

FAQs for Youth Thinking About Ordained Ministry



I Think God Wants to Hire Me – What Do I Need to Know?

By Meg Lassiatt with Deborah Bushfield*

1. What does it feel like to be called? How do I know if this is God's call or my passion?

It feels different for each person. Sometimes during prayer or communion, you may feel a strong urging. Sometimes on a mission trip or at a church camp you might sense that God seems to be calling you to ministry somehow. It may be that someone has said something to you that started this train of thought. However the feeling comes, God wants all of us to serve as disciples. You have to decide whether you actually have the gifts and talents to be successful as an ordained minister.

2. How do I get a reality check? I want to be sure my feelings are grounded in reality as well as spirituality.

You need honest feedback. Talk with people you trust, those who know you and care about you. These will include your best friends, your youth minister, or your pastor. Also be sure to include your parents, and maybe a few other relatives, such as cousins or grandparents. You may have a neighbor or teacher whose judgment you trust. Share your thoughts and plans with these people and ask their advice.

3. What if my parents don't want me to be a minister?

This is tough, but the best advice is: Be patient; it takes time for anyone to get used to a new idea. The key is clear communication. Don't assume your parents know what you're thinking or feeling – you'll have to tell them, and tell them in a way that they can take in. Let them know you feel committed to this or, if not fully committed, you are committed to exploring ministry as a career option.

While you're getting them used to the idea, keep yourself encouraged by taking advantage of your own support system. Talk to your friends about your decision, and talk with others who care about you and who will be supportive: grandparents, ministers, youth workers, teachers, and anyone else whom you feel would understand.

4. Who do I talk to for information about ministry?

If you know a youth minister at your church, you may want to talk with that person. You'll also want to talk with your senior pastor. Ask her/him how to get in touch with the church's district superintendent for your area – your own DS, as they're called. This person has all the official info you'll need and can connect you with the right sources for education, scholarships, interviews, etc.

5. Are there scripture passages I should look up?

Yes! Some of them are:

- God calls Moses – Exodus 3:1-12
- God calls Samuel – I Samuel 3:1-10
- God calls Esther – Esther 4:9-17
- God calls Mary – Luke 1:26-38
- God calls Timothy – I Timothy 4:6-16

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These passages show how God calls many types of people – young people, adults, women, men, girls and boys. Don't sell yourself short because you don't think you can do it. God calls different people for different ministries. The challenge is to figure out how God is calling you.

6. Do I need college to be an ordained minister?

Yes, if you want to become a full-time ordained elder or deacon, you will need a college degree. Elders must also earn a Master of Divinity from an [accredited seminary](#). Deacons may choose to attend seminary, or they can earn a master's in their specialized area of ministry, and combine it with graduate theological education.

7. What should I major in?

People often think they should choose an undergrad major in religious studies or pre-theology, but that can limit your overall education, and may prevent you from developing your own unique interests.

A Bachelor of Arts gives you a well-rounded degree and provides a good amount of knowledge in a lot of subjects. (It is also useful as your career path becomes more focused – then you'll have educational backup.) BA majors that are useful to future ministers include history, sociology, psychology, political science, English, and many others. After college, you'll attend a seminary. You'll get the theology and religious studies you need there and can focus your studies in particular areas of ministry.

8. What do ministers do Monday through Saturday?

A lot. Most who choose to become elders are leaders of the local churches where they serve. Their primary responsibilities include creating and carrying out thoughtful worship services. They also choose the text, coordinate the music and readings, and finally, write sermons filled with fresh ideas and perfect stories that make the scripture come alive. In addition, they oversee the Christian education at the church, create and supervise the programs the church offers, deal with the finance committee, the trustees, the women's and men's groups, the youth group, and the choir and music committees. Besides all this, they visit the sick, make nursing home calls, visit members in their homes, offer counseling, conduct weddings, funerals, and baptisms, and lead in serving Holy Communion. [Elders](#) are do-it-all ministers in the local church. They are generalists.

Some elders feel called to serve as pastoral counselors or military chaplains, teach at schools or seminaries, or serve in other institutions that share in the church's work. These elders serve in [extension ministries](#).

However, not all ordained ministers are elders. Those who choose to become [deacons](#) decide that they are called to specialized ministry, such as youth work, music, education, church administration, chaplaincy, counseling, mission work – and the list goes on. Deacons can usually serve in a ministry that lets them focus their career primarily on their chosen interests and areas of specialization.

Both deacons and elders can serve either at a local church or in ministries that are based outside of the local church. For more info and videos about [ordained ministry in general](#) or about [deacons](#), [elders](#) and [chaplains](#) visit www.ghbem.org/ministryvideos.

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9. Do I officially start the process of becoming a minister before seminary?

Yes, you may! Because it is a rather involved process with numerous steps, you should talk to your DS while you're still in college, preferably before your junior year – or as soon as possible after that. Ask the DS for the name of the person you should contact on the district committee on ordained ministry (dCOM). It is at this time that the DS will help the dCOM assign to you a mentor who will help you navigate the ministry process. That will get the ball rolling. Be persistent. You're not bothering people; you're simply reminding them that you're interested. They like to hear that, and the more you remind them, the more they will remember you, and see to it that you get the right info at the right time.

If at all possible, [you want to become a "certified candidate"](#) before you enter seminary so you will qualify for more scholarship opportunities from The United Methodist Church and from your annual conference. If you can't become certified before seminary, you can still attend; however, it's better for you to become certified during your senior year in college. Always check with your district committee or the annual conference's candidacy registrar to be sure you are following the process in the correct order – it may be different in different conferences. The DS can give you those names.

10. How long does it take to become an ordained minister?

It depends in part on how fast you are. You need an undergraduate degree – generally four years, though a few can do it in three. It also requires a master's degree including theological studies, which will take a minimum of three years, sometimes four. So, best case, your education will take six to eight years. Following completion of your education you will be required to serve in ministry for a minimum of a two-year period before completing the ordination process.

11. What do I do now?

- Make a plan. Do the talking, the reality check, the contacts with your youth minister, the DS, etc.
- List a series of action steps you'll take, and turn it into a time line. Label the first action step "Today."
- Realize that you can do this. If God wants to hire you, God will send you to the correct Human Resources people to get you ready. You don't have to know how the entire process will unfold, but you do have to take the first steps.
- For more information, visit: www.explorecalling.org

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