

To: Prospective Student Pastors

From: P. Alice Rogers, Director  
Teaching Parish Program

I am pleased to learn of your desire to attend Candler School of Theology. The enclosed information will be of assistance if you are considering serving as a student local pastor while you are working towards the Master of Divinity degree. Although the paragraphs below relate specifically to those pursuing appointment in the North Georgia Conference, they relate generally to student appointments in other conferences as well. Please take a moment to read these words of explanation before pursuing your application for a student-pastor appointment.

### ***Eligibility***

Persons enrolled, or planning to be enrolled, in a degree program of the Candler School of Theology are eligible to seek appointment as student-pastors. Appointments offered to persons prior to admission are contingent upon admission to the Master of Divinity degree program. Normally, only those who are certified candidates for the ordained United Methodist ministry and have fulfilled the License to Preach requirement will be considered for appointment. Due to immigration regulations limiting off-campus employment to an eighteen-month term of service, international students will not be considered for a student-pastor appointment in their first year of study. International students may be considered for appointment during the final eighteen months of study at Candler. For additional information regarding international students and student-pastor appointments, please contact the Office of Admissions (404-727-6326).

### ***Student Appointments: Blessings and Burdens***

Pursuing one's theological education while serving a charge as a student-pastor is a wonderful opportunity in many ways. From a financial standpoint it allows the student-pastor to generate an income to help with tuition, living expenses and other obligations. In addition, married student-pastors' spouses may find employment in the parish community. There is also the advantage of being able to meet one's housing needs by living in the charge parsonage.

Serving a student appointment is an excellent way to gain ***experience*** in parish ministry. The student-pastor is the pastor-in-charge, not a junior trainee. For all intents and purposes he or she carries all the responsibility, with all the corresponding opportunity, that a fully ordained clergy person would have in the same situation.

This arrangement also provides a special ***learning opportunity***. The student-pastor is in a position to maximize the integration of theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom

with experiential learning gained through the ecclesial setting. The Teaching Parish exists to help the student-pastor make the most of this opportunity, and provides a peer support group as well.

There is also the advantage of deriving *personal support* from one's congregation as one works through seminary experience. Many student appointments have a history of service by student-pastors giving these congregations a special ability to empathize with and care for the student-pastor. In addition, student-pastors constitute a valuable support group for one another, through the Teaching Parish Program.

Having noted these assets of student appointments, it is only fair to highlight the burdensome aspects as well. Essentially there are two, heavy workload and travel.

All student-pastors experience stress as they attempt to do justice to their educational work, their pastoral responsibilities, and their family needs, not to mention their own personal care. It is important to know this up front. Please ponder carefully, prayerfully, and consultation with your family before coming to a decision regarding a student appointment. If you think the heavy load might seriously impair your ability to function adequately in any of the areas mentioned above please consider alternatives, e.g., seeking other sources of income, extending you seminary training over an additional year, etc. It is not worth shortchanging one's educational opportunities, formative job experience, or family relationships just to be a student-pastor.

A major contributing factor to many student-pastors' loads is travel. Student appointments in North Georgia, for example, are scattered throughout the Conference, which means most participants have to drive some distance between the parish and the seminary on a regular basis. Some student-pastors even choose to rent a room near Emory so as to be able to stay overnight during the school week. The majority, however, commute. Maximum one-way distance would be about 100 miles, though the majority of the routes fall in the 20-80 mile range (one-way). Many cope with this problem by car-pooling.

In citing these potentially negative factors, I in no way intend to deter you from seeking a student appointment. The majority of student-pastors handle their appointments admirably. I do want to be sure you are aware of the opportunities and the burdens early on so that you will be prepared to manage them well from the start.

### ***The Appointment Process***

If you decide to request a student appointment, please complete the enclosed application, attaché a brief summary letter (as requested on the application form), attach a recent photograph of yourself, and send it to me at the address shown on the application. As

soon as I receive it, I will send it to the Conference offices you have chosen, where it will be made available to all the district superintendents.

From this point forward, an appointment becomes a matter between you and the Conference Cabinet. ***Neither I nor anyone else at Candler School of Theology has anything to do with making student appointments.*** Normally sometime in the spring prior to the start of the new Conference year in June, a district superintendent will contact prospective student-pastors. Such contact is dependent upon the number of persons who have submitted applications and the number of appointments that will be available. It behooves one, therefore, to submit the application as soon as possible.

For North Georgia appointments, if you are not contacted by a district superintendent by mid-spring, you will want to initiate contact with Rev. John Simmons, Director, Office of Ministerial Services and Spiritual Formation, 4511 Jones Bridge Circle, Norcross, GA 30092, 678-533-1369.

When a district superintendent does contact you, you will be informed of the appointment that is available. Of course, you are not constrained to accept an offer; when you reject an offered appointment, however, it does limit the number of subsequent possibilities that are available to you.

Once you accept an appointment, you will be expected to begin your service on the Conference moving day, which is usually in mid-June. If your circumstances prohibit this, you might be able to negotiate an alternative start date; again, this is a matter between you and the district superintendent.

Should you receive an appointment and subsequently find you cannot fill it (e.g. you are not granted admission the Candler School of Theology), you should inform the district superintendent as soon as possible.

***The Teaching Parish Program for Appointments in North Georgia, North Alabama, and Alabama-West Florida***

Once you have been accepted at Candler and are established in your appointment, you automatically become a member of the Teaching Parish. A joint creation of the Conference Cabinet and Candler School of Theology, the Teaching Parish Program consists of all Candler student-pastors serving in the annual conferences with whom Candler has a Teaching Parish agreement. Its purposes are to strengthen student-pastors in their understanding and execution of ministry, to facilitate their integration of theory and experience, and to provide support for them.

The Teaching Parish is organized on a geographic basis, with all the student-pastors in a geographic area constituting a Teaching Parish Group. Each Teaching Parish meets together (presently on Mondays) throughout the fall and spring semesters. Each group is led by a Teaching Parish Supervising Pastor, an elder serving in that area who has been chosen for this responsibility. The elder's job is to lead the Teaching Parish group in its work, to evaluate each student-pastors's performance in Teaching Parish, and to provide individual counsel to each student-pastor. Teaching Parish activities are suspended during the summer, though there is an orientation for all student-pastors at the end of the summer. You will receive more information about the orientation and about the Teaching Parish Program soon after arriving at your appointment in June.

Participation in Teaching Parish is not optional; the participating annual conferences require it of all Candler student-pastors, unless excused by their Cabinets due to extenuating circumstances. Since Teaching Parish involves certain requirements (as well as the possibility of academic credit), it is part of the student-pastor's workload.

As is the case in most endeavors, one's attitude has a lot to do with how one performs as a student-pastor in the Teaching Parish Program. Should you become a student-pastor, a positive attitude will help you not only endure but also make the most of this demanding but potentially enriching experience. I hope this information will help shape your attitude in a positive way. If I can answer your questions or be of assistance to you, please let me know (404/727-3006.)