

“Here I Am...Send Me!”

Introduction

Have you ever wondered where great pastors come from? Great pastors come from congregations just like yours!

- Congregations who welcome young people and encourage them to become active participants in church life.
- Congregations who look for young people with a heart for ministry and the gifts and graces to serve the church.
- Congregations who intentionally invite young people to consider ministry.
- Congregations who take the time to support candidates for ministry.

Here in the Texas Annual Conference, we are committed to providing the best pastoral leadership possible for every local church. However, in order to do so, we need your help.

We encourage you to do just three things:

First, schedule a “Calling Sunday” for your congregation—any one Sunday to emphasize Christian vocation during which the sermon, worship, and Sunday School lessons can focus on God’s callings in our lives. These resources were created to help you—a five minute video; scripture, worship, and music suggestions; and lesson plans for Sunday School classes of all ages. The youth resources were created for UMYF or other youth gatherings, but can easily be adapted for a Sunday School.

Second, ask your pastor, Pastor/Staff Parish Relations Committee, Church Council or Administrative Board to read the information provided to help them emphasize Christian vocation in your congregation. The five minute video is the perfect length for a Church Council, Administrative Board, or P/SPRC meeting, and can be shown either using a computer and projector (on a blank wall or screen) or using a TV and DVD player. Photocopy the files “Thoughts for Congregations, P/SPRCs, and Pastors” for the meetings; include them in your church newsletter; or save and send them as e-mail attachments to church leaders.

Third, if you need help emphasizing Christian vocation in your setting or helping interested laypersons consider ordained ministry, please contact The Center for Clergy Excellence, Texas Annual Conference, 5215 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77002, 713.521.9383, www.txcumc.org.

Special thanks to Texas Annual Conference elder, **Dr. Carla Badgett Shield**, who wrote and edited these materials.

May God richly bless our efforts as we seek to emphasize the option of Christian vocation, that our congregants might hear and respond to God’s callings in their lives!

“Here I Am...Send Me!”

Contents

Video on DVD

This five minute video featuring Bishop Janice Riggle Huie and young clergypersons in the Texas Annual Conference is the perfect length for Worship or a Church Council, Administrative Board, or P/SPRC meeting, and can be shown either using a computer and projector (on a blank wall or screen) or using a TV and DVD player.

CD filled with resources

Place this CD in your computer to see the following list of Word files.

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What is a “Calling Sunday”?

A “Calling Sunday” is one Sunday set apart each year to talk about Christian vocation and to encourage young people to think about full-time ministry. Hearing God’s voice is quite different for all of us; therefore, different scriptures, hymns, and stories are needed to help us all hear God’s callings in our lives.

Pastors and congregations used to play a larger part in calling young people into full-time service for God. Calling Sundays are an attempt to encourage the entire congregation to think about their own calling and their own responsibility to recognize God’s calling in the lives of young people who are struggling with thoughts about their future.

The best time to have a Calling Sunday is when young people are home from school for the holidays. Therefore, we suggest a time during the summer, Thanksgiving break, or Christmas holiday. Because the Sunday after Thanksgiving is sometimes Christ the King Sunday and sometimes the first Sunday in Advent, both are included for your use. While we feel these times are the best times to have a Calling Sunday, if these suggestions do not work in your local church, please choose one which suits your congregation.

A sample optional commitment card has been included below. You may print this on card stock and place the cards in the bulletins or hand out during the service. People may return the cards in the offering plates, or you may decide to have the congregation come to the altar for prayer and leave the cards on the altar rail. Please make sure you follow up with the persons identified on the cards. A simple call or conversation could bear much fruit in your ministry and in God’s kingdom.

Scripture Suggestions for “Calling Sunday”

Basing your sermon on a theme rather than a scripture is a bit dangerous. Here are some scripture passages that naturally lend themselves to God’s callings in our lives. The most important part of a calling sermon is probably the preacher sharing his or her own call into ministry. You might also want to ask a mentor or two about their stories which you could share. Another idea might be to ask a previous pastor of the church you serve about their call.

Young people need to know that God’s voice is heard in more than one way. God’s call can be an inward voice, the voice of their pastor, their friends, lay leaders in the church, or even (but not usually, for various reasons) their parents! While it is important to be honest about the nature of ordained ministry, be sure to proclaim the joy found in ministering and proclaiming the gospel.

Don’t underestimate the power of a calling sermon. Just today I was talking to a deacon in our conference who mentioned that he received his call to the ministry after going to a Baptist service that included testimonies from church administrators, music ministers, and missionaries, followed by a powerful calling sermon. He was 11 years old. His life was changed by that service and sermon. Go and do likewise!

Sometime in the summer (Ordinary Time)

Gospel, Mark 1:16-20 "Let's Go Fishing!"

Epistle, Romans 12:1-7 "Use Your God-Given Gifts"

Old Testament, I Kings 19:9-13 "Out of Silence, God Speaks"

Psalms 40:1-10 "Here I Am"

Sunday after Thanksgiving (Christ the King)

Gospel, Matthew 9:9-13 "A Kingdom of Sinners"

Epistle, I Timothy 1:12-17 "Appointed to Serve"

Old Testament, Isaiah 6:1-6 "Here Am I"

Psalms 29 "The Voice of the King"

Sunday after Thanksgiving (First Sunday in Advent)

Gospel, Luke 1:26-38 "Mary's Call from God"

Epistle, Romans 10:12-17 "Beautiful Feet"

Old Testament, I Samuel 3:1-10 "Do You Hear What I Hear?"

Psalms 66:5-10, 16-20 "Come and Hear"

Sunday after Christmas

Gospel, John 1:43-51 "Come and See"

Epistle, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 "A New Creation: Our Birth in Christ"

Old Testament, Jeremiah 1:2-10 "Made for God"

Psalms 71:5-18 "From Birth to Old Age, Praise"

Other scriptures for your consideration...

Genesis 12:1-5a "Abram's Call"

Exodus 3:1-15, 4:10-17 "Bushes Are Burning"

Judges 4:4-10 "Deborah: Wife, Judge, and Prophet"

Matthew 4:18-23 "Following, Teaching, Proclaiming, Curing"

Mark 8:34-38 "Lost or Found?"

Luke 24:1-11 "The First Preachers"

Acts 8:26-38 "Get up and go..."

Acts 9:1-20 "The Light that Calls, Blinds, and Transforms"

I Corinthians 9:16-23 "Woe to me if I do not proclaim..."

Music Suggestions for “Calling Sunday”

These songs are suggestions only. The hymns are organized according to the church season, and more contemporary songs are included as well.

