SOME CHANGES RELATED TO THE ORDAINED MINISTRY IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN METHODISM

by D.M. Beiler

Today when we speak of a United Methodist preacher we are usually thinking of a fully ordained ministerial member of an annual conference. In the early days of Methodism, however, the Methodist preacher was not an ordained man, but a lay preacher. As Bishop Nolan B. Harmon has reminded us, "In England, Wesley's preachers were practically all unordained men, 'lay' men, who made their living at some special trade or occupation and preached on Sunday in the pulpits assigned to them—usually on large circuits."1 The Methodist preachers did not need to be ordained because the Anglican clergy took care of the sacramental needs of the Methodists. Indeed, the Methodist services in the Methodist chapels (not churches) were not held at the same hour as those of the Church of England.

Likewise, in our country. "Until the year 1784 American Methodism was a lay movement within the Church of England. Up to that time none of the Methodist itinerants had been ordained. nor did they consider their societies real churches, their places of worship being called 'chapels' or 'meeting houses,' never 'churches'."2 It is difficult to realize that even the leader of the itinerating Methodist preachers, Francis Asbury, was unordained until the Christmas Conference in 1784, even though he had been in America since he was chosen by John Wesley in 1771.

Mr. Asbury supported Wesley's policy of Methodists in America avoiding a break with the Church of England and therefore needing to depend on the Anglican clergy for the sacraments. During the year 1780, Mr. Asbury wrote to Mr. Wesley several times imploring him for an ordained itinerant for America. Wesley in turn pleaded with the Bishop of London, Richard Lowth, to ordain such a man for America. Specifically, in 1780, he asked him to ordain John Hoskins, who had brought Methodism

to Newfoundland six years earlier. The objection to Hoskins was that he did not understand classical languages. In response to the Bishop of London came the well-known reply of John Wesley: "...but your Lordship did...ordain...other persons who knew something of Greek and Latin, but who knew no more of saving souls than of catching whales."  

The most prominent of the cooperating priests of the Church of England in America was the Reverend Devereux Jarratt of Virginia, who assisted Methodists with the sacraments from 1773 until the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church at the Christmas Conference in 1784. Well-known is the fact that Robert Strawbridge, who "raised up" a number of early native American Methodist itinerants and, although not ordained, administered the sacraments. Other Methodist preachers in Virginia and Carolinas would have followed this practice, 1777-1779, organized a presbytery and ordained each other had it not been for Francis Asbury, Freeborn Garrettson, Thomas Rankin, William Watters and the redoubled efforts of the Reverend Jarratt. The sacramental and other spiritual needs of the Methodist people in America were not being adequately cared for and some new solution was demanded. Some plan for the ordination of American Methodist preachers was necessary, especially following the Revolutionary War.

The story of the Christmas Conference--its background, Mr. Wesley's cooperation, as well as that of Dr. Coke--is well-known and it is not necessary to tell it again. Many wise decisions were made in a very short time, including Mr. Asbury's demand for his election by the preachers.

In the first Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church are included the "Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D., the Rev. Francis Asbury and others, at a Conference, begun in Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, on Monday, the

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27th of December, in the Year 1784."

Question 3 asks:

As the Ecclesiastical as well as Civil Affairs of these United States have passed through a very considerable Change by the Revolution, what Plan of Church-Government shall we hereafter pursue?

Answer. We will form ourselves into an Episcopal Church under the Direction of Superintendents, Elders, Deacons and Helpers, according to the Forms of Ordination annexed to our Liturgy, and the Form of Discipline set forth in these Minutes.

Question 4. What may we reasonably believe to be God's Design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists?

Answer. To reform the Continent, and to spread scriptural Holiness over these Lands. 4

The answers to Questions 26-29, define the office of a Superintendent and his work. Question 30 deals with the office of an Elder and Question 31 indicates the office and work of a Deacon. A longer section, Questions 32-34, deals with the Helper. It is made very clear that only the Elder administers the Lord's Supper. 5

Question 37. What shall be the annual salary of the Elders, Deacons and Helpers?

Answer. Twenty-four Pounds (Pennsylvania-Currency) and no more.

(In the Second Edition, Bishops were added and Deacons replaced Helpers.) Wives of the married preachers were to receive the same amount.

Of interest is the answer to Question 74, in regard to buildings. The answer was:

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4 Minutes....., Philadelphia, 1785, Reproduction, 1887, Concord, N.H.

