



naming the elephants: words from young adults in ministry

Call it professionalism, call it excellence, call it collegiality--but it needs to happen. **Without it, we will continue to see young adults leave our ministry process in droves** (as already happens) for years to come. Several conferences are already streamlining, reorganizing, and coordinating the process to make it as simple and uniform as possible--this work needs to happen throughout our United Methodist family.

Encourage more openness. **It took me years to finally connect with some current clergy who would really open up and be honest** and tell me things like, "You know, some days you might hate it and think this is not what you want and then realize it's not about just you," or, "So this is the budget and we have a problem; listen to how we're thinking of solving it." Just, I guess, opening the curtain to reveal all those things.

Encourage younger clergy to be mentors. I know that being a pastor is tough and time is limited, **but if [we] want younger clergy, the ones who have succeeded need to be active in the process.** Encourage fruitful and relevant mentor/intern experiences. Don't pigeon-hole young clergy into only a few fringe roles.

For those on a track toward pastor-in-charge status, I would like to require church leadership coursework, personal finance training and a minimum level of organizational theory, marketing and accounting/finance training. We don't value these **practical tools** and toss folks into leadership positions that, in a mid-sized church, guide laypersons to manage hundreds of thousands of dollars of operational budgets. **In short, it isn't all spiritual stuff out in the real world of the local church.**

I don't think that you should turn new clergy loose by themselves (although some might be ready for that). I would like to see some creative appointments (maybe with some slightly older but open-minded, creative and passionate clergy) that would begin to put some of our best talent toward some of our greatest opportunities. **The young clergy need the wisdom of those who have come before them and the older clergy need the insight, vision and energy of a group of people who might better understand the needs of this generation.** So, in short - I would like to see more REAL partnerships taking place between younger clergy and more experienced clergy - to really begin dreaming and thinking about how the church needs to change in the future.... and then the money to back up their visions!

I had a conversation with someone and he straight up told me that **because my vocation will be one in the church, my calling "trumps" that of my spouse.** Though I feel as if he was completely out of line to make that comment, I do feel like he spoke the words that the church has been saying implicitly for a very long time. My spouse is not United Methodist. *GASP!* I don't know why my spouse married me, honestly, knowing how our lives will be filled with appointments and moving. This whole process of candidacy is so overwhelming to my spouse, and I can't help but think it just foreshadows the overwhelming future ahead.

I plan on getting married. And it will be really hard to say, "Yeah, marry me, but you know, in three years we could be moving. So make sure your job's okay with that too. But then again, it could be like fifteen years...who knows really? We'll find out and then have a couple months to fix it." **I love the ideals behind the appointment process,** but as has been said before, it's not appealing to have to try to re-secure another person's job. In addition, other people are JUST as called to their vocations as clergy are. **I wouldn't get rid of changing appointments. But we need communication and compromise to help with those spouses who aren't stay at home spouses either.**

I really am **blessed with how my candidacy worked out,** even though it was the scenic route, to say the least.

I still journey with so many people with kindred hearts "outside" of the United Methodist Church. They wonder why I've stuck it out. Through our deep listening of each other, I've come to know well that **I love this church.** I really do. She has broken my heart, and silenced my voice; she has burdened me with unimaginable things. However, She is not who she should or could be: The body of Christ. Well, I know that Christ very well. **While I've seen the church at its worst, I've also seen the Body of Christ at its very best.** And I tell you, it's a beautiful thing.

I think attention should be given to the unique situation the church finds itself in general and young clergy in particular. **Because people are living longer, we have more generations present in the life of the church than ever before.**

I think having some kind of **district relocation team** made up of people (laity and clergy) who are connected in the area would be helpful. **I wouldn't want my spouse to feel that my work is more important than theirs** – spouses are just as called to their vocation as I am to this life. I think that such a team would make spouses feel more supported, valued and cared for. I think this would be beneficial for clergy of all ages - and may encourage young people to answer their call into ministry.