Hymns for Ordinary Time

128 He Leadeth Me: O Blessed Thought
156 I Love to Tell the Story
163 Ask Ye What Great Thing I Know
273 Jesus’ Hands Were Kind Hands
341 I Sought the Lord
344 Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore
354 I Surrender All
357 Just as I Am, Without One Plea
390 Jesus Calls Us
393 Spirit of the Living God
419 I Am Thine, O Lord
497 Send Me, Lord
577 God of Grace and God of Glory
581 Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service
584 Lord, You Give the Great Commission
593 Here I Am, Lord

Hymns for Christ the King Sunday

139 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty
159 Lift High the Cross
168 At the Name of Jesus
176 Majesty, Worship His Majesty
177 He Is Lord
569 We’ve A Story to Tell to the Nations
580 Lead On, O King Eternal
582 Whom Shall I Send?
593 Here I Am, Lord

Hymns for the First Sunday in Advent

156 I Love to Tell the Story
181 Ye Servants of God
200 Tell Out, My Soul
204 Emmanuel, Emmanuel
206 I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light
215 To a Maid Engaged to Joseph
593 Here I Am, Lord

Hymns for the First Sunday after Christmas

93 Let All the World in Every Corner Sing
156 I Love to Tell the Story
221 In the Bleak Midwinter
240 Hark! the Herald Angels Sing
241 That Boy-Child of Mary
251 Go, Tell It on the Mountain
593 Here I Am, Lord

Songs from *The Faith We Sing*

2101 Two Fishermen
2114 At the Font We Start Our Journey
2117 Spirit of God
2125 Come, Holy Spirit
2129 I Have Decided to Follow Jesus
2130 The Summons
2137 Would I Have Answered When You Called
2153 I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me
2165 Cry of My Heart
2172 We Are Called
2176 Make Me a Servant
2178 Here Am I
2184 Sent Out in Jesus' Name
2218 You Are Mine
2222 The Servant Song
2236 Gather Us In
2240 One God and Father of Us All
2241 The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve
2242 Walk With Me
2243 We All Are One in Mission

Songs from CCLI

From the website: “**Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI)** provides churches with simple, affordable solutions to complex copyright issues surrounding congregational worship services. CCLI helps churches maintain their integrity and avoid costly lawsuits, while also giving churches the freedom to worship expressively and spontaneously.” You can get a license, search for songs, and get the music from their website www.ccli.com

Here Am I Lord #1819
We Fall Down #4613770
We Are Called #14545
Here I Come #2928735
Follow Me #799853
Say You Will to His Will #1398796
Here Am I Send Me #1882264
Called By Christ #2015947
Here I Am #39489
Jesus Send More Labourers #229567
Lord Send Me #675214
I Give My All #2942917
Listen He Is Calling #1722836
What I Have Vowed #2454797
I Will Offer Up My Life #1083764

Responsive Reading Suggestions for “Calling Sunday”

Psalter Readings from the Hymnal

Psalm 29 page 761

Psalm 40:1-11 page 774

Psalm 66:8-20 page 790

Psalm 71:1-12 page 794

An Adaptation of Psalm 29

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of Glory thunders.

Speak to us, our Lord and God.

The voice of the Lord is powerful, the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.

We praise you, O Lord.

The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars, the Lord makes nations skip like calves.

Break open our hard hearts, Lord, and open our ears to listen.

The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire; the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness.

Shake up and sanctify us, that we might be your servants.

The voice of the Lord makes the oaks to whirl and strips the forest bare.

Glory to God!

May the Lord give strength to all people.

We hear the call of the Lord.

May the Lord bless his people with peace!

Here I am, Lord, use me.

Drama Suggestion for “Calling Sunday”

If drama is not typically a part of your worship, this might be best used at the beginning of the worship service...even before the prelude. It could also be used in Sunday school classes or smaller groups. Feel free to adapt it in any way or even create your own drama entirely. It might even be used before or as a part of the sermon.

This skit can be done with no props, the ones suggested, or anything you can think of to fit. You can get a different person for each part or have fewer people play multiple roles. It is best if you alternate male and female playing God and the one who is being called. Feel free to improvise.

Narrator (announcer-type quality): “Today we are going to have a short pop quiz. The one multiple choice question is...how does God call us into the ministry?

Choice number 1.” *You might hold up a poster that says, “Choice #1.”*

Phone rings (you can use an old-fashioned phone, cell phone, or imaginary phone & the ring can be vocal or mechanical.)

Person answers “Hello”

God’s voice only comes over a microphone “Hello, this is God calling!”

“Yeah, sure, right...”

“You see that azalea bush outside your window” *This works well without any props or you could have someone hold up or shake some sort of large bush, and even put it behind a hand held window.*

“Uh, yes...”

O My God [alternate: ohmigawd]...

it’s burning!” *You can someone hold up flames made of tissue paper in the bush if you are using this prop...you could even have people (or kids) dressed as flames flickering around the bush.*

“Yes, the one and only God, that’s me, and today I’ve called to tell you that you are being called... by me ... to be an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church.”

More flames start engulfing the bush “Uh, I think I need to find a fire extinguisher or something...”

“Look, all taken care of [*flames vanish*], and I added a few extra blooms [*tissue paper blooms appear*] while I was at it. Your seminary acceptance letter will be arriving in the mail shortly.”

“But I didn’t apply to seminary.”

“Well, what they don’t know won’t hurt them, now, will it? Enjoy your life as a pastor. Bub Bye.”

Narrator: “Choice number 2.” Optional poster saying, “Choice #2.”

Person wearing a sign saying, ‘God,’ is handing out cards.

A young, petite teenager in a pink dress receives a card and reads it: “Fabulous! I’ve always wanted to be an offensive lineman for the Cowboys.” Someone can throw her a football which she does not catch.

A fairly large young guy wearing a cowboy hat, boots, and well-used jeans and chewing on a piece of hay with one blacked-out tooth receives the card, reads it, pulls the hay out of his mouth and yells: "One of them ball et dancers! Yee-haw! I'm gonna dance!" He twirls...sort of.

You may add others receiving cards with unexpected occupations on them

A young woman dressed in the normal Sunday wear at your church receives and reads the card: "Clergy? What's a clergy?"

God: "Clergy are ordained ministers."

Woman: "Um, [looks distressed] don't I get a choice in this decision?"

"Sure, you can be street-corner preacher preaching hellfire and damnation for pennies in a hat, a Catholic priest, or a United Methodist pastor."

"I didn't know they let women be Catholic priests..."

God: "Uh, I mean, you can be a street-corner preacher preaching hellfire and damnation for pennies in a hat or a United Methodist pastor."

"United Methodist pastor, yeah, I can do that...and maybe I can even be a bishop!"

Narrator: "Choice number 3" Optional poster, "Choice #3."

One older person stops a younger one and says:

"Hey, _____, I really enjoyed your Sunday School lesson today."

"Thanks, _____."

"You know, that work you've been doing on the evangelism committee is top-notch. You have such great ideas, and you have single-handedly brought so many people to join this church."

"Thanks, but it wasn't just me, this is a great place, and people love the worship services."

"Well, Fred says he joined just because of you, and he said that you were such a comfort to his wife last week when he was in the hospital. You know, I've been thinking that maybe you should think about full time church work. I know that you graduate from college soon. God gave you your gifts for a reason, and the church could really use pastors with your faith and love."

Narrator:

"And the answer is...choice #3!" Hold up #3 poster and another poster that says, "Applause." You can also have youth in the church whistle, yell, and cheer while throwing streamers or confetti.

