

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United Methodist Endorsing Agency in an Emerging Regional Structure A Rationale for Discernment and Future Alignment

The Nature of Endorsed Ministry

The ministry of endorsement serves a vital intersection of ecclesial supervision and public institutional trust. Bishops rely on it to confirm the readiness and fitness of clergy for specialized forms of service. Institutions—including the military, the Department of Veterans Affairs, healthcare systems, correctional environments, and other public settings—depend on it as a means of ensuring accountability, professional standing, and denominational support. Clergy serving in these contexts depend on it as a source of connection, guidance, and ongoing relationship with the Church that appoints them. Because endorsement operates at this intersection of supervision, representation, and institutional engagement, its structural placement within the life of the Church warrants careful and sustained attention.

A Changing Structural Context

This report offers a framework for discerning how the ministry of endorsement may be most faithfully aligned within the evolving structures of The United Methodist Church. It arises in the context of significant denominational transition following the ratification of regionalization and the emergence of new patterns of collaboration among general church bodies. These developments suggest that the Church is entering a period in which responsibilities may increasingly be carried through coordinated, connectional systems rather than through fixed, singular institutional forms. In such an environment, the question is not simply where endorsement is located administratively, but how its essential functions are best supported within the Church's broader life.

Clergy, Institutions, and Accountability

The report begins by clarifying the nature of endorsed ministry itself. Clergy serving in endorsed settings remain fully within the covenantal and supervisory structures of the Church. They are appointed by their bishops, maintain their membership in annual conferences, and remain accountable to the Discipline. At the same time, they serve in institutions governed by legal, professional, and organizational frameworks that differ substantially from congregational life. Their ministry requires not only theological formation and pastoral skill, but also institutional literacy, professional credibility, and the ability to navigate complex systems of authority and expectation. Endorsement is not a discretionary programmatic function, then; it is a necessary expression of the Church's responsibility to send, support, and remain accountable for clergy serving in such contexts.

Episcopal Responsibility and Support

The theological foundation of this ministry is rooted in the Church's understanding of vocation, connectional life, and episcopal oversight. Endorsed ministry arises from the bishop's responsibility for general superintendency—the ordering of the Church's ministry and the supervision of its clergy wherever they serve. While this supervisory responsibility cannot be delegated, it can be supported. Historically, the Church has relied on designated structures to assist bishops in providing the specialized care, institutional liaison, and credentialing support required in these

settings. This relationship—episcopal oversight supported by delegated functional responsibility—remains central to the Church’s ability to sustain endorsed ministry with integrity and effectiveness.

Historical Continuity

The report also traces the historical development of endorsement within Methodism. From early patterns of ministry beyond congregational life, through the establishment of the Commission on Chaplains in 1941, to the administrative realignment that placed this work within the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry in 1972, the Church has consistently recognized both the necessity of this ministry and the need for structures capable of supporting it. While administrative placement has changed over time, the underlying ecclesial responsibility—grounded in episcopal oversight and connectional accountability—has remained constant.

Regionalization and Functional Alignment

Regionalization introduces a new context for considering the future alignment of this ministry. Because endorsed ministry operates almost entirely within U.S. institutional systems, its functional requirements are closely tied to the emerging U.S. Regional Conference. At the same time, the timeline for structural development extends over several years, and the forms that regional bodies will take are not yet fully defined. This report therefore does not propose a specific structural outcome. Instead, it offers a set of principles to guide future discernment, recognizing that functional ministries often require continuity within existing structures even as new frameworks take shape.

Guiding Principles for Discernment

Among these principles are the need to maintain alignment with episcopal systems of appointment and accountability; to recognize endorsement as a functional rather than programmatic ministry; to sustain continuity with historical patterns of ecclesial support; and to remain flexible in anticipation of an evolving structural landscape. The report also emphasizes the “frontier” character of endorsed ministry—its role at the boundary between the Church and the institutions of public life—and the importance of structures capable of understanding and supporting that distinctive context.

A Contribution to Ongoing Discernment

Taken together, these considerations suggest that the future alignment of endorsement should be guided less by inherited administrative patterns and more by the functional and ecclesial requirements of the ministry itself. As the Church continues its process of regional discernment, endorsed ministry offers a constructive case through which broader questions of functional alignment may be explored. Its experience highlights the importance of clarity in supervision, coherence in institutional relationships, and continuity in connectional support.

This report is offered as a contribution to that ongoing conversation. It does not anticipate decisions that properly belong to the General Conference or to the emerging U.S. Regional Conference. Rather, it seeks to provide a grounded and integrative perspective that may assist the Church as it considers how best to sustain the ministries entrusted to it. In a period of structural transition, the goal is not to determine outcomes prematurely, but to ensure that when decisions are made, they are informed by the theological, historical, and functional realities that have long shaped the Church’s life and witness.