5 Ibid., pp. 11-13.
Let all our Chapels (later in the 2nd Edition, "Churches") be built plain and decent; but not more expensively than is absolutely unavoidable: Otherwise the necessity of raising money will make rich men necessary to us. But if so, we must be dependent on them, yea, governed by them. And then farewell to the Methodist-Discipline, if not Doctrine too.6

In regard to salary, the 1792 General Conference fixed the circuit rider's annual pay at $64 and traveling expenses. Wives of married preachers were to receive also, "Sixty-four dollars if they be in want of it." Certainly, few preachers received the total amount regularly. Increases in salary did not come rapidly: $80 in 1800 (with a like amount for wives and small allowances for children). In 1816, the salary was $100; in 1836, it was $200. In 1848, differences in salaries appear by authorized allowances for "table expenses" to be determined by the Quarterly Meeting. As from the beginning, the early bishops received the same salary as the preachers. Indeed, it was a brotherhood of poverty. Asbury declared, "We must suffer with, if we labor for, the poor."7 The "table expenses" of bishops after 1832 were determined by the annual conference in which the bishop resided. In 1860, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church put the determination of the preacher's salary in the hands of the Quarterly Conference of the circuit and station.8

The need for ordained ministers has been a recurring concern throughout the history of Methodism in America. It was a major demand leading up to the Christmas Conference. Well-known is the fact that on successive days, December 25-27, 1784, Francis Asbury was ordained Deacon, Elder and Superintendent or Bishop. Of special interest now is the assistance, at Asbury's request, of Philip William Otterbein, the pastor of the German Reformed Church in Baltimore and subsequently

6 Ibid., p. 28.
the co-founder of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. Dr. Coke mentions in his Journal, "that we admitted him, at brother Asbury's desire, to lay hands on brother Asbury with us, on his being ordained bishop." In the ordination certificate, Dr. Coke used the term "Superintendent," but in the sermon he preached he used the term "Bishop" and "Superintendent." This is not the time to discuss the use of the term "Bishop" or Wesley's violent reaction to it. Remember the "dear Franky" letter! Of some interest, however, is the fact that from the beginning the service used is, "The Form of Ordaining a Bishop." Another interesting fact is that the "Superintendent" was "ordained" and not "consecrated" as is the present practice.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, through the General Conference of 1860, the bishops were "ordained." Since 1864 they have been "consecrated." The "Form of Ordaining Bishops" became the "Form of Consecrating Bishops." The Methodist Episcopal Church, South changed the form to consecrate in 1870. In Wesley's The Sunday Service of Methodists in North America, which was adopted at the Christmas Conference, he had included "The Form of Ordaining of a Superintendent." Although he used the term "ordain," it was not thought then or later that the Superintendent or Bishop was a third order. Always in American Methodism the Bishop has been an Elder with the office of the Bishop. In this we have followed Wesley's reading of early church history and English authorities.

Not always remembered is that the Christmas Conference not only elected Dr. Coke to the superintendency and Asbury to deacon's orders, then as an elder and finally as a superintendent, but thirteen others were also elected to deacon's and elder's orders. Two were not ordained elder until later. Three were elected deacons. When we remember that there were about 60

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11 Gerald F. Moore, The Office of Bishop in Methodism, pp. 34-44.
12 Smith, op. cit., pp. 26ff.
preachers in attendance at this historic first conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and only 16 were elected to orders, then it means that more than two-thirds went away unordained. In all there were at that time over 80 Methodist preachers.

From 1784 to 1792 the membership of the new church increased from 14,988 to 65,980. The number of preachers during this same period grew from 83 to 266 and the circuits from 42 to 135. To be noted also, is that of the 266 preachers only 78 were fully ordained and qualified to administer the Lord's Supper. Consequently, it was necessary for the Presiding Elder, or another elder, to administer the sacraments and supervise the preachers and the other unordained leadership of the expanding church. Thus there grew up the traveling ministry and the local ministry—local preachers, exhorters and class leaders.13 After 1789, local preachers were eligible for deacon's orders and in 1812 elder's orders were open to qualified local deacons.14

From several hundred local preachers following 1784, the number had grown by 1812 to two thousand in comparison to 700 traveling preachers.15 The total membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1840 was 852,908, and it was served by 3,587 traveling preachers and 6,393 local preachers.16

The road to the ministry was clearly set forth in the early law and practice. Steps along that road were generally as follows: member in society, class leader, exhorter, local preacher (local deacon after four years, later local elder), traveling preacher on trial in an Annual Conference for two years, traveling deacon for two years, and finally traveling elder.17

