



Handbook for Probation Word and Sacraments 2026

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THE MCSA PROBATIONER MINISTERS' REQUIREMENTS AND REGULATIONS

A. SEMINARY TRAINING

All candidates for the ministry of Word and Sacrament who successfully complete the candidating requirements and are accepted by the Connexional Executive and Conference shall attend **Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary, Pietermaritzburg** for three years. The Connexion makes the stationing decision late in the previous year, and accepted candidates move to Seminary in order to start the academic year by the middle of January if they are single or staying in single quarters, and by November / December of the previous year, if they are staying in married quarters. There is an Easter break and a July vacation. At the end of the year before Seminarians are stationed in Circuits, they attend a "Going to Circuit Seminar" at the Seminary.

No stipend is received during the time at seminary. A grant contributes towards living expenses.

B. POST SEMINARY TRAINING

District Internship

Probationers who have completed the seminary training will spend the remainder of the probation in a full-time circuit station. They shall participate in the District Internship Training for the duration of their probation (except Ordinands). This programme is run under the direction of the District Supervisor of Studies/Internship Convener in the District. It has a set syllabus for each year that is drawn up by EMMU.

The purpose of Internship training is:

1. To continue the process of ministerial and spiritual formation.
2. Within this process, to develop further **skills for theological reflection**, that is, the integration of knowledge, skills and values for ministry.
3. To let all of this be driven by "a vision for Mission".

The programme begins each year with a Connexional Seminar in January. The attendance is compulsory for all probationers in circuit. Up to a further 8 days but with a minimum of 5 days per year are negotiated in District groups to meet for formation, learning, fellowship, worship and accountability. **Every Probationer is expected to be in attendance for the full duration of the agreed internship meetings.** The internship assignments are distributed at the seminar.

January Seminar Outline

The seminar, among other activities, consists of:

- a session to meet with DSS's/IST conveners
- Sessions for presentation of the projects (including speaker input if required). Also to include workshop on skills required for the project (e.g. how to journal for pastoral care; how to lead a workshop; how to do social needs analysis, etc.)
- sessions for specific skills development and character growth:
 1. Pastoral care practical electives (e.g. grief, bereavement, marriage prep, narrative therapy). Multiple sessions will run concurrently and probationers will elect 1 to attend each year.
 2. Spiritual / contemplative focus (e.g. retreat, guided self-reflection)

District IST Meetings

DSS's or IST Conveners will organise meetings for all probationers for a minimum of 5 days and up to 8 days. A day must comprise a minimum of 6 hours of activity.

Compulsory common IST Meeting content:

- 1 day must be designed around the contemporary issues common assignment. In the morning there should be an interactive presentation/workshop by a speaker on the issue identified for the assignment. The afternoon should consist of small group work-shopping of questions/problems offered by the speaker as well as discussion of the specifics of the assignment task.
- 1 day must be devoted to visiting a mission project in the District. The visit must be arranged so that the people who began and/or operate the project engage with the probationers. The intention is to provide an opportunity for the probationers to obtain practical information on how to start and run projects of different kinds.
- 1 day must be devoted to Spiritual Health and Personal Mastery. Probationers must be guided through a deep examination of 'how it goes with their souls'. There must also be a small group session in which probationers reflect on their journey with their Probationer Mentoring Committees.
- 1 day must be devoted to creating meaningful opportunities for Accountability Groups (see below) and the conveners to have feedback discussions on the common assignment.

Process for the marking of the Assignments:

The Probationers in the Districts are divided into *Accountability Groups* of five or six and are led by a Coordinator (this could be the IST Convenor, DSS or an Ordained Minister that is involved in the training of the student ministers in the District). In cases where there are few Probationers in a District, the Convener and DSS will use a suitable process which will involve and empower Probationers.

At the January Seminar Probationers in each Accountability Group will be elected as *Assignment Facilitator* for the assignments (i.e. each of the assignment will have a different facilitator from the group; every Probationer should serve as facilitator at least once during the course of their probation).