"God calls people into the ministry through other people...through me and you! Maybe we can no longer wonder why more gifted young folks aren't going into the ministry. Maybe its time for us to get busy for God."

Here I Am; Send Me
Commitment Card

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here I am; send me!"

Isaiah 6:8

___ Yes! I believe God may be calling me into full-time Christian ministry.

___ Yes! I see gifts for ministry in another person and I will encourage him/her to consider Christian vocation.

___ Yes, I will pray for all of those called into ministry.

Name: _____

Home Phone: _____

Email: _____

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Suggested Calling Lessons for Adults

Letters from Paul (2 Lessons)

The lesson plans are provided to guide your discussion. Ideally, you will tailor the questions and comments to fit your class, however, the questions in bold are suggestions you can respond to yourself and use for class discussion. Remember the goal of these lessons is to help people think about discerning God's call in their lives and in the lives of others.

Lesson 1: Ambassadors for Christ

Take care of class business and announcements before beginning the lesson.

Opening Prayer

Almighty Christ, You have called us into your service to represent God's love to the world. May we be lights on the hill that cannot be hidden. May we shine with joy and faith, so that all who see us might catch a glimpse of your glory. May we be witnesses to others with our words and actions. Give us the power of your presence so that we might courageously speak with wisdom and discernment, for we long to be your servants in all we do and say. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Suggested Hymn (with or without music)

#419 I Am Thine, O Lord

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 It may be helpful to make copies of the passage if your class does not have Bibles. You can split the passage into sections for different people to read or have a volunteer read the entire passage.

“From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Ask if anyone has any questions or comments on the passage.

Key verse: *“So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us...”*

No city needed ambassadors or representatives for Christ more than Corinth. The ancient Greek city had been known for its licentiousness. On a hill high above the city, a temple built to honor Aphrodite had housed thousands of prostitutes. After annihilating the Greek city, Consul L. Munnius burned Corinth to the ground—the flames destroying buildings, art, and monuments, obliterating anything the Roman soldiers might have missed. Desolate for a century, Corinth was refounded with freed slaves from Italy. Many Jews also came to the new colony to build their synagogue and find a bit more freedom from Rome's state religion. But the new city, located so near the port of Lechaion, was a hot spot for trade and travel, bringing great diversity, money, and a lack of morals back into play.

When Paul had first arrived in Corinth he found shelter with Priscilla and Aquilla, Jews that had been expelled from Rome for following Christ during the reign of Claudius. With their help, Paul was successful in growing and leading a church, but his letters back to the struggling community show that the church was not immune to the immorality and conflict of its city.

Share an example of conflict between the standards of your faith and what the world expects or considers appropriate.

In the cosmopolitan atmosphere, ambassadors from all over the ancient world would have been a familiar sight traveling through Corinth. Though the ambassadors back then would have been different from modern ambassadors, we can assume that their role of representation would be similar to that of today.

What does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ? Let the class discuss this idea for a while and offer your own insights...especially as you reflect on this subject of God's call in our lives.

Consider Matthew 4:18-20

“As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

How is being an ambassador for Christ similar to fishing for people?

But we don't have to go to seminaries to find bright, young people to work for the Kingdom of God. They are here, in Texas, in your churches. Every lay person in the church needs to be ambassing young people who love God and love the church... helping those young adults discern if God is calling them to be an ordained minister. We have great need in our world of consumerism, loose morality, and prejudice for leaders who will speak God's loving and reconciling word to the people. Our churches have great need for the best and brightest of young people to commit themselves to serve with joyful hearts. But the United Methodist Church depends on the outward call of the church as well as the inward call of the heart.

Will you help ambass? Will you join Jesus in calling young people to serve the church?

What excites you about this ministry of calling, and what makes you hesitate?

When I think about all the letters that Paul wrote to the church, I wonder what would have happened if there had been no Paul... Even one person who is on fire for Christ Jesus can make a huge difference in our world today. Maybe the one you encourage could be that person! I am good friends with a clergywoman whom I hope I encouraged to consider becoming ordained. She, in turn, has influenced several young people to go to seminary and give their lives to God and the church. They will influence others, and the gift will be passed on to countless generations. You can also become a spiritual mother or father to someone who is longing to know what God wants them to do with their lives. You can make a difference.

Do you feel you are an ambassador for Christ? In what way?

Have you ever met a young person who seemed to have gifts and graces for the ordained ministry? If so, did you tell that person? What happened?

Closing Prayer (Ask for prayer requests, joys, and concerns. Ask for volunteers to follow up with the prayer requests with cards or phone calls if needed.)

God of Hosts, You rule the heavens and our world below. Help us to serve you and follow you instead of the things of this world. Commit our ways to your righteousness that we might bring light, hope, and joy into the lives of those we meet. Make us bold in seeking out disciples, servants, and ministers to work for you in this world so that your world might be a better place to live for all your people. We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Lesson 2: Gifts from God and for God

Take care of class business and announcements before beginning the lesson.

Opening Prayer:

Generous God, you give extravagantly, with joy, and without hesitation. Help us use your gifts wisely and with joy. Remind us of the life you gave us in Jesus Christ so that we might give our lives in love and service to your people. Assist us also to seek out the gifts of others that might be used in your church, and use us to make your church a loving place to serve. We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Suggested Hymn (with or without music)

#393 Spirit of the Living God

Read Romans 12:1-8 It may be helpful to make copies of the passage if your class does not have Bibles. You can split the passage into sections for different people to read or have a volunteer read the entire passage.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.”

Ask if anyone has any questions or comments on the passage.

Key verse: *“We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us...”*

Start the lesson with these questions...we will return to them at the close of the lesson to see if the answers change.

What gifts do you have from God?

How have you used your gifts to serve God?

Christmas is one of my favorite times of the year. Everyone seems to be in such great spirits. The lights in the neighborhood brighten the darkest nights. The church is decorated and hums with a great expectation filled with pageants, parties, nativities, carols, and sermons that culminate in the birth of Jesus. Then, of course, there is the gift giving. I love to see trees with gifts of all shapes and sizes stacked underneath. What would happen if all of the gifts were the same...what if you ended up receiving 20 new toaster ovens for Christmas?

We need a diversity of people and gifts in the church. I love Paul's use of the body as the metaphor in this passage. All of us have different gifts, and the church uses these different gifts in different ways. Some of our gifts are more obvious than others. If our gift is teaching, we know if we are using that gift to teach classes in the church. If our gift is prophecy, it might be harder to know how to use the gift, or even how to discern if our prophecies are from God. Nevertheless, when we sense that someone is gifted and graced for the ministry, this can be a prophetic gift that we can pass along to the person.

Several years ago a very wise old clergyman had a dream that I was going to a particular church. The church was open for appointment, and I thought that maybe I would be asked to go there, but I was on family leave and the time wasn't right. Still, the dream bugged me and sometimes I wondered if I was supposed to be serving in a church. Last month the district superintendent called and said that the same church my friend dreamed about was moving from a full time to part time pastor and asked if I would go from family leave to part time. It was God's perfect time for my family and me. My wise friend's prophetic dream came true!