That all appointments in the early days were made by Bishop Asbury (not Coke or other early bishops) is

13 Ibid., pp. 40, 47f.
14 Ibid., p. 48.
16 Sweet, op.cit., p. 64.
17 Norwood, op.cit., pp. 467f., from the 1798 Discipline.
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quite clear. Through the years the length of tenure slowly rose—from possibly six months to an exact maximum of two years from 1804 to 1864 in the North when it became three years, and five in 1888; in the South the limit became four years in 1866. It continued at that figure in the South until the time of union in 1939, with an exception for certain editors and board secretaries; also, after 1930, with the consent of the majority of the cabinet, the Bishop could extend it beyond the four year limit.

Extensive travel and other demands on the early circuit rider made many preachers old men before they were forty years of age. All of these demands joined with the meager financial remuneration made it seem questionable for a preacher to marry or stay with the traveling ministry as a life-time calling unless he remained a bachelor. It is not surprising, therefore, in the early disciplines that there appears the admonition:

Take no step toward marriage without first consulting with your Brethren.

Marriage was discouraged among the traveling preachers because of the demand for travel. If a preacher did marry, it often meant that he would locate. The late Dr. Sweet summarized the seriousness of the situation as follows:

The great loss of traveling ministers through their "location" is shown by the fact that, of the 1,616 preachers received into the conferences from the beginning of American Methodism to 1814, 821 had located, most of them within a relatively few years after their admission; 131 had died in the service; 34 had been expelled; and 25 had withdrawn. As late as 1809, of the 84 preachers in the Virginia Conference, only 3 had wives.

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18 Ibid., p. 469.
19 Harmon, op.cit., p. 10.
20 Minutes...., op.cit., p. 11.
21 Sweet, op.cit., p. 50.
Of course, Bishop Asbury never married and never had a home of his own, and rather favored celibacy for his preachers. At one time when he heard that a favored preacher was to be married, he exclaimed:

I believe the devil and the women will get all my preachers.22

Dr. Coke was married, but the three bishops chosen after Coke and Asbury were unmarried. The unmarried state of so many circuit riders may have been the reason that it was said by the critics of the successful Methodists, "There are three requirements for a Methodist preacher--ignorance, impotence and a hell-uva voice!"

The accusation of ignorance was justified in regard to Methodist preachers if the only criteria of judgment is formal academic education. In regard to education of ministers the early Disciplines have often been quoted to show how secondary the education of a minister seemed to be. For example:

But it is objected, 1. This will take up so much Time, that we shall not have Leisure to follow our Studies. We answer, 1. Gaining Knowledge is a good Thing, but saving Souls is a better. 2. By this very Thing you will gain the most excellent Knowledge, that of God and Eternity. 3. You will have Time for gaining other Knowledge too. Only sleep not more than you need; and never be idle or triflingly employed. But 4. If you can do but one, let your Studies alone. I would throw by all the Libraries in the World rather than be guilty of the Loss of one Soul.23

Not always quoted, however, are other passages, such as the following:

Question 49. What general Method of Employing our Time would you advise us to?

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23 Minutes...., op.cit., pp. 7f.
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Answer. We advise you, 1. As often as possible to rise at four. 2. From four to five in the Morning, and from five to six in the Evening, to meditate, pray, and read, partly the Scripture with Mr. Wesley's Notes, partly the closely-practical Parts of what he has published. 3. From six in the Morning till twelve (allowing an Hour for Breakfast) to read in Order, with much Prayer, the Christian Library, and other pious Books....Read the most useful Books, and that regularly and constantly. Steadily spend all the Morning in this Employ, or at least five Hours in four and twenty. "But I have no taste for reading." Contract a taste for it by Use, or return to your Trade ...Preach expressly on Education. "But I have not gift for this." Gift or no Gift, you are to do it; else you are not called to be a Methodist Preacher: Do it as you can, till you can do it as you would. Pray earnestly for the Gift, and use the Means for it. 24

Of course this does not mean that all preachers spent five hours out of twenty-four reading and studying. But it must be clear that Bishop Asbury was not an anti-intellectual or prized ignorance. Rather, his interest in the founding of Cokesbury College, as approved by the Christmas Conference, indicates a real concern for education. The three reasons given in the Discipline for establishment of Cokesbury College were stated as follows:

It is to receive for education and board the sons of the Elders and Preachers of the Methodist Church, poor orphans, and the sons of the subscribers and of other friends. 25

It was called a college, but children of seven years of age were received. In typical Asburyian seriousness, it was stated that "we prohibit play in the strongest terms." As is well-known, the college building burned after a few years and Bishop Asbury was relieved, partly because raising money for it had become a burden.