For every assignment, the Probationers in the group will e-mail their projects to the assignment facilitator who will ensure that he/she has everyone's projects and then email all of the projects to each member of the group and the group Coordinator. All Probationers are required to review their colleagues' assignments and send comments for the whole group and facilitator to read. This review and engagement process forms part of the assignment assessment.

For the common assignment all assignments must reach the facilitator at least a month before the Internship meeting designated to engage with the assignment. This is to enable group members and the Coordinator to assess the assignments and send feedback to the individuals prior to the meeting. (No marks or competencies are awarded in this review process, rather this feedback would include things such as parts of the projects they have not dealt with, areas they need to think a deeper about, or alternatives to try – e.g. "we cannot see that they have reflected theologically" or "maybe you should try applying another approach to social development for that a specific aspect of the assignment").

The purpose of this review process is so that Probationers don't have to present their full assignments at the IST Meeting because everyone in the group has engaged with every assignment already. The meeting thus will provide an opportunity to add value to each other's ministry through reflection on how the Probationer has grown through this assignment, what they learned out of their failure or out of their

Success, how the project has affected their ministry and those they minister to, etc. Each project would naturally lend itself to a variety of specific questions that could be asked with regards to reflections.

The feedback that was given will be checked by those who gave it (and the student has an opportunity to defend their original work, although this would have hopefully taken place at the time the feedback was given or they would show that they have received the feedback, reflected and made the required changes).

Part of the purpose for the marking of projects by the Probationers is that a student who hasn't thought deeply enough about something, or had misunderstood an aspect of the project would have picked this up when they reviewed the other projects and would have some idea of what is expected or of alternatives they could try before getting to the internship meeting.

The final mark for the assignment will be determined by the Assessor at the meeting, incorporating the original submitted assignment, the revised assignment and the Probationers' engagement with their peers' assignments before and during the meeting.

IST Character Assessment

Each Probationer is assigned a **Probationer Mentoring Committee** (PMC) comprising at least 5 people (plus the Superintendent as an ex-officio member), appointed by the Superintendent at the first CQM of the year. This committee is chaired by a member of the society or section in which the Probationer is designated to serve (appointed by the Superintendent) and must also comprise various leaders of the society/section in which the Probationer serves along with, so far as possible, an Ordained Minister with whom the Probationer works closely.

The intention of the Probationer Mentoring Committee is to allow the Probationer to be in continuous conversation with a consistent committee throughout the duration of her/his time within the circuit and not simply in the year of recommendation for ordination. This allows for a more holistic approach to the assessing of the Probationer and a pastoral space to assist the Probationer to develop in areas of weakness and strength.

Building a Relationship: *It is helpful to begin the supervisory relationship by investing time in the PMC getting to know something about the context and approach to ministry of a Probationer.*

For example:

- *A Probationer's sense of vocation to ministry and its relationship with other callings, e.g. to family roles, other professional roles*
- *A Probationer's current ministry context – particular features and particular risks that need factoring (e.g. as a pioneer, mission partner, inner city minister, lone worker etc.)*
- *A Probationer's theological commitments and approach*
- *What passions a Probationer has that might inform their reflective process*
- *Any factors around difference and power that need to be considered*

The Boundaries and Expectations of Reflective Supervision and Mentoring

The PMC must meet with the Probationer on a quarterly basis. Before the second and fourth CQM each year, in committee (or consultation), the PMC will compile the **Circuit Probationer Report 1 (form P2A or P2B)** for submission to the Superintendent and DSS. The report assesses the holistic character, spirituality and growth of the Probationer. The reports focus on three keys areas of relationship – with God, Others and Self – as well as the values of Stewardship, Leadership and Moral Integrity. The Superintendent will complete the relevant additional sections.

These reports will be kept on file by the DSS as a record of the Probationer's character formation throughout IST. If a Probationer moves Districts during probation, the record will be transferred to the new DSS.

