the halls are not able to accommodate the huge number of students who would wish to study at this Institution. The school is attended by students from the five sponsoring churches—The Methodist Church Ghana, The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Accra Diocese of the Anglican Church— and other private students who are usually non-residential. Due to this, the quota system is applied whereby each of the five sponsoring denominations is given the number of students to be selected for a particular year. So, the selection of qualified candidates is based on the quota given to Methodist Church Ghana.²⁴ Due to this, students who candidate under S.O. 54 and ought to be trained residentially are now enrolled on TEE. This in a way serves as a remedy however most students prefer the residential way of training due to the numerous experience it offers. That notwithstanding, the quota assigned to a particular denomination must be adhered to strictly to avoid congestion at the Halls. This definitely affects the number of candidates to be considered by each church.

Availability of Manse in Societies in the various Circuits

Some societies have grown to a level where they can receive (cater for) a minister but there is the problem of accommodation for the minister. It is the responsibility of the church to provide accommodation for the minister and his or her immediate family. “This should be a well-furnished house. This implies that the church cannot select, train and station a minister to a society where there is no manse, especially when it is a full-time minister.”²⁵ Ministers who stay in their own homes may receive rent allowance from the Head Office. To this effect, Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman said that it is prudent for the church to first provide accommodation for the minister. When the minister has a place to lay his head, he/she will have peace of mind to build a chapel for that society. This explains why the availability of manse can determine the number of candidates to be considered.

Death and Superannuation of Ministers

The population of ministers in the Methodist Church Ghana is affected by numerous factors which include death, superannuation, resignation, dismissal for disciplinary issues and ministers leaving to join other Conferences. Of all the factors, death and superannuation are of higher percentages. Hardly is there a case of a minister being dismissed, resigning, or joining another Conference or denomination. The church has records on the number of ministers who would be superannuating each year; especially those who will be doing so in the next ten years. However, the church has no control over the number of ministers who will be called home. If for one church calendar year, more ministers superannuate or die, then they have to be replaced by admitting more candidates. The church, therefore, admits candidates each year considering these probable factors that can create vacancies.

What theological and pastoral reflections can we make based on the foregoing? The following section answers this question.

Theological and Pastoral Reflections

Is it legitimate to place an age limit on qualification into the ordained ministry?

The call into the ministry is triangular, consisting of three points—God, the called and the Christian community. This is depicted in the diagram below.

²⁴ Boateng, *The Challenges Involved in Candidating for the Ministry of the Methodist Church Ghana*, 43.

²⁵ Boateng, *The Challenges involved in Candidating for the Ministry of the Methodist Church Ghana*, 42.

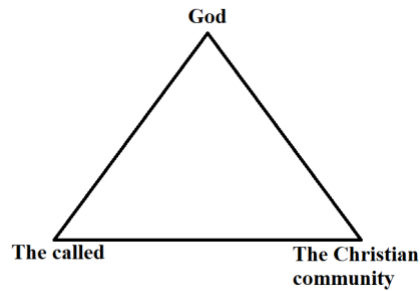


Fig. 1: Triangle of the call into ministry

The Christian community has the responsibility of confirming or questioning the call. There are, therefore, three parties involved in the call as shown above. God is the Ultimate Caller; he calls, trains and ordains people into ministry. However, he uses human agency to facilitate the process; that is where the church comes in. There are many ways in which God can make his call known to the individual. Again, the qualification to be called was not based on seniority or age.²⁶ For example, Samuel (1 Sam. 3), David (1 Sam. 16:5-13) and Jeremiah (Jer. 1) were called when they were very young; but Moses was called when he was an adult (Exod. 3). Robert K. Aboagye-Mensah rightly notes that, in the biblical world, age was neither a barrier nor a qualification for God's appointment.²⁷ Even though Aboagye-Mensah was writing about leadership, the authors believe that his assertion is applicable to the minister because ministers are also leaders. This raises the question of the legitimacy of setting an age limit for the qualification into the ordained ministry. Obviously, the answer to this question is not a "Yes" or "No" affair but something that needs critical analysis.

