

PURPOSE: EQUIP AND CONNECT

Circuit Elders serve as extensions of the office of District Superintendent, to assist District Superintendents in equipping local church leaders for ministry and by encouraging connections for ministry beyond the local church.

Circuit Elders are not supervisors and they do not have a role in the appointive process. Instead, the work of Circuit Elders is focused on equipping and connecting leaders and local congregations so that local churches make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world..

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS/TASKS:

- 1. Embody the United Methodist Connection through intentional relationships and a ministry of presence by:**
 - a. Encouraging pastors and lay leadership of congregations to engage their communities and neighborhoods with missional purpose.
 - b. Convening and facilitating gatherings regularly online, over meals, and/or through in-person meetings for mutual fellowship, prayer, support, peer coaching, and encouragement.
 - c. Attending special events of the circuit as a representative of the connection when available.
 - d. Along with the other pastors in the circuit, providing mutual pastoral caregiving support to the clergy, certified lay ministers, and lay supply preachers in the circuit, and by keeping the District Office informed of situations of concern to build up a team approach to caregiving.

- 2. Collaborate with the District Superintendent to order the life of the church by:**
 - a. Providing coaching and equipping for pastors concerning the practice of ministry and church leadership.
 - b. Coordinating with the DS and Ordained Elders in the region to ensure that congregations with assigned laity have regular access to the sacraments.
 - c. Assisting pastors in preparing for charge conferences and other connectional administrative responsibilities.
 - d. Communicating regularly with the DS regarding the ministry of the churches on the circuit.
 - e. Presiding at annual and called charge conferences as requested by the District Superintendent.

- 3. Collaborate with the District Superintendent to encourage strategic connections among congregations by:**
 - a. Supporting and encouraging a team-based approach to ministries in communities..
 - b. Facilitating conversations with congregations and the pastors of the circuit around topics such as vital ministry, mission field engagement, and cooperative parishes.
 - c. Facilitating strategic missional assessments in congregations as requested by the District Superintendent, including utilizing Discipline ¶213 as a guide for conversation as directed.

EXPECTATIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS

Circuit Elders

1. Attend Circuit Elders' training and required meetings.
2. Fulfill essential functions of the Circuit Elder role.
3. Facilitate gatherings of circuit pastors
4. Communicate with DS regularly. Note that there are limits on circuit group confidentiality: as an extension of the office of DS, a circuit elder is expected to share concerns with the DS.
5. Be readily available to the circuit pastors and circuit congregations.
6. Share appropriate information with the DS, and hold all conversations and circuit work as confidential with the congregations, pastors, and district superintendent.
7. Communicate regularly (monthly, in most cases) with pastors in circuit.

NOTE: the responsibilities of the dCOM mentor, formally included in the role of the Circuit Elder, are being transferred to a separate dCOM and DS assigned mentor.

Pastors, CLMs, and Assigned Supply Preachers in the Circuit

1. Attend Circuit gatherings.
2. Communicate regularly (monthly in most cases) with Circuit Elder.
3. Complete and submit reports by the appropriate deadline.

Congregations in the Circuit

1. Utilize the Circuit Elder as the initial contact for questions of practice, policy, and polity.
2. Complete and submit charge conference packets as required.
3. Welcome opportunities to share in ministry with the other churches of the circuit and support the ministry of the Circuit Elder

District Superintendent

1. Initiate quarterly contacts with Circuit Elders.
2. Be available for consultation on circuit matters.

Arkansas Conference

1. Assist in Circuit Elder training and resourcing.
2. Provide funding for Circuit Elder mileage

Basic Meeting Pattern - Circuit Pastor Group Facilitated by Circuit Elder

1. Devotions rotated among the pastors
2. Check-in and “how goes your soul” time
3. Sharing experiences in ministry (such as “opportunities & challenges”)
4. Discuss any matters of ministry practice or church administration
5. Close by sharing prayer requests and praying for one another

Template Annual Schedule of Circuit Meetings and Contacts

July	Circuit Elder Training Email, text, and/or phone contacts with circuit
August-September	Welcome Gathering <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Devotional• Expectations & organization• Share time (call to ministry & current appointment)• Discuss Charge Conference preparations• Everyone share contact information and organize any mutual prayer times
September-October	Check-in contacts (email/text/phone) with circuit
October-November	Preside at Annual Charge Conference
October-December	Meet at least once, based on CC Schedule (in-person and/or zoom) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Devotional, Check-in and “how goes it with your soul” time• Sharing opportunities and challenges in ministry• Discuss Advent and ministry plans for the new year
January-March	Meet at least once (in-person and/or zoom) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Devotional, Check-in and “how goes it with your soul” time• Sharing opportunities and challenges in ministry• Discuss opportunities for community engagement• Discuss Lent and Easter Plans
April-June	Meet at least twice (in-person and/or zoom) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Devotional, Check-in and “how goes it with your soul” time• Sharing opportunities and challenges in ministry• Discuss the hopes for next conference year; celebrate any changes in appointments

Opportunities & Challenges: Sharing Ministry Experiences

As communities of practice*, circuit groups offer an opportunity for pastors to reflect on their ministry experiences. The congregation and community provide an immersive space for ministry to flourish, and then, during circuit meetings, the pastors can “step back and reflect” in the community of practice made up of fellow CLMs and clergy. The circuit elders are responsible for facilitating the group’s conversation. As a reminder, the group cannot and should not attempt to “fix” the situation or their fellow pastor. Instead, the best help we can give one another is *encouragement* and *perspective*.

For groups that enjoy more structure, the below may provide a possible approach:

- Presenter shares ministry experience with your circuit group using the Opportunity/Challenge Outline below as a general guideline (5-10 minutes)
- Presenter answers *clarifying* questions (for understanding) from the group (5 minutes)
- Circuit group offers *coaching* questions to Presenter (15 minutes).
- Presenter shares with the group your learnings and/or which ideas or solutions you will take back to your ministry setting for implementation. Group affirms & encourages presenter, and concludes by holding their fellow pastor in prayer. (5 minutes)

**WHAT IS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE? A community of practice is a group who share a common concern or an interest in a topic and who come together to fulfill both individual and group goals. Communities of practice often focus on sharing best practices and creating new knowledge to advance a domain of professional practice, such as education, business, or medicine.*

Opportunity/Challenge Sharing Outline

1. The opportunity/challenge is (one or two sentences that spell out the heart of the issue in clear terms):

2. My ideal outcome/resolution to the opportunity or challenge is:

3. Relevant background information (short points identifying how, when, why it began; who the players are; the forces at work; today’s stakes):

4. Options I have already considered:

5. Peer coaching I need from this group (options/solutions I am missing; dimensions I am not considering; questions I must find answers to, etc.):