Using the biblical story of “young” Timothy, my dissertation project was guided by several research questions. These questions were reflected in the online survey and follow-up phone interviews.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

#1: According to the young clergy surveyed, what are the best practices and common characteristics of family members identified by participants as most influential in helping them discern and follow their call into pastoral ministry?

#2: According to the young clergy surveyed, what are the best practices and common characteristics of local churches identified by participants as most influential in helping them discern and follow their call into pastoral ministry?

#3: According to the young clergy surveyed, what are the best practices and common characteristics of those persons who have served in pastoral roles identified by participants as most influential in helping them discern and follow their call into pastoral ministry?

#4: Based on follow-up interviews with young clergy who gave permission, what are the best practices used to help prepare young people to discern and follow the call to pastoral ministry in the United Methodist Church?

**PLEASE CONTACT DAVID FOR MORE DETAILS AND/OR TO SCHEDULE A PRESENTATION OR WORKSHOP IN YOUR DISTRICT, CHURCH OR GROUP**

Ph: 216.956.9900
eroypastor@gmail.com

**CALL WAITING**

**THE YOUNG CLERGY CRISIS IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Summary of Dissertation Work

**Rev. Dr. David T. Rittgers**

United Methodist Elder in the East Ohio Conference

2013 - Doctor of Ministry, Asbury Theological Seminary

2004 - Master of Divinity, Ashland Theological Seminary
THE PROBLEM

United Methodist Church

As of 2012, only 5.6% of United Methodist clergy (probationary and ordained elders) were under the age of 35. Meanwhile, 52.9% of clergy were between ages 55-72. Yet, Methodists weren’t alone in their struggle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>% under 35</th>
<th>% 55-72</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Baptist</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Church</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episcopal Church</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Lutheran</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian (PCUSA)</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Lewis Center Clergy Age Trend Report, 2012)

“The study of leadership has shown us that in declining organizations, there is a failure to attract sufficient quality leadership. The leadership base of a declining organization gets smaller and smaller, and they fail to attract quality young leaders. So just at the same time when the organization needs its best leaders in greatest numbers, the base of new and quality leadership tends to be smallest.” – Dr. Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

North Central Jurisdiction Lags Behind

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>% under 35</th>
<th>Elders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>7.26%</td>
<td>403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Central</td>
<td>6.51%</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>3.81%**</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>3.81%</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>5.60%</td>
<td>930</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Lewis Center Clergy Age Trend Report, 2012)

A Multi-faceted Problem

Previous research showed that many different factors (lack of young people in churches, length of ordination process, cost of seminary, etc.) were contributing to the young clergy shortage. Instead of focusing on the problems, I decided to use an appreciative inquiry style approach to discover what was already working among younger clergy in the East Ohio Conference UMC.

“I didn’t really feel that I had a choice but to go where God was leading.”

“It was a call from God I couldn’t ignore.” - East Ohio participants

Snapshot of Participants

Men 27, Women 7, Total 34
Ordained 14, Commissioned 11, Certified 9
Caucasian 33, African-American 1, Other 0

Most Influential Factors

- Mentoring by Pastor: 2.44
- Opportunity to lead as layperson: 2.39
- Opportunity to preach as layperson: 2.27
- Exercising spiritual gifts: 2.26
- Practicing spiritual disciplines: 2.24
- Experiencing high quality preaching: 2.15
- Regular conversation with pastor: 2.03
- Mission project: 1.81
- Small group: 1.79
- Parental or family influence: 1.76
- Observing pastor in daily work: 1.75

Least Influential Factors

- Annual Conference invitation: 0.28
- (given at ordination service)
- Jurisdictional Event: 0.36
- Youth Annual Conference: 0.60
- Conference Recruitment event: 0.62

MAIN FINDINGS

- The call of God is of primary importance
- Mentoring clergy play the most crucial role in the exploration process
- The local church is the source of future clergy
- Family members provide a foundation of support
- Campus ministry might be a missing link
- The United Methodist process has limitations
- Diversity of gender and ethnicity are keys to the future

What’s working with Pastoral Mentoring in East Ohio?

38% of respondents said their “unofficial” pastoral mentoring relationship was “much more helpful” than their official relationship during the ordination process.

24% said “more helpful”
24% said “about the same”