In the year a Probationer may be recommended for ordination, and the year of potential ordination,

Circuit Probationer Report 1 (form P2B) & Circuit Probationer Report 2 (form P3) must be completed before the April CQM.

IST Requirements for Synod

- a. **District Exam** (please see the yearbook for details) (**Form P1** submitted to DSS before District Exam Committee).
 - i. Part one: Written exegesis submitted to DSS
 - ii. Part two: Oral defense of exegesis and engagement with exegeses of peers with District examining committee.
- b. **Circuit Assessment Report (Form P2A)** submitted by Superintendent to DSS.

- c. **Trial Service (Form P4** submitted by Superintendent to DSS).
- d. **Grade for 1st IST assignment**
- e. *If in year of being recommended for Ordination – Circuit Assessment Report 1 (Form P2B), Self-Assessment Assignment, Circuit Assessment Report 2 (Form P3), CQM Recommendation (Form P5), and District Screening Committee Interview Report (Form P6).*
- f. *If in Ordination year – Circuit Assessment Report 1 (Form P2B), Circuit Assessment Report 2 (Form P3), CQM Recommendation (Form P5), and District Screening Committee Exit Interview Report (Form P7).*

EXIT PROCEDURE FROM PROBATION TO ORDINATION

A Probationer under FINAL WARNING may not be advanced to ordination.

Each year at the January seminar, EMMU will provide a list of Probationers who may be ready to be recommended each year.

Only when a Probationer Minister has **COMPLETED ALL** academic requirements in the previous year and if the Superintendent of a Probationer Minister judges the Probationer

- Of sound moral and religious character,
 - As believing and teaching sound Christian doctrine as held by the Methodist Church,
 - As observing and enforcing our doctrine,
 - And as having competent abilities for the work of an Ordained Minister in the MCSA,
 - AND the Probationer having served the required minimum years on probation.
1. The PMC conducts an interview with the Probationer and makes a recommendation to the April Quarterly Meeting. **The Interview questions and reporting are Form P3** (available from EMMU or can be downloaded from www.methodisttraining.co.za.)
 2. The April CQM receives the P2B and P3 reports then forward them along with their recommendation to Synod and EMMU, through the DSS. **Please use Form P5 for recommendation to Synod.** It is available from EMMU or can be downloaded from www.methodisttraining.co.za.
 3. The District Supervisor of Studies convenes a District Screening Committee before the District Synod, including members of the District EMMU Committee. This committee will review the Probationer's Circuit Assessment (Form P3) and CQM recommendation Form P5) and then interview the Probationer to assess personal and spiritual growth of the Probationer. **Please use Form P6 for this interview.** It is available from EMMU or can be downloaded from www.methodisttraining.co.za.
 4. The District Listening Committee conducts an Oral Doctrine and Practice Examination of the recommended Probationer in committee (not on the floor of the synod). This examination will assess the Probationer's understanding of Methodist doctrine and practice and will be set by EMMU.
 5. Synods receive the names of all Probationers whose advancement is recommended by the Circuit Quarterly Meetings for consideration and recommendation of advancement by the Synod Screening and Listening Committees.
 6. **Probationer Ministers submit the required Assessment Documents (content to be determined from time to time) on next page to EMMU, by 01 June of the year in which Synod has recommended their name for advancement to Ordination.**

The General Committee of EMMU, having received all the reports from District Synods, shall on the basis of such reports (through its Assessment Committee) make a recommendation to the Connexional Executive pending satisfactory end of year results.

7. Based upon satisfactory reports, EMMU recommends Ordination for the following year to the Connexional Executive and Conference.