As mentioned before, Bishop Asbury was a believer

24 Ibid., pp. 16f.
in reading of "the most useful books." His own reading was amazing. He had a fixed purpose of reading at least 100 pages a day. In a fifteen-month period, 1791-92, he read, in addition to the Bible, more than 5,000 pages. Over 100 titles of specific books are mentioned in his Journal and they cover a wide range of subjects.26

In spite of Wesley's background concern for education and Asbury's urging, there was no organized way to implement the admonition of the bishop. At last, in 1816, the bishops were authorized to formulate a course of study for the incoming young ministers. A committee in each Annual Conference was to be appointed to point out a course of reading and study and the presiding elders were to direct the candidate to this course. Evidence of knowledge of the subjects involved was to be given by the candidate before he was to be received into full connection in the Conference.27 How this worked in the case of Peter Cartwright is told as follows:

We had at this early day no course of study prescribed, as at present; but William M'Kendree, afterward bishop, but then my presiding elder, directed me to a proper course of reading and study. He selected books for me, both literary and theological; and every quarterly visit he made, he examined into my progress, and corrected my errors, if I had fallen into any. He delighted to instruct me in English grammar.28

In the beginning the plan recommended was a simple two-year course of study and not uniform throughout the church because each Annual Conference designed its own. In 1844 the course was extended to four years. Some authorities would argue that the course of study met a need but delayed the establishment of theological schools within Methodism because there seemed to be no additional need of such. Also, it was thought that

colleges and universities could supply any academic training needed.29 Peter Cartwright expressed the prejudice of many frontier preachers toward formal theological education when he said,

The Presbyterians, and other Calvinistic branches of the Protestant Church, used to contend for an educated ministry, for pews, for instrumental music, for a congregational or stated salaried ministry. The Methodists universally opposed these ideas; and the illiterate Methodist preachers actually set the world on fire (the American world at least), while they were lighting their matches!..."

I do not wish to undervalue education, but really I have seen so many of these educated preachers who forcibly reminded me of lettuce growing under the shade of a peach-tree, or like a gosling that had got the straddles by wading in the dew, that I turn away sick and faint. Now this educated ministry and theological training are no longer an experiment. Other denominations have tried them and they have proved a perfect failure.30

With the first Constitution and Discipline of 1830, of the Methodist Protestant Church, a prescribed course of reading was printed. Included were about 30 books to cover three years. In 1834 the list was shortened to 19 and an additional 43 books were listed as recommended for all Methodist Protestant ministers. This remained the same until 1858 when it was revised and the responsibility placed on each of the Annual Conferences.31

By 1876 one-third of the Methodist Episcopal ministers were conference members who were graduates of the Course of Study while the other two-thirds were local preachers.32 The continuous opposition to pro-

30 Cartwright, op. cit., p. 64.
Professional theological education within Methodism had made the establishment of such schools difficult. The school that became Boston University School of Theology was founded in 1840-41, as Newbury Biblical Institute, Newbury, Vermont; Garrett Biblical Institute at Evanston, Illinois, opened classes in 1855; Drew Theological Seminary opened in 1867 at Madison, New Jersey. Other denominations had opened professional theological schools or had theological professorships much earlier.

The ministerial educational situation nearer to today is summarized by the late John O. Gross, as follows:

As late as 1939 more than half of all ministers who joined Annual Conferences on trial had no professional training in theological schools. The Asbury axiom, "The saddlebags are the best school for traveling preachers," continued long after the automobile had replaced the circuit rider's horse. Legislation calling for seminary graduation as the regular qualification for conference membership and the making of the Conference Course of Study the exception was not enacted until the General Conference of 1956.33

Today one of the most important tasks of the United Methodist minister is that of counseling. Most pastors spend a great deal of time in counseling sessions with many individuals. Every theological school gives serious attention to this field. There is no greater contrast between the ordained pastor of today and the ordained circuit rider of the past than in this role. Of course, the local preachers took care of many of the relationships of the members of the local church. The traveling elder ministered to the people of several congregations, often far apart. Consequently, he did not have long periods of time in any one place. He preached, administered the Sacraments, kept records of his churches, sold books, married, buried, and supervised the local ministry—local preachers, exhorters, class leaders.