Most of us do not have dreams and visions that point the way. This can make it harder to trust our intuition and tell people what we think God's plan might be for them. The good news is that when it comes to matters of ministry in the United Methodist Church, many checks and balances exist. Your encouragement can make a huge difference in the life of a future pastor. Candidates who know they have the support of people from their home church have extra affirmation that can help them get through the long process of becoming an ordained minister.

Consider I Corinthians 4:7

If our treasure from God is found in clay jars, then God can use any vessel (any person) to glorify Jesus.

You don't have to worry about leading someone astray by telling them they have gifts and graces for ministry. Perhaps they will end up becoming powerful lay ministers or have a ministry beyond the walls of the church, but all of us have gifts that need to be used in serving God. Your encouragement can be a gift you give to the church and to God as well as to the person you encourage.

In the end, that is the way the body functions. When people are using their gifts for God, the body prospers. When people are wasting their gifts or not using them for the good of God's kingdom, the body withers. If you have ever had the experience of having a pastor that was less than adequate, the body is not functioning the way it should. You can make a difference by your attitude, your gifts, and your voice.

But what are the gifts that one needs to be an ordained minister? Any list will be incomplete, but it is helpful to hear what The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church has to say about what the ordained minister should do:

“ordained ministers devote themselves wholly to the work of the Church and to the upbuilding of the ministry of all Christians. They do this through the careful study of Scripture and its faithful interpretation; through effective proclamation of the gospel and responsible administration of the sacraments; through diligent pastoral leadership of their congregations for fruitful discipleship; and by following the guidance of the Holy Spirit in witnessing beyond the congregation in the local community and to the ends of the earth.” (Paragraph 137)

Using this definition, it is helpful for pastors to have, first and foremost, a love of God and neighbor, a passion for the Bible, good communication skills, a deep prayer life, leadership abilities, and a heart for social justice. Pastors must be able to move emotionally from a hospital room of profound grief and loss into the room next door in which there is a joyful celebration of new life. Pastors must be able to handle lovingly the people who project their own anger, frustration, and even hatred onto them. Pastors need to be able to take their own authority and also work comfortably with people who have authority over them. Pastors must be able to handle

a divisive situation without choosing sides or losing a loving, non-anxious presence.

What other gifts do you think would be helpful for a pastor to have?

Can you think of anyone who has these gifts?

Closing prayer:

Generous God, you give gifts to us all with extravagance and grace. We delight in your power and presence, for you rule over the mightiest in our midst and the most humble: raining down blessings, bringing love into our lives, and guiding our paths to righteousness. We thank you for calling us all into your kingdom on this earth, to work and serve you with our lives. Help us to know exactly how you want us to use our gifts and graces, and grant us the wisdom to strengthen your church by raising its future leaders up from our midst. Put your holy words into our mouths and your intentions in our hearts so that whatever we do and say might glorify your holy name and bring your kingdom closer to this earth. In Jesus' holy name we pray, Amen.

Suggested Calling Lessons for Youth

Here I Am! (3 lessons)

The suggested lessons provided in this section are designed around activities which get Jr. High and High School students into thinking about how God calls them and how they can respond to God's calling. It would work well to use the material in a typical youth gathering at your church. These lessons can also be adapted for use during Sunday school. If you normally split your group up into smaller age ranges, please do so and adapt the material accordingly. (It works for all, but you may want to plan on helping the younger ones more during the discussion). If no youth presently meet, this could be a good short session to pull some together and get them thinking about God and the church. If you are able, it would be great to have music at these gatherings, and you can refer to the song list in these materials. It is always ideal to have a simple meal or snack to begin (and/or end) the youth fellowship.

Lesson 1: Hiding and Seeking

Start by playing a game of hide and seek. You or one of the assistants/youth counselors can be the first to "seek." Once someone is "found" they can help look for the others. This game works best if you can use a large portion of your church campus. It is especially nice to have the sanctuary as a place the youth can hide. Be sure to scout out the area you are going to use and have clear forbidden zones if there are places it might be unsafe for them to hide. I was surprised at my church how this game appealed to all ages of youth and how many times they wanted to play. On the last round of hiding and seeking, have one of the counselors sneak over and hide a special Bible (a white one, a really big one, whatever) somewhere in the sanctuary. Then gather in the sanctuary for the rest of the lesson.

Opening prayer:

Almighty God, you are amazing. You know everything about each one of us—where we hide, what we do, and even what we think—and you love us more than anyone on earth could ever love us! We don't deserve your love and grace, but you give it to us anyway. Make us grateful for you and for your blessings in our lives. Help us to know you are always present with us: guiding, helping, forgiving, and sustaining us in every circumstance. When we are searching for answers in life, help us find our answers in you. Thank you for Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.

Read Psalm 139:1-18

This Psalm works well if each student reads one verse in turn. You can also use the responsive reading that is found on page 854 in the United Methodist Hymnal.

Ask the students to **summarize** what this psalm is saying. After they are finished, or as they make statements about the text, recap by trying to hit the main points...we can't hide from God; God knows everything about us (even our thoughts and our words before we speak them); God lays God's hand upon us [i.e. claims us, loves us, blesses us]; no matter where we go or what we do, God will continue to love us, sustain us, and be with us; God made us, and we belong to God; God knows everything, and we cannot begin to understand how great God and God's love are; even at the end of our lives, God promises to be with us.

Read verses 1-3 again: *"O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways."*

Ask the students how this makes them feel—uncomfortable, safe, judged, loved... Affirm their answers. Go back and stress that it may seem strange, but this passage is telling us that no matter how hard we might try to hide from God or even do things that we know God doesn't want us to do, God still loves us and wants the very best for us.

Read verses 13-14 again: *“For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.”*

Ask these discussion questions:

- What do you like best about the way God made you? Affirm that they are wonderful.
- What difference does it make to believe that God made you rather than believing that you are just a random collection of genes?
- How do you use the gifts and talents God gave you to serve God? Affirm that just by being present they are putting themselves in church, in a place God wants them to be.
- Do you feel God has a plan and purpose for your life?

Closing activity:

Describe the Bible which was hidden earlier and let the students try to find it. If you want to, you can have a prize for the one who does. Gather everyone back in a closing circle. Tell them that we can’t hide from God, but that sometimes God seems hidden from us. It is good to search for God, just as they sought the Bible. Ask them how they think they might seek God (reading the Bible, going to church, praying, talking to other church members, etc). Then join in a closing prayer or a standard benediction if that is what your group usually does.

Closing prayer:

God of grace and love, thank you for being with us as we hide and seek and as we learn about you and grow closer to you and to each other. When we feel lost, sad, or alone, urge us to seek you, for you are always present and there for us, filling us with your Holy Spirit. Remind us that you are our Creator, and that we are wonderful because you made us! Help us to serve you more with our gifts, talents, and spirits. We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Lesson 2: Lost and found

Have samples of mazes and labyrinths for each youth. Ask if they can tell the difference between the two. (Mazes have traps or dead-ends, labyrinths are a single path that eventually gets you to the end.) Have a contest to see who can get to the end of the maze first.