I understand that the denomination can't bend over backwards for new pastors. However, it is such a huge shock for churches that have been used to full-time pastors to make the switch to a part-time pastor. Even something as simple as **the superintendant or another pastor sitting down with the Pastor Parish Committee and going over protocol, helpful advice,** and maybe an explanation of what the new pastor's job description entails would be nice.

I would really like to meet up with other people in my conference/district/etc. that were **considering the same things I considered before I applied to seminary.** And even in seminary...they're my future cohort. Why can't my conference make sure I know them before commissioning time?

I've been told all along that **the candidate is in charge of their own process**. What this statement can say is:

1. We really don't have an organized process;
2. We don't care enough to structure the process so you can follow it in some organized way;
3. We aren't going to assist you in much of a tangible way, and
4. It was hard for me, so it has to be hard for you.

All of these perceptions need to be made figments of the past. **Thank God there are those of us who feel called to the level that we're willing to put up with the very human and occasionally flawed way that the organization (that is us) does things.**

If the process of entering ministry is not reflecting the high calling of ministry in the name of Jesus Christ (not to mention the United Methodist Church), then why would anyone want to enter ministry with us? Or stay in the process? Too many times, phone calls never get returned, information falls through the cracks, and/or miscommunications happen that end up punishing the candidate even though it isn't their fault. **Is this really how we want to present the incredible vocation of ministry to young people excited about Christ?** Our process is long and complex for many good reasons. There is no good reason for it to be chaotic, impossible, erratic, or arbitrary.

If we want to attract more high quality candidates, perhaps we also need to be more accommodating to their likely high-quality spouses.

It is known that **church vocation is not the highest paying vocation**, but something must be done. With second career pastors of any capacity, they have had the opportunity to make some money (hopefully) and establish themselves financially before diving into ministry.

It would be nice if there were **some kind of relocation team to help spouses** - even in remote areas - to find gainful employment in their field. I agree that my spouse has been called. My spouse has been called to be my partner, and to serve in their line of work.

Look outside of the mold for clergy. So what if someone with a huge tattoo and some piercings comes into your office and wants to pursue ministry? Okay...maybe not your top result for "pastor" when you picture it in your mind, but that's okay. The world is changing, and so should the church.

Make sure at least one person from every church actually knows the current discipline and all its specifics so people don't sit waiting for a deadline to come that passed years ago and get behind. In reality, provide more specific details on the steps, or again, at least someone who will be more forthcoming. **I feel like candidacy is this big secret society and I'm trying really hard to get into it, but can't seem to get started to save my life!**

My struggle, and that of many others I've known, is that **the debt incurred by a person going straight from undergrad into seminary is unthinkable.** And then to be appointed to a church that doesn't pay well makes repayment difficult.

More internships and mentorships, even before people are actually in the [ordination] process would be helpful....[Have] more Christian education/other ministry setting internships and offer it to **campus ministry** people - for that's where you'd find the potential for future seminarians. Lots of people consider church and ministry something separate from an actual vocation- and if they are given a light into how it CAN be a vocation, that could be just another step in their calling to perhaps higher things...such as ordination.

My first thought is **the need for our voices to be taken very seriously**. And to be engaging many of us in real conversations about how the church needs to change. **So much of our financial resources as a denomination are being poured into preserving the institutional church as it exists**. I would love to see equal if not more energy and resources being invested in exploring new ways of doing church that are reaching out and connecting with many of the people who have left. I feel like the young clergy who want to do things new have to "put in their time" and "prove themselves worthy" and jump through a million hoops before they are released to really do the kind of ministry that their hearts feel called to.

No leadership training! I have had my call since high school - yet beyond the 'candidacy process' and taking the psychological, I don't feel at all prepared. **I've had two different appointments over three years, and still don't feel any different**. Perhaps more frustrated than ever as I'm farther in and still at a loss.