EXITING PROBATION SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS (2025)

INSTRUCTIONS:

The following questions are to be answered openly and honestly, to assess understanding of personal growth and of acquired competence in ministerial practice during Probation. Answer all questions. The number of words given to each question is for guidance. **The total document is not to exceed 4000 words i.e. 8 typed pages. REFERENCE YOUR WORK WHERE APPLICABLE!**

Personal reflections:

1. (a) Discuss which tools you used to measure spiritual growth and maturity in ministry,
(b) And how have you grown as a disciple of Christ and in your personal spiritual discipline during your Probation. Give practical examples.
(c) What strategies have you used to manage the balance between your spiritual disciplines with the demands of your congregation? Personal vision and mission statement (500 words)
2. (a) Discuss how you have created disciples pathways for new believers and spiritual growth, for Relocated and Repositioned ministry and mission.
(b) Affirm yourself by briefly commenting on the skills/ practices of ministry that you believe you are doing very well. (350 words)

Practical and Pastoral Ministry

3. How effective are your small groups and Bible studies in fostering depth and community? What have you found to be your particular gifting? Explain how this gifting fit in with the order of ministry you are called into as well as with the mission of the MCSA? (500 words)
4. What practice/ skill of ministry do you use to make the congregation to be embrace unity in diversity, give practical examples? (250 words)
4. (B). Which social justice issue you believe the church should advocating for in the community. (300 words)
5. Outside of the formal Methodist training, who or what else has influenced your ministry during this time of Probation. Explain how. (300 words)
6. Describe an event/ incident of failure or hardship you have experienced during your Probation. How did you handle and process this experience and what have you learnt from it? Please include some theological reflection on the experience. (500 words)

Theological and Ethical Reflections

7. What particular IST Project have you enjoyed during your in-service training and why? Which one challenged you and why? Measure progress and adjust course. (500 words)
8. Society tends to bestow status and power upon those in the ministry. How do you as a minister relate and handle this power? Give examples. (300 words)
9. How have you maintained a healthy and positive relationships with the members of the

congregation you are serving AND with those who are your supervisors in the ministry i.e. Superintendent, District Supervisor, IST Convener etc.? Time management Indicate how you have manage your time. (500 words)

10. As you are nearing ordination year, write a reflection on what you understand ordination to mean especially within the order in which you are called. (300 words)

ORDINATION YEAR

Having completed probation successfully, and having completed an accepted degree or diploma, and having fulfilled all requirements expected, a Probationer is advanced to Ordination.

Preparation for Ordination includes:

- Attending the **January Ordinands' Seminar**.
- Prescribed Ordinands' Assignments
- A retreat together with other Ordinands a few days before Conference and the Ordination Service.

Synod Requirements in year of Ordination

1. The PMC conducts an interview with the Probationer and make a recommendation to the April Quarterly Meeting. **The Interview questions and reporting are Form P3** (available from EMMU or can be downloaded from www.methodisttraining.co.za.)
2. The April CQM receives the P2B and P3 reports then votes to recommend the Probationer for Ordination to synod. The CQM (Superintendent) should forward the reports along with the recommendation to Synod and EMMU, through the DSS. **Please use form P5 for recommendation to Synod.** It is available from EMMU or can be downloaded from www.methodisttraining.co.za.
3. Ordinands must conduct One (1) Trial Service in front of at least two, but preferably three Ordained Ministers and one lay member of the District. This team of assessors will provide the DSS with a report of the service (Form P4) plus an attachment with a brief outline of the sermon and a general description of the service.
4. The District Supervisor of Studies convenes a District Screening Committee before the District Synod including members of the District EMMU Committee. This committee will review the Probationer's Circuit Assessment (Form P2 with Section B) and CQM recommendation and then conduct an **Exit Interview** to assess the Probationer's readiness for Ordination. **Please use Form P7 for this interview.** It is available from EMMU or can be downloaded from www.methodisttraining.co.za.
5. **An Oral Exam** occurs on the floor of Clergy Convocation assessed by a Listening committee appointed by the District Bishop and DSS.
6. Synods receive the names of all Probationers whose Ordination is recommended by the Circuit Quarterly Meeting and District Screening Committee for consideration and votes on recommendation of advancement – sent to the EMMU General Committee.
7. The General Committee of EMMU, having received all the reports from District Synods, shall on the basis of such reports (through its Assessment Committee) make a recommendation to the Connexional Executive pending satisfactory end of year results.