Samples of a labyrinth:

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~cbidwell/SITES/lse-some.htm>

Sample of a maze (I suggest you print out the simple mazes):

<http://www.clickmazes.com/mazes/ixmaze.htm>

For older youth, challenge them to draw their own mazes. You can put their names on their creations and photocopy enough for everyone to sample everyone else’s maze creation.

Talk about how frustrating it is to reach the dead-end of a maze. Can they relate this to situations in life? Talk about the examples they give.

Next let them trace a path through the sample labyrinth.

Talk about how the path curves, often making you feel like you are going backward, but really leading you forward into the center. There are no dead-ends and no frustrating barriers. The path is continuous.

If you have a full-sized canvas labyrinth available, this would be a great time to use it so they could walk the labyrinth. The Conference office has one available; if you'd like to arrange to borrow it, contact your district office. In addition, if you want to create your own "labyrinth," you can do so by laying down a circular, winding path with masking tape or rope-lights that lead them to a gathering point for the lesson.

You can download the song *Moses* from Ken Medema to provide a musical backdrop for this activity. Go to... www.kenmedema.com/store/Scripts/prodView.asp?idproduct=188

Prayer:

Holy God, we confess that at times it seems like we hit a wall in life: things start going wrong, we get upset with our parents, or we become angry with our friends. Help us know that when we follow Jesus, we never hit a dead-end. You are a God who opens doors and creates new opportunities. Even when Jesus died on a cross for our sin, you raised him up on the third day to show us that nothing is impossible for you and that your love can conquer all obstacles. Grant us the assurance to walk with you, even when we are unsure of the right path or direction to take. Lead us and help us to follow faithfully. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Bible Lesson—Exodus 1-3

Last week we talked about hiding from God. This week we will talk about a man who had to be hidden at birth so as not to be killed by the Egyptian Pharaoh, who tried to kill all the newborn Hebrew baby boys. When his mother could no longer hide him, she put him in a basket of reeds for the Pharaoh's daughter to find. Who are we talking about?

Moses!

If you look at the life of Moses, there were many moments that must have seemed like the end of the road for him, a blind alley, the last stop in an unsolvable maze:

- He was born under a death threat (but was hidden and saved).
- He was put afloat in a basket on the Nile River (but found by Pharaoh's daughter).
- He grew up biologically as a Hebrew and Egyptian by adoption, which must have caused him some twisting, turning confusion... emotionally and spiritually.
- He ended up killing an Egyptian who was abusing a Hebrew kinsman and calling down Pharaoh's wrath (but he escaped from Egypt).
- He was at another dead-end: alone, far from the only home he'd ever known, more-or-less lost in the wilderness of Midian (but at a well he defended the daughters of Jethro from some rowdy shepherds and won one of them in marriage).

But there was no real place for Moses there; he was a stranger in a foreign land, and so he became a shepherd for his father-in-law, which is just about as low as you can go. Can you imagine doing nothing but watching sheep all day long? We are so used to being plugged into technology: emailing on our computer, text messaging on our cell phone, and talking on a land line...all at the same time! Now think about Moses, out in the desert watching a bunch of boring sheep. Nothing to do all day but sit in the sun and guard fluffy white balls of wool.

Tell the students to imagine that they are Moses. You might download Ken Medema's song, "Moses" and play it. <http://www.kenmedema.com/store/Scripts/prodView.asp?idproduct=118>

What is Moses thinking, out surrounded by nothing but sheep and scraggly bushes?

Let them think about their answers. Affirm them and add that part of what he must have thought was "What a dead-end! I can't believe that I've come through so much to end up here in the middle of nowhere looking after

sheep that don't even belong to me. Life is pretty pointless out here. I wish I could find a way out of this trap.”

And then God speaks to him, out of a burning bush, no less...**Read Exodus 3:1-6.**

Have the students take off their shoes. Ask them these questions.

- What was Moses thinking when he said, “Here I am?”
- Why did Moses hide his face from God?

God tells Moses that the Israelites have been stuck at the dead-end of the maze that is Egypt long enough and that he, Moses, is the one to get them out. But Moses is so stuck in his own maze, he can't imagine being the one to get the Israelites out of the even bigger more complicated Egyptian maze. Moses gives God all sorts of reasons and excuses about why he can't possibly be the one to get the Israelites out of Egypt. He says, “But God, I don't know your name, they won't believe me, I'm not eloquent, please send someone else.” God counters all of Moses' arguments and sends him despite his objections.

Discussion questions:

- Have you ever felt like God was calling you?
- What do you think God wants you to do?
- Do you believe that God will lead you out of the mazes of life into something that has meaning and purpose? If so, will you follow if it means taking risks and going outside your comfort zone?

Closing activity:

Shoes in hand, have the students walk slowly back along the labyrinth. Tell them to imagine that they are following Jesus. When everyone is done, tell them that God makes mazes into labyrinths...there are no dead-ends in God's love, grace, or mercy. Give each one the closing prayer printed on an index card.

Pray the closing prayer in unison:

Holy God of Moses and me, lead me through the difficult times of life when it seems like I'm going nowhere and have nowhere to go. Show me your paths of righteousness that I may go where you send me and fulfill the purposes you have for my life. Help me to be more like Jesus, Amen.

Lesson 3: Calling and Listening

For the opening activity, separate large groups into smaller groups (about 5-9 students in each would be ideal) to play the “Cell Phone” game. Line them up. Write down a few sentences and whisper them to the first person in each line...that person repeats what she/he heard to the best of his/her ability to the next...repeat down the line...the last person listens and then writes down what she/he remembers. Compare the first message with the last message. The group which messes up the message the least, wins! (For small groups, just do the activity in one group without the competition.) A sample message might go something like this: “God has a purpose and plan for every person on earth. Even though we mess things up and it may seem like we have reached a dead-end, God will see us through to countless blessings.” You can play several times with different messages each time. Keep in mind that younger students will need messages that are simpler than the older students.

Prayer:

Compassionate God, you listen and care about our every word and every thought. Teach us to listen to you. Help us to hear your voice and respond with joy and obedience. We thank you that you have a calling for each one of us and that we have a purpose in life as we serve you and your church in love. We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Bible Lesson—I Samuel 3:1-10, New American Standard

Assign four parts: the narrator, the Lord, Samuel, and Eli. Read the Bible passage as a short drama.

Narrator: 1Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli And word from the LORD

was rare in those days, visions were infrequent. **2**It happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim and he could not see well), **3**and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God was, **4**that the LORD called

LORD: “Samuel;”

Narrator: and he said,

Samuel: “Here I am.”

Narrator: **5**Then he ran to Eli and said,

Samuel: “Here I am, for you called me.”

Narrator: But he said,

Eli: “I did not call, lie down again.”

Narrator: So he went and lay down. **6**The LORD called yet again,

LORD: “Samuel!”

Narrator: So Samuel arose and went to Eli and said,

Samuel: “Here I am, for you called me.”

Narrator: But he answered,

Eli: “I did not call, my son, lie down again.”

Narrator: **7**Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him. **8**So the LORD called

LORD: “Samuel”

Narrator: again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said,

Samuel: “Here I am, for you called me.”

