



Minnesota
Annual Conference
of the United Methodist Church

Guidelines for Sermon Submissions to MN BOM

So those who welcomed Peter's message were baptized and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

--Acts 2:41-42

Preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ may be considered many things—a craft, a skill, a gift, and a calling. The Minnesota Board of Ordained Ministry, through the process of discerning candidates for ordained ministry, seeks to evaluate candidates' sermons for fruitfulness in ministry. This process will involve evaluation of not only the delivery of the sermon, but also the content and form of the sermon.

We invite candidates to submit a sermon—on video and in print--that reflects one's best efforts and practices in preaching the Word of God in one's congregation, or in a ministry setting appropriate for one's candidacy.

The following guidelines will be used in clarifying the Board's expectations concerning plagiarism. Plagiarism occurs when someone uses the words of others without giving credit, thus representing the work of others as one's own. In preaching, plagiarism can apply to quotes, paraphrases, ideas, stories, structure and even a series' themes. We recognize that today there are many diverse resources one may use in exploring, preparing and writing a sermon. Reading biblical commentaries, the sermons of our ancestors, popular and scholarly resources all help develop a sermon with a specific scriptural text and context. Study groups with colleagues and online discussion groups can also offer new insight and understandings. One may watch videos of well-known pastors to explore delivery styles, use of media, and innovative forms of communication. All of these good opportunities can enrich and enliven one's sermon writing and speaking. Yet, the risk of plagiarism-- intentional and unintentional—is a serious matter. It is vital that attribution be given for when the words of others become the words of one's own sermon.

The Board recognizes that today there are preachers who are happy for others to use their sermons, and have given their permission broadly. For our Annual Conference's candidacy process, the Board expects to review sermons that reflect a candidate's own honest, authentic and prayerful engagement with biblical texts and one's missional context. We want candidates to bring to the sermon their exegetical skills, theological understandings, pastoral awareness, and what Walter Brueggemann calls the "prophetic imagination." Candidates need to craft their words with responsibility, fairness and respect for themselves and others. Thus, while the submitted sermon is neither a research paper nor an academic presentation, we do expect candidates to give attribution to their sources and avoid plagiarism.

Dr. Lenny Luchetti, Associate Professor of Proclamation and Christian Ministries at Wesley Seminary of Indiana Wesleyan University, invites pastors to open themselves to preaching as a transformative process. In response to an essay featured on the website *Preaching Today* entitled "When Do We Cross the Line into Plagiarism?" Dr. Luchetti writes:

"The best sermons are birthed through preachers who, like good ol' Jacob of Genesis, wrestle with the angel for a sermon from the biblical text. In other words, the most profound and passionate sermons develop in preachers who have been engaged by God through a biblical text in a way that causes the former to come away personally transformed, limping with Jacob. This cannot happen for the preacher who simply downloads, prints, and preaches another preacher's sermon."

Developing a sermon that is conceived in you by the Holy Spirit through your engagement with the God of the biblical text not only makes for powerful preaching, it makes for powerful preachers.

The Board will be reviewing candidates' sermons with the following ethical guidelines in mind. In the sermon...

1. Attribute a direct quote, idea, or theme to the author or source.
2. If the idea or theme is from a study of multiple sources, one can attribute them in general: "As various scholars think..."
3. Avoid passing off others' stories as one's own personal story.
4. The overall structure or outline of the sermon should reflect one's original work.
5. If one has permission to use the words of others, that is fine, but it would be fair in the context of the candidacy sermon to give attribution. Imagine how your congregation would feel if they later learned a story you told as though it was your own was in fact another pastor's."
6. Avoid making just a few tweaks in a longer quote or paraphrase without attribution.

Resources:

Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, second edition (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2001).

byFaith, Dr. L. Roy Taylor, "Plagiarism of Sermons" (7-30-2014) <http://byfaithonline.com/plagiarism-of-sermons/>

Harvard Guide to Using Sources, "What Constitutes Plagiarism?"
<http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page342054>

Preaching Today, "When Do We Cross the Line into Plagiarism?"
<http://www.preachingtoday.com/skills/2011/february/whencrossplagiarism.html>

SermonCentral, "5 Leaders Examine Plagiarism in Preaching"
<http://www.sermoncentral.com/articlec.asp?article=five-leaders-examine-plagiarism-in-preaching&Page=2&ac=&csplit=9060>

United Methodist Communications
<http://www.umcom.org/learn/free-church-downloads-sermons-media-and-more>