

Guidelines for Establishing a Wesley Foundation/Fellowship or other United Methodist-related Collegiate Ministry



What is a Wesley Foundation/Fellowship or other United Methodist-related Collegiate Ministry?

Collegiate ministries are any intentional efforts by the church to minister with, to, and on behalf of those connected to college and university campuses. These ministries might be congregation-based; part of an independent, stand-alone, denominationally-specific campus ministry; an ecumenical ministry in partnership with other Christian denominations; an interfaith ministry where the Christian witness is honored and encouraged; or the chaplaincy and ministry office at a United Methodist-related college or university. Generally, the names for these ministries will vary with “collegiate ministry” operating not as an official name for any ministry but as an umbrella term covering the whole range of these ministries. Specifically, “Wesley Foundations” refer to United Methodist ministries at schools not connected to The United Methodist Church, whereas “Wesley Fellowships” refer to United Methodist ministries at United Methodist-related schools. A United Methodist-related ministry is not required to use any of these names to be a ministry of the Church.

What distinguishes collegiate ministries from other ministries of the Church?

Collegiate ministries share many characteristics with other ministries of the Church, even sharing some of the same constituencies or individual participants. Unlike most ministry contexts, collegiate contexts experience an unusually high rate of turnover of the community’s population and work with a constituency that is restricted to those connected to a particular community or status. Because of this extremely dynamic population and intentionally delimited community served, collegiate ministries are a missional context, a leading-edge environment where innovative and imaginative work of the Church’s work is required, lived, experienced, and practiced. Not a youth group ministry for young adults or simply a congregation on campus, collegiate ministry is unique. To create and sustain a successful collegiate ministry, this unique missional context requires, *first*, recognizing this distinctiveness and, *second*, establishing specific, appropriate strategies particular to this ministry.

With such diversity of expression, what do all UM-related collegiate ministries share?

For a denomination dedicated to the critical link between knowledge and vital piety, ministry on the campus is essential to our theological heritage and indispensable from our present and enduring mission on the campus. While often distinct in their structure and character, these ministries share a common mission. That mission is:

- (1) to support the witness of a positive Christian faith that creates space for establishing and deepening discipleship and intentional spiritual growth;
- (2) to create an inclusive and celebrative atmosphere that nurtures and supports the faith journeys of those involved in the ministry;
- (3) to emphasize through teachings and example the divine worth and dignity of each person;
- (4) to prepare its constituencies for lives of intellectual vigor, moral integrity, and spiritual fulfillment; and
- (5) to serve as an affirming and nurturing link between the church and the academy.

Are there different types of ministries?

Collegiate ministries take many forms. A variety of factors dictate these forms, including factors such as organizational needs of an annual conference, financial realities, historical circumstances, or available professional personnel. Here are types several types of collegiate ministries. The list

is not meant to be exhaustive but, rather, merely illustrative. They are listed in no particular order of preference or endorsement.

Conference funded director, full-time.

Free standing ministry. This model works best for a large research university that is not geographically positioned near a local church that has the resources and desire to support full-time collegiate ministry. The collegiate program relates to several churches in the area, but the ministry on campus serves as the primary “church” for those students. Churches in the area support the collegiate ministry rather than compete with it for students’ attention.

Conference funded director, full-time.

Local church affiliation. This model can work for a large research university in a “college town” that has one easily identifiable church near the campus. The church and the collegiate ministry share resources of time and talent with one another. Perhaps the collegiate minister appears frequently in the local church worship service and students are regularly included in church activities. The collegiate ministry maintains a full schedule of events for its students, but in concert with the church events.

Church funded director, full-time.

Local church affiliation. The collegiate minister is paid by the local church and charged with the responsibility for ministry on the campus. The major difference between this model and the second model is the local church is providing the salary support for the collegiate minister who provides a full schedule of events for the college students.

Conference funded director, part-time.

Some campuses do not require a full schedule of events and some clergy do not wish to work full-time. Opportunities to appoint qualified collegiate ministers for these situations should be explored. Often new collegiate ministry sites begin as part-time ministries and quickly grow to full-time ministry settings.

Conference funded director, part-time.

Local church affiliation. The collegiate minister is a member of the church staff, charged with the responsibility for ministry on the campus, but also has church related responsibilities. Percentage distribution of time and responsibilities is handled by the church and the collegiate minister.

Church funded director, part-time.

A local church with financial resources and connections to a near-by campus might identify a qualified person in the area to work on their behalf on the college campus. A church with the resources can support a minister with the qualifications, even if that minister is serving another appointment in the area.

Conference funded ecumenical minister.

Several church judicatories work together to provide a collegiate minister for students on the campus. Working cooperatively, these judicatories support the collegiate ministry rather than compete with each other for students’ attention.

Local church initiative.

UM presence on our community colleges might best be handled by local churches near these campuses in consultation with other collegiate ministries in the area and the conference staff.

Entrepreneurial ministry.

Atypical model. These ministries link collegiate ministry with some other ministry to supply funding, spacing, and staffing.

College or university chaplaincy.

Funded by the academic institution or shared funding by an annual conference. These ministries work within the organizational structure of the academic institution.

What makes a strong ministry?

Collegiate ministries that are healthy and vital typically share several characteristics. Generally, these ministries (1) are well staffed with a professionally trained minister able to articulate his/her call to collegiate ministry who is a strong, passionate, and mature leader; (2) are funded sufficiently to thrive and sustain; (3) possess a clear mission, vision, and purpose; and (4) display strong connections in ministering with students, with other elements of the campus community, and with off-campus partners.

What are the steps to establishing a ministry?

It is recommended that individuals, groups, churches, or others interested in establishing a United Methodist-related collegiate ministry follow these steps:

- (1) work in cooperation with the annual conference board of higher education and campus ministry or other structure in determining where new collegiate ministries are needed after the completion of extensive study by an appointed task force to assess the potential of ministry on a university or college campus in accordance with the policies, standards, and goals of the Division of Higher Education of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry;
- (2) study the unique missional opportunities and needs of the campus, student demographics of the university or college, number and size of other denominational collegiate ministries, student life plan of the university or college, long-range development plan of the campus, fiscal and facilities needs, support and cooperation of nearby United Methodist churches and district, and other items that may impact the collegiate ministry's ability to fulfill the mission of the church on campus;
- (3) establish appropriate expectations for the new collegiate ministry through comparison with existing ministries at similar academic institutions;
- (4) draft short-term and long-range strategic plans issuing from the above study that generate and attend to the new collegiate ministry's clear and relevant mission statement and vision; and
- (5) obtain endorsement, support, assessment, and advocacy from the annual conference board of higher education and campus ministry or other structure.



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