Narrator: Then Eli discerned that the LORD was calling the boy. **9**And Eli said to Samuel,

Eli: “Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.’”

Narrator: So Samuel went and lay down in his place. **10**Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times,

LORD: “Samuel! Samuel!”

Narrator: And Samuel said,

Samuel: “Speak, for Your servant is listening.”

The boy Samuel was dedicated to God by his mother before he was born. When he was still a toddler, his mother took him to the house of the Lord. There Samuel grew up serving God. One might think that this would mean Samuel would know God’s voice calling him in the night: “Samuel!” But he does not. Three times he goes to Eli to ask if Eli has called him. You also might think that Eli, a priest in the house of the Lord, would understand what was happening sooner. Three times Eli wakes up in the middle of the night before he realizes God is calling out to Samuel.

Sometimes it also takes us a long time to recognize God’s voice in our lives. We may not be quite ready to hear; we may engage in selective hearing; we may ignore the voice entirely. It might be that there are so many other things competing for attention in our lives: school work, extra-curricular activities, text-messages, movies, TV shows, sport events, and phone calls, that we can’t hear God with all of the other distractions. But God continues to call out to us, hoping we will listen.

Like, Eli, the church has also sometimes been slow at recognizing God’s call. We see gifted young people and we think that they could make a difference in the world by being a doctor or politician or teacher...but what about a pastor? God needs the church to help young people hear God’s call to be ordained ministers. Like Samuel, young people need to hear instructions on how to answer a call to ministry.

The first steps are really rather simple. Continue to read the Bible and pray. Dialogue with the pastor. Find

ways to be in ministry as a youth in the church. Talk to parents, friends, and others who know your gifts and can help you discern God's call.

In conclusion, we need to remember the example of Samuel. He was willing to listen to God and even though he was afraid, he gave Eli the message from God. As time passed, God did amazing and even miraculous things through Samuel.

Closing Activity:

- Have 5-7 locations in the church that can be used in a scripture hunt. These will be locations that can be found by using clues from the Bible. Pair up each room with a scripture clue (examples below).
- Write the scriptures on a piece of paper.
- Split the assembly into smaller groups and give each group a Bible.
- Tell them the rooms that they will be using (throw in a few extra).
- Give each group one scripture passage.
- Groups sharing look up the scripture and run to the room described
- A counselor is in each room with another scripture passage.
- Once they collect all 5-7 scriptures, they are done...first one wins!

Examples (or you can create your own rooms and scripture clues):

- **Prayer room:** Matthew 6:6 (Go into your room and shut the door and pray...)
- **Kitchen:** Psalm 34:8 (Taste and see that the Lord is good...)
- **Nursery:** Luke 2:7 (She gave birth to her firstborn son...)
- **Choir room:** Numbers 21:17 (Then Israel sang this song...)
- **Library:** Joshua 1:8 (This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth...)
- **Altar:** Matthew 5:23-24 (When you are offering your gift at the altar...)
- **Cry room:** Revelation 21:4 (Crying and pain will be no more...)

You can also be sneaky and do something like:

Room 100: Psalm 100

Room 3: Psalm 3

Gather back together. Talk about how we sometimes get part of God's message to us. We have to be faithful to God in the little pieces of life before we can put together the whole picture of what God is calling us to do. Different parts of life teach us and lead us to the next stages. Samuel needed to serve in the temple faithfully and answer God's call before he could grow into the great prophet that he became.

Closing prayer:

God of us all, thank you for calling us into your service. Help us to discover the unique call and purpose you have for us. Teach us to listen and hear your voice as we follow where you lead. Make us faithful in the little things so that we can go on to serve you in greater ways than we can even begin to imagine. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Suggested Calling Lessons for Elementary School Children

As the children come into the class, welcome them and write their names on name tags.

Invite them to draw and decorate a fish to take home.

Once everyone has arrived, gather all in a circle or in a special place for Bible time by singing *Jesus Loves Me*.

Introduce the story by saying that the Bible, in addition to telling us how much Jesus loves us, also has great stories in it.

Bible Story

Matthew 4:18-20

“As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

Play follow the leader: lead them around the classroom hopping, running, whatever you want and then gather back together and sit down.

Talk about how Jesus calls each of us to do special things. God gives all of us different gifts and talents. Ask them about their talents. Part of following Jesus is using our gifts to help others and to serve the church. How do they follow Jesus? (Stress how they each follow Jesus—being obedient, doing chores, and loving others. Just by being at Sunday School they are giving their presence in church to God.)

Tell them ministers (or pastors) are called to serve God in a specific way by leading the church. You can help them understand what pastors do by having a bag with different items in it. See if they can guess what activity of the minister/pastor each item represents. See also if they can talk about how as children they can participate in each activity. What you might include (you can make the items out of paper if you need to): a heart (love the people), a cross (represent Jesus), a Bible (preach and teach about God), a stethoscope/empty medicine bottle/ or thermometer (visit people who are sick), offering plate or dollar bill (help people give their gifts to God), a chalice (serve communion to the people), a jar of water and/or a baby doll (baptize babies), praying hands (pray for people), and a church (lead/care for the church).

Suggest that God might be calling them to be a minister. Ask if they think they might like to be a pastor. Why or why not?

Pray

Dear Jesus, thank you for our church and pastor(s). Thank you for loving us so much you called us to be your disciples. Help us love you and follow you. Amen.

Activities

1. Fish for people

Make fishing poles: tie string onto sticks or dowel rods. Put a paper clip on the end of the string. Tie string loops around enough gummy worms for everyone. Loop the gummy worm on the paper clip and have the kids try to eat it off the fishing pole with their hands behind their backs.

2. Cards

Give each child paper and craft items to make a card that they can give to their pastor.

3. Eat goldfish (the cracker kind)

4. Go Fish

Print out the following Bible verses on card stock and cut them into card shapes.
Play “Go Fish” using the verses...(do you have any Matthew 4?)

Closing Circle

Bring a cross sticker for each child.

Give each child a sticker and say:

“*Child’s Name*, follow Jesus, for God has a special purpose for you.”

Suggested Calling Lessons for Preschool Children

As the children come into the class, welcome them.

Direct them to a table that has been set up with different hats, costumes, and/or masks. Have the children play dress up and tell what/who they are pretending to be.

When everyone has arrived, give each child a name tag with their name on it and tell them that God created them just as they are for a special purpose.

As you put the name tag on each child say, “*Name*, you are God’s special child.”

Gather everyone in a circle or in a special place for Bible time singing *Jesus Loves Me*.

Introduce the story by saying that the Bible, in addition to telling us how much Jesus loves us, also has great stories in it.

Bible Story Matthew 4:18

Have the children stand around you and mimic your motions as you tell the story.

As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee (walk in place)
he saw two brothers... (put hand above your eyes...like you are looking)
casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. (mime casting a fishing line)
And he said to them, “Follow me...” (wave toward yourself)
Immediately they left their nets and followed him. (walk in place)

Optional Activities (pick as many as your time allows)

1. Play Follow the Leader

Run, jump, skip, and gallop around the room ending up at the next activity.

