

Plagiarism, Copyright and Respect for Intellectual Property

Materials prepared and presented by candidates for ordination in the Baltimore Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church in connection with their Examination Retreats are solemn documents that warrant careful preparation reflecting the faithfulness, inspiration, scholarship, and integrity that our congregations anticipate from their clergy. As such, these Retreat Documents must reflect the work of the candidates submitting them and must properly recognize the work of others that contribute to them. Retreat Documents that present the work of others without attribution raise serious questions regarding a Candidate's fitness for ministry that must be addressed by the Board of Ordained Ministry in addition to the other processes used by the Board to evaluate a Candidate.

Areas of Concern

The Board of Ordained Ministries has identified three areas of concern relating to Retreat Documents of candidates for probationary or full membership in the Order of Deacons or the Order of Elders.

First, Candidates must not violate the copyrights of other persons. Extensive quotation from copyrighted sources without the permission of the copyright holders violates their rights. Ordinarily, the Board would not expect copyright violation issues to arise in connection with Retreat Documents because

- The fair use doctrine permits reasonable quotation or excerpting with attribution,
- Candidates' papers are expected to reflect substantial original work, and
- Use of materials in Retreat Documents should not adversely affect the market value of copyrighted materials.

Quotation or other use of a third party's copyrighted material that is so extensive as to raise copyright violation concerns could suggest that the Board reject the proffered Retreat Documents on the grounds that they do not reflect enough of the Candidate's own thinking or work to form the basis for an evaluation of the Candidate.

Second, Candidates must not knowingly present the work of other persons as their own. Examples of improper conduct would include

- Excerpting material from written sources without attribution
- Presenting material prepared by a fellow student or candidate as if it were one's own
- Using an analysis, presentation format or similar material taken from notes or recordings of a class, sermon, or lecture presented by another.

Third, Candidates must demonstrate the ability to engage the candidacy process substantively, to think independently, and to maintain good academic discipline. When a candidate unknowingly presents the work of another as their own, regardless of the reason therefore, it raises serious concern for whether the candidate has engaged in the struggle with his or her written work that is expected of candidates.

For example, assume that a candidate were to present, without attribution, extensive quotations from the Social Principles, Book of Discipline, or the United Methodist Hymnal. The Board would find it difficult to conclude this was done in an intentional effort to present that work as the candidate's own since the sources would be recognized by Board members. The conduct could, however, raise questions regarding a candidate's fitness for ministry. This would be true if the conduct suggested a lack of theological or ethical preparedness or a lack of discipline that could adversely affect of their pastoral effectiveness. The candidate's

performance under examination could be appropriately weighed in evaluating such a circumstance.

Consequences of Copyright Violation or Plagiarism

When it finds that a Candidate has violated copyright, presented another's ideas as his or her own, or otherwise failed to credit another's work, the Board of Ordained Ministry (acting through the Executive Committee) shall take appropriate remedial or disciplinary action. Generally, in balancing the violation and the consequences thereof, the Board may distinguish between

1. Conduct that constitutes a failure to meet high standards of personal integrity expected of those set apart for ordained ministry,
2. Conduct that suggests poor academic or intellectual understanding or an unengaged attitude toward the material, and
3. Conduct that reflects low standards of care in preparing material, and poor academic discipline.

Upon discovery of any materials in Retreat Documents that raise plagiarism issues, the Board Members discovering them shall promptly bring them to the attention the Executive Committee which shall consider and act upon the concerns as soon as reasonable practicable. The Executive Committee will review any alleged violations in consultation with such additional Board Members as the Chair may designate for that purpose. If the Executive Committee decides that an allegation does not warrant disciplinary or remedial action, then the matter shall be considered fully resolved. Otherwise, the Executive Committee may take any of the actions described below at any time before, during, or after the Retreat for which the Retreat Documents in question were prepared.

With respect to candidates for probationary membership,

1. Return the Candidate to the District Committee (by rejecting of Retreat Documents or otherwise),
2. Impose conditions to be met before attending the full member retreat.
3. With the concurrence of three-fourth of the Board attending at any meeting of the Board, return to District Committee with recommendation that District Committee and candidate seek alternative paths to ministry.

With respect to Probationary Members seeking Full Member Ordination,

1. Continue the Candidate (by rejecting the Retreat Documents or otherwise) to a subsequent year without participation in, or completion of, the retreat
2. Continue the Candidate following Full Member retreat,
3. With the concurrence of three-fourth of the Board attending at any meeting of the Board, discontinue the Candidate, or
4. Impose a condition that coaching on plagiarism issues by an individual (to be approved by BoOM Executive Committee) be completed prior to ordination.