



"From Where I Sit ..."

A Preacher's Membership!

In the Methodist church and especially the CME Church, everyone is a member somewhere. Laity, regardless of positions held at the District Conference, Annual Conference (Regions) or Connectional level, are always a member of their local church. On the other hand, membership of a preacher may be in the local church or the annual conference. However, to best understand a preacher's membership, we must first understand that whether clergy or lay, a CME has at any time only "one" membership.

An un-ordained local preacher [or Licentiate] continues as a lay member of his or her local church. The credential distinguishing a Licentiate is a Local Preacher's License issued by the Presiding Elder on the authority of the respective local church's Quarterly Conference. The Local Preacher's License must be renewed yearly by vote of the Quarterly Conference. Since the Licentiate continues as a lay member of his or her local church, the Licentiate is not given the title of Reverend. Nor is the Licentiate, according to Retired Senior Bishop Marshall Gilmore, given the title "Minister". The title most appropriate for an unordained local preacher is Brother or Sister because he or she may at any time discontinue their local preacher status, without any harm done, and resume full lay activities.

Local Deacons and Local Elders also continue as members of their local churches but, since they have been ordained, they are no longer considered laity. They are given the title Reverend, entitled to wear a clerical shirt and collar and, based on their respective ordination, other such vestments.

Traveling Deacons and Elders who have been admitted into full connection are no longer members of their local churches [i.e. local quarterly conference] but are recognized as members of their annual conferences. Only the preachers in full connection are recognized as members of the annual conference and this membership continues year-round. Lay persons who vote at the annual conference are not recognized as members of the annual conference. They are recognized as delegates "representing" their respective annual conferences and their status as delegates exists only during the term of the meeting of the Annual Conference. And although they may serve as delegates to the Annual Conference, Lay Delegates remain members of their local churches.

Preachers in full connection may be "located" which returns them to a local status as a member of a local church through its quarterly conference. Retired preachers in full connection remain members of their last annual conference unless permitted to transfer after retirement. When preachers withdraw from the ministry, they also withdraw from the CME Church because they, like all other members of the CME Church, have only one membership. When preachers withdraw, they are required to submit their certificates of ordination to their Presiding Bishop. If a withdrawn preacher seeks to return to the CME Church to serve as a minister, he or she may only return by joining a local church and beginning the entire process anew as specified in the Discipline of the CME Church.

The primary point is that all CME's are members somewhere with that one membership and only that one membership. *Or at least that's the way it looks to me...*

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Tyrone T. Davis, D.Min, is the General Secretary of the Board of Personnel Services

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Personnel Services Webpage of the CME Website at www.thecmechurch.org)