It would be a mistake, however, to indicate that there was a lack of concern for the individual in early American Methodism. The early Disciplines give endless instructions to both the traveling and local ministers. Counseling is new, but the cure of souls has been a part of our Judaeo-Christian heritage from the beginning.\(^{34}\)

Starting with Wesley the societies were divided into classes and bands. Individual confessions and testimonies were expected and given and criticism of the leader and the group offered in order to improve the state of the soul of the individual.\(^{35}\)

In the first Discipline, in speaking of,

...Hindrances, both in ourselves and in People, [number 5 says] Lastly, we are unskilfull in the Work. How few know how to deal with men, so as to get within them, and suit all our Discourse to their several Conditions and Tempers: To chuse the fittest Subjects, and follow them with a holy Mixture of Seriousness, and Terror, and Love and Meekness.\(^{36}\)

In the "holy mixture of seriousness, and terror and love and meekness," as it became incarnate in the preaching and practice of the circuit rider, it may be that terror came to the foreground rather than the others. Certainly, the fear of hell was always there, but surely the grace of God was also there in contrast to the message of the Calvinists with whom they competed with relish.

The best known colorful Methodist frontier preacher and presiding elder was Peter Cartwright of Illinois. In his book, Fifty Years as Presiding Elder, he gives some six or seven pages to one incident involving two girls and their mother. During the preaching in a cabin he noticed that the two girls wept. He determined to follow up and go to their home in spite of a warning that their mother was a "violent persecutor" who would

\(^{35}\) Ibid., pp. 279-83.
order him out of the house. Over he went. He asked to pray, she refused and ordered him out of the house, and threatened him with a clinched fist. Cartwright was fearful that if she struck him he would knock her down. "Had she been a man," he said, "I would have laid him on the floor."

Then Cartwright knelt and although he kept his eyes open, prayed, as he recalls, as follows:

O Lord, thou hast well said the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force, and thy servant has no chance to rescue this family from Satan but by a holy violence. This woman,...has a ship-load of devils in her....This woman is a serious case:...she is not willing to go to hell herself, but she is determined to drag her husband down with her. By a strange providence thou hast given her some fine, interesting children, especially beautiful daughters who want to be religious, but she is so mean and so much like the devil she is determined to keep them out of heaven....She scolds, raves, and swears, prevaricates, tells lies, and does every mean thing to oppose God and religion....I, in thy name, offered salvation, but she refuses to be saved on Gospel terms. I have come to pray with her two young daughters, but she is so much like the devil she has denied me the privilege of doing so for them....Now, Lord, I know thou art slow to wrath and infinite in mercy, and hast no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but that they turn and live. And now, O God, if there is mercy for this poor, mean sinner, let it be extended to her, let it come now; but if her day of grace is gone, if the door of mercy is shut against, kill her and damm her right to the devil where she belongs, and don't let her live to torment and drag her children down to hell to suffer damnation forever and ever. Amen.

By this time her husband and daughters were bathed in tears, and the reader may rest assured the old lady looked sober and countenance-falled. By this time I felt solemn, but I had an abiding assurance that I was divinely directed in this affair.

In four weeks - for I had left another appointment - when I rode up to the cabin where I was to preach, the first person to meet me and cordially shake by the hand was
this old lady, her husband and two daughters. The old lady said my prayer had an overpowering effect on her, and she had expected for several days after I left their cabin that almost every moment hell would open and swallow her up. She took to prayer, and it pleased God to dispossess the legion of devils that was in her, and her sins, which were many and of deepest dye, were all forgiven, and the peace of God, like a river, filled her soul by day and night. That day we had a joyful time. This old lady, her husband, and two daughters all joined the Church, and were firm and steadfast when I last heard of them.

The conversion of this family and their joining the Church was the means of a good revival and the permanent establishment of a Church in this poor and sparsely populated place. The means were rough but effectual. In general I have made it a rule to not back down to the devil or his imps, whether he appears in male or female form. But sometimes it requires backwoods courage to stand our ground.\(^{37}\)

In the United Methodist Church we have the joining of several traditions in regard to the ordained ministry--Methodist Protestant, Methodist Episcopal and Evangelical United Brethren. In the Evangelical United Brethren and Methodist Protestant traditions there was only one ordination, that of elder; while in the Methodist Episcopal background there has always been two ordinations, deacon and elder. This was not always too firm, however, in The Methodist Church. At the General Conference at Pittsburgh in 1964, a General Conference Commission, appointed in 1960, came in with a recommendation of one order, that of elder. The Committee on the Ministry, however, after serious consideration, did not agree, and no change was made by that General Conference. The two orders remained.