No or very limited training for mentors. My mentor is a wonderful, caring, older woman local pastor at a large church with several other pastors. **I love my mentor, but she freely admits that she has no idea how to help me** with my financial or organizational questions/problems.

All I know is this: **in the darkest moments of a desperate and hopeless life, I met Jesus**. I have spent every day since offering every breath as a very inadequate attempt to say, "thank you." Slowly, day by day, offering that day and this messed up life to God, committed to knowing God's voice, committed to following obediently and mostly gratefully has found me HERE. I sure would have settled for a whole lot less.

One of the little-identified reasons for the lack of young clergy in the connection is that there has been **a system-wide disinvestment from campus ministries** in general. A thoroughgoing reinvestment in campus ministries across the world - just as thorough as the wonderful investments we are making in new church starts and church revitalization - would result in a dramatic increase in the numbers of young folks connected to the UMC and, by extension, in the ministry.

On-site daycare at seminaries.

Rushing appointments. I don't regret taking an appointment when I did. However, I felt very rushed into it. I was offered one the year before I took one (I took my first my senior year in college). I was also not well informed about what would happen. In fact, **I was promised that all I had to do was preach on Sunday and lead a bible study on Wednesdays by my mentor**. I think I should have been informed by the Superintendent- not just my mentor - about what would be expected of me.

Our candidacy process also needs to reflect our theology. When candidates are told that they have not discerned God's call until they have completed the sessions in the Candidacy Guidebook, the message conveyed is that **God's voice cannot be heard without being empowered by a three ring binder from Nashville**. It's difficult to get excited about serving in a church that seems to make such a claim! After months of prayer, wrestling and searching for any path other than ministry, I heard God's call to my life loud and clear and threw up my hands and surrendered. For me, this meant enormous struggles with my family as well as financial hardships, but I knew that I would otherwise never be whole. I wish that my discernment process had been appreciated, but the message that was clearly communicated was that I didn't yet know fully and through following the steps to the candidacy process I could begin to discern God's call. **Again, it wasn't the process that bothered me; it was the communication**. God calls and I want to answer. Now if someone at the conference center would answer my calls...

Personally speaking, there are times in ministry that I would like a little hand holding (guidance) from a more experienced elder. Just enough to get me going so that the training wheels can be removed! I have heard other **young pastors say that they would love to serve under a senior pastor - but not as an associate**. I think it would be great for a lot of us to have an internship experience where we fill functions of the associate and the senior interchangeably. To be able to closely shadow the senior pastor - sitting through meetings, visits and paperwork. To be able to officiate baptisms, weddings, and funerals under the direct supervision of **an elder who has been approved as a training type of supervisor**. I have had the honor of a retired elder who has closely worked as my back up and go to person. I really appreciate her and think other young clergy serving a congregation could benefit from a similar arrangement as well.

The process itself can be frustrating, but I have been more turned off by the lack of responsiveness and support from the conference. **Email and cell phones have made instant communication part of young adult culture. To many of us, not receiving responses in a timely manner indicates a lack of interest on the behalf of the recipient**. This rang out as the message I received when my District Superintendent never responded to my letter, phone calls and emails requesting to begin the candidacy process. I finally had success when I contacted the chair of the DCOM, but being ignored for nine months was my first experience of trying to enter ministry in the United Methodist Church.

Why have I endured? Well, simply stated: obedience and certainty of God's call. Believe me. I have BEGGED God to open doors for me to be in ministry in some other way, in some other place, without such limitations and boxes. **I've been overcome with envy and jealousy of friend after friend who shared my passion and dreams and vision for creative and new ministry in the church and "left the church" (meaning the United Methodist Church) to do ministry**. While they have planted churches, reached so many new people, birthed new and exciting ministries. I am still struggling for even the permission and the credentials to do so. I have spent years just trying to get to the point and obtain the credentials to live into the calling God offered to me fifteen years ago.