On the one hand, one may argue that God can call anybody into the ordained ministry at any point in time and so, there is no valid reason to give an age bracket for entrance into the ordained ministry. Given the above and other examples from the Bible, such an argument sounds good. On the other hand, it may be argued that for health and economic reasons, it is important to limit the candidature to a certain age bracket. For example, given the high cost of training a minister, it sounds reasonable to train younger people so that after their training they can work for the church for many years. The compulsory superannuation age for ordained ministers is 70 years. Therefore, training someone who is close to 70 years means the person will work for only a few years and be out of active service. The question of economics comes in here. Aside from the economic implications, the health of the candidate is also very important. At a certain age, some people may not be that strong to go through the stress in the ministerial training and so it is not out of place to limit the eligibility to those who are not in their old age.

None of the two positions is a perfect one. Both have limitations. The authors are of the view that the church should introduce another mode of candidature to train those who receive their call after passing the present age limit of 45 years. Those people should be given "special" practically-based and affordable training that is less academic. This mode of entry into the ordained ministry should, however, have only a small percentage of the people selected for the ministry. More attention should be given to the youth for obvious reasons.

Scrutiny by the Christian Community

The society in which the candidate worships forms the immediate community that must scrutinize his/her call. When God calls someone, he normally gives the person opportunities to minister in different ways. The candidate lives in a community and is better known by the people in that community of which some of the local society (congregation) forms a part. This immediate society is

²⁶ Robert K. Aboagye-Mensah, "Reflections on seven lessons on Leadership in the Bible," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 23(1), (2020):47-51, 49.

²⁷ Aboagye-Mensah, "Reflections on seven lessons on Leadership in the Bible," 47-48.

given the mandate by the Methodist Church Ghana to confirm or question the call of the candidate based on what they know about him/her. The part of the process which requires the Leaders' Meeting to vote on the candidate is meant to seek the immediate community's view about the candidate. In the Methodist setting, the Leaders' Meeting normally comprises of two different categories of depending on the situation. When functioning as a Court of Discipline or inquiries of a disciplinary nature arising out of the examination of the Christian Community Roll, the Leaders' Meeting shall consist the following members (S. O. 721):

- a. The Minister and Probationers/Deacons appointed to the circuit;
- b. Any Supernumerary Minister, Diocesan Catechist or Caretaker having Pastoral responsibility for that Society;
- c. The Class Leaders;
- d. The Society Stewards

For all other matters, the Leaders' Meeting shall consist of

- a. The Minister and Probationers appointed to the Circuit;
- b. Any Supernumerary Minister, Diocesan Catechist or Caretaker having Pastoral responsibility for that Society;
- c. The Class Leaders, Assistant Class Leaders and Leaders of Junior Society Class;
- d. The Society Stewards, Poor (Grace) Fund Stewards, Chapel Stewards, and any Circuit Stewards whose membership is in the society concerned;
- e. Representative of the Society (or societies) in accordance with the regulations of S.O. 730;
- f. The Superintendent of Sunday School;
- g. Representatives of Organisations duly recognized by the Conference;
- h. Secretaries of Committees of the Society.

The Circuit Superintended Minister shall preside or shall appoint one of the Ministers in Full Connexion stationed in the Circuit to preside. All the members of Leaders' Meeting shall not be less than eighteen years of age, and shall be Full Members for at least two years immediately after prior to appointment, and, if married, they shall have complied with requirements of the Constitution and Standing Order.

Each of these persons usually has adequate knowledge about the church members to make decisions about their calling. For example, the minister has oversight responsibility of the members. He/she visits them and interacts with them in various ways to know them. The Class Leaders must have adequate knowledge about their members—their place of residence, occupation, attitude, marital status and others. The Class Leader also visits the members and since they normally live in the same community serves as a key model for the class members. Aside from the Class Leaders, the candidate is also known at the organizational level by the organizational representative at the Leaders' Meeting. Organizational meetings and other gatherings give organizations the opportunity to nurture and evaluate their members. All other members of the Leaders' Meeting are to have adequate knowledge about every full member of the society. After the voting process, there is an announcement to the whole congregation of the intention of their member to be considered for training as an ordained minister. At this point, the whole congregation has the opportunity to raise issues about the person if any.

