



General Conference 2012 created the Young Clergy Initiative (YCI) Fund, as follows:

There shall be a Young Clergy Initiative Fund which provides support to increase the number of young clergy among the jurisdictional conferences. This begins a three-quadrennium effort to enable The United Methodist Church to focus efforts on encouraging young adults who wish to respond to the call to ordained ministry to receive a strong theological education in the United Methodist tradition in preparation for ordination. This initiative is in addition to the funds that the church already has budgeted for discernment, recruitment, nurturing, education, and support of young clergy leaders.

The agencies, in collaboration with Boards of Ordained Ministry, seminaries, bishops, and cabinets will determine the most effective use of the Young Clergy Initiative Fund in response to the need for young clergy leaders to reach their own generation and those younger generations. With measured success, it is hoped that the next General Conference will increase this investment. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry will administer this designated fund.

In August 2012, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) hosted a Young Clergy Summit with young adult candidates, clergy and annual conference representatives to define the triumphs and challenges faced by young adults during the ordination process, and establish goals to guide the fund's use.

GBHEM organized an advisory team to develop a grant program for supporting projects that promote systemic denominational change. Grant applications were evaluated on the project's potential to: **prepare** young people to hear God's call to ordained ministry; **assist** young people in responding to God's call to ordained ministry; **develop** young people in spiritual and theological formation; and **nurture** young clergy for lifelong transformational ministry.

Two rounds of grants were awarded in May 2014 and

October 2014, with up to \$100,000 available per application. In total, YCI received 164 applications and awarded 78 projects.

The jurisdictional distribution for awards was as follows:

Jurisdiction	Number Awarded	Percent of applications awarded
<i>North Central</i>	13	60%
<i>Northeastern</i>	8	42%
<i>South Central</i>	16	40%
<i>Southeastern</i>	32	48%
<i>Western</i>	9	60%

Awards fell into six main categories:

- Covenant groups with peers;
- Call exploration events;
- Internships;
- Intentional communities;
- Mentoring experiences;
- Missional immersion experiences.

**A full list of YCI grant recipients can be found at [www.explorecalling.org/yci/awards](http://www.explorecalling.org/yci/awards).**

Three projects are highlighted here:

### **Project Transformation**

Project Transformation (PT) invites young adults discerning a vocational call to ministry to serve with children experiencing poverty and at-risk for lower educational accomplishments. The grant enabled PT to expand from a regional to a national ministry. In 2014, there were 183 young adults in ministry to more than 2,000 children. Participant Justin Mayo said, "In finding community, in sharing my story, in serving others at PT—I am being transformed. I'm now finishing my sophomore year at college, where I've gotten more involved with my campus ministry at the Wesley Foundation. I have switched my major to Social Work. I now sing in a gospel choir at my



church. I feel more at peace. While my relationship with God isn't perfect, I'm trying to be open to God's path for me."

#### **The Raices Latinas Institute**

The Boston University School of Theology organized the Raices Latinas Institute to help Hispanic/Latino students better discern God's call to ordained ministry. During its first year, the institute engaged 48 master's-level students and facilitated space to nurture new generations of Hispanic/Latino religious leaders. One participant, Cesar Esteves, reported, "I was encouraged to think about the implications of my spiritual beliefs while helping me realize this is a constant process I must engage in, especially through dialogue with my community."

#### **Called: One Word, Many Ways**

Similar project requests from three annual conferences were combined to plan and launch a new churchwide vocational discernment resource. This resource, *Called: One Word, Many Ways*, was a collaboration among GBHEM, Discipleship Ministries, United Methodist Communications, and the Forum for Theological Exploration. Contributors represented a broad diversity among age, gender, nationality and race, location of ministry, deacons, and elders. Resources include sermon starters, graphics, liturgical resources, videos, retreat plans and educational material for children, youth and other small groups. *Called* will be updated annually and available for free download at [www.explorecalling.org/called](http://www.explorecalling.org/called).