2. Play Simon Says

Use “Jesus Says” instead of Simon Says and have everyone do everything that Jesus says like stand up, sit down, etc. and not do what you say to do when you don’t say, “Jesus Says.”

3. What does a pastor do?

Have a bag with several items in it (they can be made of paper) that represent what a pastor does. Ask the children, “What does the pastor do?” As they answer you can pull out the corresponding item or pull out the item and tell them if they need help. You can also ask them how they can participate in each thing. What you might include: a heart (love the people), a cross (represent Jesus), a Bible (preach and teach about God), a stethoscope/empty medicine bottle/or thermometer (visit people who are sick), offering plate or dollar bill (help people give their gifts to God), a chalice (serve communion to the people—ask the kids if they have taken communion), a jar of water and/or a baby doll (baptize babies—ask the kids if they have been baptized), praying hands (pray for people), and a church (watch over/care for the church).

4. God is calling

Have a table set up with play phones. You can collect them from parents or your nursery, and/or you can unplug an old landline phone or use old cell phones. Encourage the children to pretend like they are talking to God. What do they want to tell God? What is God telling them?

5. Cards

Fold construction paper in half, write on the front (or on the inside), "Thanks for being our pastor!", and give each child one. Have markers, crayons, stickers, and other items to decorate the cards. Explain to the kids that they are to give the cards to their pastor and thank them for loving them, praying for them, and teaching them about God.

6. Phones

Get one piece of string and two paper or Styrofoam cups for each child. Before class, tie a knot at one end of the string and put holes in the bottom of the cups. Write on half the cups, "God Calls," and the other half, "I Listen." Give the children one of each the cups and one string. Help the children put the string through the cups and tie a knot to hold them in place. Show them how to use the "phone."

7. Snacks

Have goldfish crackers and water

Closing:

Gather back together. Talk to the kids about how Jesus calls each one of us to do special things. He calls our parents to be our moms and dads. He calls you to be their Sunday school teacher. He calls the pastor to lead the church. Jesus wants everyone to follow him. Give them each a sticker (a fish, heart, or cross would be good) and say, "*Name*, Jesus calls you."

Pray—have the kids bow their heads, close their eyes, and make praying hands. Tell them to repeat after you:

Dear Jesus,
thank you
for loving me
and calling me.
Help me
to follow you.
Amen.

Thoughts for Congregations

Gifts and graces for ministry are apparent if we just look for them. In my first student appointment when I was at Duke Divinity School, the congregation members would always comment on the minister's son, "Oh, he's going to be a pastor just like his daddy." The boy was about eight years old! But I wouldn't be surprised if he fulfilled the expectations of his congregation. Many church members do not realize the way young people in the church look up to them and consider them mentors in the faith.

Consider these words from *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*: "It is out of the faith and witness of the congregation that men and women respond to God's call to ordained ministry. **Every local church should intentionally nurture candidates for ordained ministry and provide spiritual and financial support for their education...**" (paragraph 303) Can your local church honestly say that it is abiding by this charge in our Discipline? The materials in this CD will help.

One of the professors at Duke Divinity School tells the story of when he was a young man headed off to college. He was an undergrad at Duke University, and he had no aspirations for the ministry whatsoever. His church, however, had other thoughts. They waged what he calls a war for his soul. They prayed him into seminary. Despite what that young man had planned for his life, the congregation saw that he had gifts and graces that God wanted him to use in ordained ministry. That professor gives all the credit for his life's work to his home church.

Every person in the church can become a spiritual mentor and guide for young people. As a matter of fact, we all pledge that we will be just this in the baptismal vows that we make on behalf of every baby baptized in the church. Children and young people are longing to know what God wants for them. Pastors can help, but often it is the lay people who have seen children grow up from baptized infants and who know the children in the congregation best. If you see gifts and graces in a young person that would make them a good minister, tell your pastor and tell them.

The United Methodist Church, as well as many mainline churches, is in need of talented young people who will give their lives to the ordained ministry. As the baby boomers begin retiring, the churches will suffer if gifted young pastors are not around to fill the void. The Texas Annual Conference is investing a great deal of time and energy into the effort of finding the best and brightest who have a heart for serving God and the abilities to lead congregations; however, you and other lay members in your church are the best resources we have. Please take this material seriously and make an effort to "fish for people" as Jesus charged his disciples to do.

Think about these facts:

- **Fewer young people are entering ministry.** According to The Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary, in The United Methodist Church from 1985 to 2005 the percentage of young elders (under 35) dropped dramatically from 15.05% to 4.69%. While the total number of elders has fallen since 1985, the drop in young elders has been much greater, from 3219 to 850. The decline in young elders has been significantly greater than the decline in church membership, number of churches, and number of pastoral charges. Despite an overall increase in population, the U. S. population aged 25-34 has declined, but the decline in young elders has been much greater. Comparisons with other mainline denominations show a similar trend of fewer young clergy. In the Texas Annual Conference, there are only 41 commissioned or ordained elders under the age of 35. That's 3.3%.

Why is that a problem? Because congregations tend to attract congregants the same age as their clergy leadership, a shortage of young clergy means we face a shortage of young church members. Unless lay and clergy members begin gaining church experience now, churches in the Texas Annual Conference will not have adequate leadership in the future and our congregations will age and decline.

- **People are entering ministry later in life.** According to The Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary, in The United Methodist Church from 1985 to 2005 the average age of elders has increased from 46.8 to 51.5. In the Texas Annual Conference, the current average age of elders is 58, and the average age of entering clergy (clergy commissioned into probationary membership) is 46.

Why is that a problem? “Second-career” clergypersons offer our Conference great life experience and expertise. However, clergypersons typically need five to eight years of church experience before they are prepared to take on key leadership roles in the annual conference and in our churches. The process into ordained ministry alone can take four to six years. Therefore, persons seeking to enter professional ministry late in life will have very few years of mature church leadership to offer before retirement.

- **Many current clergy are preparing to retire.** In 2008 and 2009, only 9 clergypersons will reach 70, our mandatory retirement age. However, many clergypersons retire before mandatory retirement age—often as early as age 62. Over the next ten years, from today through 2017, 872 current Texas Annual Conference clergypersons (that’s over 83% of the total 1043 current full time Texas Annual Conference clergy) will fall between the ages of 65 and 70 and, potentially, retire.

Why is that a problem? Currently, only about 15 new (commissioned probationary) clergy enter the Texas Annual Conference each year. Their average age: 46. Approximately five full time local pastors enter Conference service each year. Their average age: even higher. Over the next ten years, we anticipate 20 clergypersons coming into Conference service each year and potentially an average of 87 retiring each year.

Although demand in our Conference for clergy may be light for the next two years, over the next ten years--like the Roman Catholic Church and all mainline denominations--we are facing a shortage of clergy and a critical shortage of young clergy.

These facts and figures could affect your local church. Please take these materials seriously and help young people hear God’s call in their lives. You will be glad you did!