Given the foregoing, it stands to reason that the Methodist Church Ghana's candidature process begins from the grass-root and it is not an imposition by any higher authority. The question is: Do leaders meeting actually do a good job? The Methodist Church Ghana expects the Leaders' Meeting to honestly confirm or question the call of the candidate. The authors opine that each minister should be made to start a ministry in their own circuit, preferably their own society, for a period of 2 to 3 years right after commissioning. This means that the immediate community which endorses the person's candidature will have the first share of the person's ministry. This will urge the immediate community to better scrutinize people's call into ministry.

Should the Process of Candidature involve Academic Work?

One often hears people debating whether or not academic qualification and academic work matter in ministry. It is, therefore, important to examine the relevance or otherwise of the academic aspect in the

selection and training of candidates into the ordained ministry. Ministry and theological education cannot be separated from each other. To be in ministry is to engage in theology. Proper theology cannot be done without academic expertise. There are instances where one's field of work before candidature (that is, one's previous education in a secular field) becomes an advantage to the individual should the person encounter issues from such field in the ministry. For instance, an accountant or lawyer who had become a minister can better deal with financial and legal issues respectively in the ministry.

The current trend of affairs in contemporary society requires ministers to be apologetic in their approach to ministry. There is the need to include a component in Christian Apologetics right from the beginning of the candidature till one completes his/her training. The likes of Tertullian and Jerome were able to write apologetically to defend the Christian faith in the first century. They were able to do so because of their academic level in the education of their time. The twenty-first century minister should be abreast with current issues in order to contextualize and conceptualize appropriately. Apostle Paul's background as a Pharisee and knowledge of the law helped him to discuss thoroughly the doctrine of grace in most of Pauline Epistles particularly the Epistle to Romans.

Ministry does not only involve preaching and pastoral care but administration and finance. In the Methodist Church Ghana, for instance, a minister should be knowledgeable in report writing, finance, administration, legal relations issues and others. How can a minister who is not academically grounded handle such demands from the church? Therefore, if all these are expected from a minister, then it is prudent to include an academic aspect in the selection process. The demands in the training from candidature through to the end of probation require academic knowledge. The series of examinations and interviews during the candidature process is academic in nature. During the training, the courses taken by students require that the individual is grounded academically.

The church also runs on the wheels of committees, boards, ministries, and directorates who spearhead or supervise the day-to-day activities of the church. Some of them are to be headed by ministers. To get a minister who qualifies means that an individual pursued that particular academic field. There are instances the church consciously selects candidates from certain fields so that after training, those ministers would be assigned to serve in those offices. It is worthy to note that schools need head teachers and chaplains who are ministers, churches in the garrisons need ministers who are also men in uniform and our health facilities need doctors, chaplains and administrators who are ministers. There is, therefore, nothing inherently wrong with the academic aspect of ministerial training.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The theological-pastoral reflection on the process of candidature and training of ministers in the context of the Methodist Church Ghana has many lessons for the Ghanaian Christian community. First, systems must be put in place to ensure that all pastors receive some kind of theological education before they are allowed to pastor churches. This, in the view of the authors, will give pastors the necessary theological-ethical foundations and hence, help reduce the abuses associated with contemporary Christian ministry in Ghana. Theological education is also necessary to ensure that pastors divide the word of God rightly and help others to understand it. This does not mean that theological education can address the challenges of differences in the interpretation and application of the Scriptures. Uniformity in doctrinal issues is not feasible, but theological education can help deal with the extreme position that some pastors sometimes take. Another lesson is that the call into the ordained ministry and the training involve the whole Christian community and not just the one called. This means that the Christian community must be genuine in their assessment of candidates before endorsing or rejecting their candidature. This is a God-given responsibility that all Christians must fulfill if they get the opportunity to do so. Finally, as new ministerial challenges emerge in the ever-changing ministerial field there is the need to adjust the ministerial training to prepare pastors adequately for the task in the field. The need for Christian Apologetics, for example, is an urgent one. Christian denominations are encouraged to make the necessary changes in their curricula to meet the demand of the day.

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