#### ***Distribution of Funds***

##### **Non-Profit Organizations**

Grants were awarded to non-profit organizations related to an annual conference, church, college, university or theological school.

##### **Matching Support and Additional Funding**

Grant recipients were encouraged to seek additional project support from other sources. Grant leaders

secured supplemental funds from annual conference initiatives, special collections within local churches, districts, colleges, universities, theological schools, endowments and more. By seeking additional funding, projects could increase the scope of their work and expand the impact of the YCI awards. **In total, grant recipients raised an additional \$6.8 million, nearly doubling the General Conference's investment in ministry discernment and young clergy development.**

#### **Direct Scholarships and Debt Relief**

Much consideration was given to using the fund for direct scholarship support and debt relief for candidates and clergy. In considering the most strategic and far-reaching ways to utilize the fund, the leadership team discerned that direct support for individuals would not allow the fund to reach its potential for systemic denominational change.

The number of people the fund would be able to directly support was drastically fewer than the number of those who could benefit from the diversity of projects that were ultimately awarded.

Given the fund's \$7 million allocation and the average amount of seminarian debt accumulated by graduation (\$66,367.45), direct support could assist only 105 of the 2,162 young adult candidates and clergy in the Church. Even if the YCI Fund awarded \$10,000 grants to individuals, the fund would be able to assist about 700 people. While direct support initially appeared promising, the fund's size could not help a substantial percentage of young adult candidates and clergy if awarded to individuals. Additionally, direct support would not lay the groundwork for systemic change in the recruitment and development of young clergy.

#### ***YCI Evaluation***

One of the challenges in evaluating the fund's success is seeing immediate change in its primary desired outcome—to "increase the number of young clergy among the jurisdictional conferences." New projects may not produce young clergy for many years given



the time it takes to be ordained; therefore, evaluation currently is gauged by measuring behaviors and intentions as early success indicators. Each project's timeline and context varies. Reports are collected and posted as each project begins and concludes at [www.explorecalling.org/yici](http://www.explorecalling.org/yici).

Key learnings are also being compiled. Highlights include:

- Changing Church culture requires time and involvement from a broad array of influencers including bishops, cabinets, boards of ordained ministries and others;
- A more proactive and selective fund distribution process may yield more desired results;
- Personal relationships are the most effective way to guide a person in vocational discernment. Means for establishing and maintaining those relationships vary by culture and context;
- Youth feel called into Christian work but do not discern that call to be into ordained leadership;
- Youth seek and need opportunities to be in conversation with other youth who are discerning similar calls;
- Churches that regularly engage children and youth in conversation around vocational discernment tend to discover more children and youth who are interested in ordained ministry than churches that do not;
- General vocational discernment resources, such as *Called: One Word, Many Ways*, are helpful in framing conversations with children and youth and in creating a congregational culture of call.

### *Hopes for the 2017-2020 Quadrennium*

YCI is a three-quadrennium emphasis (2013-2024), and 2016 marks the conclusion of its first quadrennium. While much has been learned, more will be discovered as projects evolve and new projects begin.

Some areas identified for future focus include:

- Seminary debt relief;
- Young clergy financial wellness;
- Ethnic/minority recruitment and early ministry support;
- More frequent best practice sharing;
- Discernment/recruitment issues outside of the jurisdictional conferences;
- Continued development of vocational discernment resources;
- Support for hiring vocational discernment coordinators in each annual conference.

### *Funding Request*

GBHEM requests an additional \$7 million for the YCI for the 2017-2020 quadrennium. In the diversity of grants awarded and by encouraging grant recipients to secure additional funding, the YCI has been able to double the Church's investment in youth and young adults who are discerning to a call to ordained ministry. The Fund's renewal will enable the Church to continue its investment into the next quadrennium and find new, innovative ways to increase the number of young adult clergy for The United Methodist Church.