It must be admitted also, that in the Methodist Episcopal and The Methodist Church tradition, the authority given in regard to the administration of the Lord's Supper has varied. Authorization of even un-

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\(^{37}\) Peter Cartwright, *Fifty Years as a Presiding Elder*, edited by W. S. Hooper (Cincinnati, 1871), pp. 71-79.
ordained men to administer both of the sacraments, if appointed as pastor, was made possible by the action of the General Conferences of 1939-1940. It was limited somewhat in 1944 by making it necessary for such authorization to be recommended by the District Superintendent and written consent given by the resident bishop annually. Certain changes were made during the next 24 years, but the authorization of unordained men to administer the Lord's Supper was continued. In the Evangelical United Brethren Church the Annual Conference in "cases of necessity" could, by special Annual Conference action, grant authorization for an unordained man to administer the sacraments, if he were regularly serving a charge. In the United Methodist Church in 1968 this was changed. Now the deacon, "when serving as a regularly appointed pastor of a charge, he shall be granted authority to administer the Sacraments on the charge to which he is appointed." No change in this regard was made in 1970 or 1972.

Not long ago one District Superintendent, in the Strawbridge tradition, serving not far from Kansas City, was faced with the need of a local congregation for the Lord's Supper. Not having any ordained man near and none regularly appointed to the church, he took an unusual action! He had the elements prepared, placed on a table, and he consecrated them by telephone!

For many years we Methodists have been making a transition from too much dependence on the local ministry in the church--local elders, local preachers, exhorters and accepted supplies--to greater responsibility for the fully ordained conference members. Different ways of serving the sacramental needs of the small local churches have been tried, such as the assistance

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38 Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Church, 1939, Par. 223.2, p. 68; Par. 223.3, p. 70.
39 Ibid., 1944, Par. 352.2, p. 98.
40 The Discipline of The Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1963, Par. 328, p. 92.
41 The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 1968, Par. 311, p. 110.
of the Counseling Elder. But we are still in the transition period. In the nineteenth century and even in our own experience the ordained local elders have served the people well and they met a real need. Although today in the United Methodist Church the ordination of local elders is no longer allowed, there is still a large number of local elders, who remain in an anomalous position. They are not and never have been members of an Annual Conference, but they formerly were accepted and listed in a separate category. Today they are now lay pastors, although having the full authority to administer the Lord's Supper. In many Annual Conference Journals their full ordination as elders is not noted. In regard to this the Discipline is silent.

The present plight of the local elder and the authorization of unordained men to administer the Lord's Supper illustrates the lack of a strictly legalistic approach to ordination in American Methodism. From the very beginning the spiritual needs of the people have been more important than legal consistency. Therefore, many times the demands of strict ecclesiology have been altered or overlooked. The people's needs are more important than consistency.

The last two changes in regard to the ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church were made possible by the actions of the 1968 General Conference. There is need only to summarize these because they are well known. The Board of Ministry of each Annual Conference was given significant additional responsibilities. Earlier the Board had been related to the ministerial candidate only up to the time of reception into full membership of the conference. Now it has the task of being involved with the minister throughout his or her total career from the call to preach until death. The same General Conference created a new church-wide approach to the financing of the training of its ministry through the Ministerial Education Fund. In the sharing of this fund the Annual Conferences through their Boards of Ministry, the theological schools and the church as a whole join in this life-long training of the ministry. No other church in Christendom has matched this tremendous program.
In this paper it is obvious that I have not covered all the aspects or all of the changes in regard to the American Methodist ministry or even within the former churches which now make up the United Methodist Church.

Since 1953, at least one branch of the present United Methodist Church has been studying the ministry, or training for the ministry, through General Conference Committees or Commissions. Some creative work has been done and the end is not yet. The General Conference of 1972 authorized two new commissions related to the ministry. One of these, the Commission to Study the Ministry, is especially concerned with the developments with which this paper has been dealing. It is safe to say that all solutions will not be arrived at by 1976.

The hopeful thing is that we are concerned to serve the present age with a ministry that seeks to know its present task and is conscious of its heritage—American Methodist, Wesleyan, church tradition, as well as Biblical.