Thoughts for Pastor/Staff Parish Relations Committees (P/SPRC)

While the materials in this CD have been aimed at encouraging people to think about ordained ministry, the P/SPRC has a vital role in being the first committee the candidate for ministry will meet before continuing the process. While it is difficult to discourage a young person many of the committee members may have known for years, it is important for the P/SPRC to be faithful in discerning gifts and graces for the ministry. Never recommend someone who has issues that will keep him/her from being an effective pastor.

While this might seem harsh, stopping a candidate before they have spent time, effort, and money in a fruitless venture is much more loving in the long run. If a candidate has anger management issues, is divisive, has issues with authority or boundaries, is theologically rigid to an extreme, or does not hold up the highest standard of Christian conduct, a P/SPRC committee should not recommend that person for ordained ministry. If a committee is indecisive, they can recommend with reservations and list the reasons for their hesitation.

The United Methodist Church believes in an outward call as well as an inward call. Your input is necessary to determine if a candidate is ready for ministry. Please take your job with all seriousness and use prayer and discernment in making your decisions. God bless you in your work.

Information and advice to help with your work, provided by the Center for Clergy Excellence:

- Find out if there are currently any candidates for ordained ministry in your congregation. Actively help them in the process.
- Check out the “Is God calling you?” section of the Texas Annual Conference Website (go to www.txcumc.org, click “Administration”, “Center for Clergy Excellence”, and “Recruitment”), and send the link to those in your congregation who work with youth and young adults.
- Familiarize or re-familiarize yourself with the steps into ordained ministry in The United Methodist Church at www.isgodcallingyou.org/pdfs/stepord.PDF.
- Order several copies of the book written for candidates, *The Christian as Minister*. This book is less than \$6, and is available at Cokesbury Bookstore at www.cokesbury.com or 1.800.672.1789.

Formation:

- Create opportunities to communicate the option of Christian vocation in your congregation. Re-tell biblical and modern-day calling stories in sermons and in small groups, and share the option of ordained ministry with your youth and young adults.
- Encourage and expect youth and young adults in your congregation to participate visibly in worship and to be actively involved in all levels of congregational life.
- Spend time listening to youth and young adults in your congregation. When you sense a heightened interest or spiritual awakening in a gifted young person, prayerfully consider whether God may be calling that person into ordained ministry. If you feel led to do so, let that young person know that you have been praying for him or her, and that you believe God may be calling him or her to consider ordained ministry.

Celebration:

- If you have candidates for ministry in your congregation, take the time to get to know them personally. Take them out to lunch, listen to their struggles, and let them know that you support them and are available to them.
- Place and keep all college and seminary candidates on your church’s prayer list.
- Create a task force or invite a concerned staff member or layperson to keep in touch with your

congregation's candidates. Encouraging e-mails, phone calls, and care packages sent to candidates in colleges and seminaries can help them tangibly experience your love and support.

- Consider creating a scholarship fund or taking a special offering to help your candidates with educational expenses. *The Fund for Theological Education* offers matching grants to candidates whose congregations support them. To learn more, go to www.thefund.org/programs/.

For more resources to help you and your congregation call people to consider ordained ministry, consider ordering a copy of the book *Pastor Parish Relations: Supporting your pastor, staff, and congregation* also available at Cokesbury. You may also find information at www.thefund.org/programs/congregations_library.phtml, or contact the Center for Clergy Excellence at 713.521.9383.

Working together with God, we can increase the number of candidates for ordained, licensed, and lay ministry, and meet our future needs for congregational leadership.

Thoughts for Pastors

I knew love at first sight was real when I looked at my babies for the first time. Over the years, love comes to me in that same rush on various occasions when I look at them. One of those moments was when I put the waters of baptism on their heads and said the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Since baptizing my own babies, the sacrament of baptism has taken on a deeper significance for me for every baby I am privileged to bless.

As pastors we, as well as our congregations, have a special responsibility for the babies we baptize. They are part of our family, and we are to teach them what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. As we watch them grow, we need to guide their faith and help them to grow in love. Some children show signs of deep faith very early in their lives. Pastors have the opportunity to seek out young people with gifts and graces and help them discern God’s call—it is part of the vows we make at baptism. Like Eli, despite our own sins, despite our own successes or failures with our own children, we can become a spiritual parent to the young people in our congregation who are struggling to figure out what God wants for them. It may or may not be to become a pastor, but if it is, you will experience great joy from being a part of that journey. Furthermore, you can watch them grow and mature in the United Methodist Church, knowing that you have a special bond with them.

I grew up in a large United Methodist church, and every associate as well as the senior pastor was a part of my calling. I had the opportunity to serve as an associate in a large church as a part of my first appointment. In the five years I was there, that church started at least eight congregation members on a path to seminary and ministry. Just last Annual Conference a young lady came up to me and said, “You may not know me, but I met with you in your office one day and the things you said to me helped me discern my call to ministry. I’m in seminary now, and I just wanted to thank you.” I confess that I did not remember that conversation, but God uses us even when we are unaware of it...how much more can God use us when we consciously work to seek out the best and brightest young people in our midst and help them wrestle with what God wants them to do with their lives.

Being a spiritual parent and mentor to young pastors brings incredible joy into our own ministry. It can revitalize us to connect with our own calls to ministry. It can help us relate to the younger generation. And it can bring delight to God and purpose to God’s church as congregation members help support young people in seminary with everything from prayer to financial assistance. The resources in this CD will help you and your church experience this joy firsthand.

Hosting a “Calling Sunday” once a year in your church is an opportunity for you to share your call story with the congregation. It is a chance to meet with your youth director or counselors and talk to them about students in the youth group who might have gifts and graces to serve God. It is a great time to include young people in the service: offering testimonies, giving the children’s sermon, or reading scripture.

Here is helpful information to guide young people through the process, provided by the Center for Clergy Excellence.

- Check out the “Is God calling you?” section of the Texas Annual Conference Website (go to www.txcumc.org, click “Administration”, “Center for Clergy Excellence”, and “Recruitment”), and send the link to those in your congregation who work with youth and young adults.
- Familiarize or re-familiarize yourself with the steps into ordained ministry in The United Methodist Church at www.isgodcallingyou.org/pdfs/stepord.PDF.
- Order several copies of the book written for candidates, *The Christian as Minister*. They only cost \$3.00-\$6.00 each, and are available at Cokesbury Bookstore at www.cokesbury.com or 1.800.672.1789. Have them on hand for people who may be interested.

- Find out if there are currently any candidates for ordained ministry in your congregation.

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- Place and keep all college and seminary candidates on your church's prayer list.
- Invite current candidates to preach, participate visibly in worship, and share their calling stories and seminary experiences with your youth and young adults.
- Create a task force or invite a concerned staff member or layperson to keep in touch with your congregation's candidates. Make sure that your S/PPRC is fulfilling its role to help candidates. Encouraging e-mails, phone calls, and care packages sent to candidates in colleges and seminaries can help them tangibly experience your love and support.
- Consider creating a scholarship fund or taking a special offering to help your candidates with educational expenses. *The Fund for Theological Education* offers matching grants to candidates whose congregations support them. To learn more, go to www.thefund.org/programs/.

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