MINISTER – IN – TRAINING IN CIRCUIT (Probationers and Ordinands) RUBRICS FOR SKILLS AND CHARACTER FORMATION

CAUTION	<p>1) A failed IST Assignment, Exegesis, Trial Service, Theological exam for advancing to Ordination, Self-assessment, Ordinands’ Theological Exam or Ordination Assignment. [see Note 1 & Note 2]</p> <p>2) Evidence of plagiarism [see Note 2]</p> <p>3) Late submission of assignment (IST and Ordination) beyond reasonable extension [see Note 2]</p> <p>4) Unacceptable behaviour towards fellow probationers, guest speakers, or those in authority at the January seminar, IST meetings and Screening or Readiness committee's (this includes late coming, disrespect, rudeness, and expressing any of the various“ism's”) [see Note 2]</p> <p>5) Being under the influence of alcohol or any other substance [see Note 2]</p> <p>6) Receiving Category A rating in a Probationer Mentoring Committee (PMC) Report [see Note 2 and Note 3]</p> <p>7) A repeat offence occurs after a lifted Caution, Warning or Final Warning in any year of Probation [see Note 4]</p>
WARNING	<p>1) Accumulation of TWO cautionable offences.</p> <p>2) Avoidance of recommended interventions issued by EMMU when cautioned.</p>
FINAL WARNING	<p>1) Accumulation of THREE cautionable offences.</p> <p>2) A Cautionable offence while on Warning.</p>
DISCONTINUANCE	<p>1) Accumulation of FOUR cautionable offences.</p> <p>2) A cautionable offence while on Final Warning.</p> <p>3) Failure to meet all the requirements for ordination within 7 years.</p> <p>4) Being found guilty of the breach of Discipline as per Laws and Discipline.</p>
PASTORAL LEAVE	<p>1) A Probationer may at times be placed on Pastoral Leave. This may affect their participation in the formation program on their allowed seven years for Presbyters or six years for the diaconate for Ordination. [see Note 5]</p>

NOTE 1

- 1.1. In situations where the Probationer/Ordinand has failed any of the components listed in no.1 she/he will be allowed to re-submit.
- 1.2. In the case of an IST Assignment, if it was to be a communally determined assessment, the Probationer is to re-submit by the end of the IST meeting. If it is to be solely assessed by the DSS or IST Convenor, the probationer will be given a week in which to re-submit from receiving knowledge of the assignment not being competent.
- 1.3. In cases of other components, the DSS & the District EMMU committee will determine the dates of re-submission- which should be before the July EMMU General Committee Meeting.
- 1.4. If the re-submission is not successful it results in a failure of the Component and the rubrics fall into place (see note 2).

NOTE 2

- 2.1. Deferment of ordination by a year.
- 2.2. If a probationer has lost a period or component of their training, their ordination will be deferred by a year.

NOTE 3

3.1. If no pastoral commission has been instituted, and the DSS is unable to secure a pastoral commission with the Synod Bishop, the Director of EMMU may request the Presiding Bishop to institute a Pastoral commission. The report from either of these pastoral commissions is to be submitted to the DSS for submission to the next EMMU General Committee Meeting. EMMU may then require further intervention.

NOTE 4

4.1. If a repeat offence occurs after a lifted Caution, Warning or Final Warning shall require an appointment of a Mentor who will submit a report to the ensuing General Committee.

NOTE 5

5.1. Consideration of the circumstances leading to pastoral leave shall be made by the EMMU General Committee. One further year may be added to their probation period, subject to CE.

5.2. The same shall also apply to Conference appointed seminarians.

CANDIDATURE AFTER WITHDRAWAL/DISCONTINUENCE

Noting the ambiguity on the process that needs to be followed when individuals have been discontinued or personally chosen to withdraw from either the Candidature or Probation Processes, the following rubric shall apply: An individual who was discontinued or personally withdrawn (so called resigned) from probation seeking to come back into the MCSA ministry must re-candidate (*4.20 Book of Order*). All EMMU processes and requirements for candidature remain the same. The following shall be observed:

1. The Superintendent's letter stating the reasons for candidature shall accompany the application forms. If a candidate is re-candidating from a new circuit other than the one previously offered from, the previous superintendent may be requested to give/write a report.
2. A Superintendent intending to nominate an individual who has previously been discontinued or personally withdrawn (so -called resigned) from the MCSA ministry shall inform the District Bishop.
3. The Bishop shall appoint a pastoral Commission to investigate the circumstances of the resignation or discontinuance. The District Supervisor of Studies, a social worker or someone with psychology background be appointed as part of the pastoral commission to offer relevant information on the circumstances of the discontinuance or personal withdrawal.
4. If the candidate was discontinued or personally withdrew (so-called resigned) whilst at SMMS, consideration shall be given to their academic requirements and if requirements have not been met, the candidate will return to SMMS to complete their qualification.
5. If the candidate was discontinued or personally withdrew (so-called resigned) whilst at SMMS and is not in possession of a Formation Certificate, they shall return to SMMS for the years that they did not complete their formation.
6. Should a person return having failed a component that the Church had paid for before discontinuance, then the cost of such return shall be on the account of the Probationer. The church shall be responsible for all costs except tuition. Only when discontinuance was before such required formation was offered shall the Church cover the full cost of such a return to SMMS.
7. If the formation certificate was received, (that is, having completed the three years at seminary) the candidate may be stationed in Circuit depending on the nature of the reasons for personal withdrawal (so-called resignation) or discontinuance.
8. All processes of probation remain the same. Any remedial work prescribed by the EMMU General committee will be monitored by the DSS and report back to the EMMU General Committee.

NUMBER OF YEARS ON PROBATION BEFORE ORDINATION

Minimum of 5 years. A Probationer must ordain within 7 years **or** face discontinuance.

Guidelines for Postgraduates Studies for Probationer Ministers:

Probationers may feel called to advance their academic formation through structures that are not necessarily part of the formation through the EMMU. Guidelines for Probationers seeking to further their academic studies here referred to **study leave**.

Probationers shall/may apply to EMMU through the DSS in consultation with District Bishop motivating reasons for such study leave.

The EMMU Director on behalf of General Committee, before making recommendation to the PB or Connexional Executive shall assess how the proposed study shall contribute to their effectiveness as Probationers and the witness of the Church.

1. For such a Probationer to further their academic formation for a period not exceeding five (5) years of full-time study.
 2. A Probationer on study leave shall give a progress report to EMMU signed by the relevant officer/head of the institution. Failure to submit such a report shall result in the review of study leave by EMMU General Committee.
- 3.1) such permission shall mean the following:
- 3.1.1) The Probationer's formation shall be on hold and the Probationer shall be deemed to have been granted study leave.
 - 3.1.2) The Probationer annually shall provide with proof from where ministerial and character for formation is taking place to Registrar of the EMMU.
Such as church placement, supervisor that there is satisfactory progress on their formation.
 - 3.1.3) on return, the Probationer shall apply for the lifting of the hold through the office of Director of EMMU.
 - 3.1.4) At the discretion and wisdom of Conference, the probationer shall be stationed to complete the Circuit Formation in preparation for Ordination continuing from where they left their formation in accordance with the rules of EMMU at the time of return.
 - 3.1.5) The Probationer shall at least spend one year in Circuit for formation and preparation for ordination irrespective of when they left for further formation.
 - 3.1.6) It will be the discretion of the EMMU General Committee, after careful assessment of how many years the probationer will have in addition to the compulsory year in Circuit after the return for preparation for Ordination.
 - 3.1.7) Should the years of such further formation exceed 5 years (given some PhD's especially overseas), then the probationer shall be deemed as having been discontinued and the will apply like all other probationers who would have been discontinued.