



A Vital Resource for the Church and Its Ministry

Since its creation in 2012 by General Conference, the Young Clergy Initiative (YCI) has become a crucial tool to guide young people through their call to ministry and to expand The United Methodist Church's ability to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Due to its marked success and the valuable insights gained through the program, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) requests that the General Conference 2020 vote to continue funding YCI and secure its important work for the next quadrennium. GBHEM administers YCI on behalf of the Church.

General Conference 2016 stated the following rationale for the Young Clergy Initiative:

“There shall be a Young Clergy Initiative Fund which provides support to increase the number of young clergy among the jurisdictional conferences. This continues 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.”

Along with administering YCI, GBHEM was also tasked with growing the overall investment in the program. Through the broad reach of YCI grants awarded, and by working with grant recipients to secure additional funding, GBHEM has more than doubled the Church's investment.

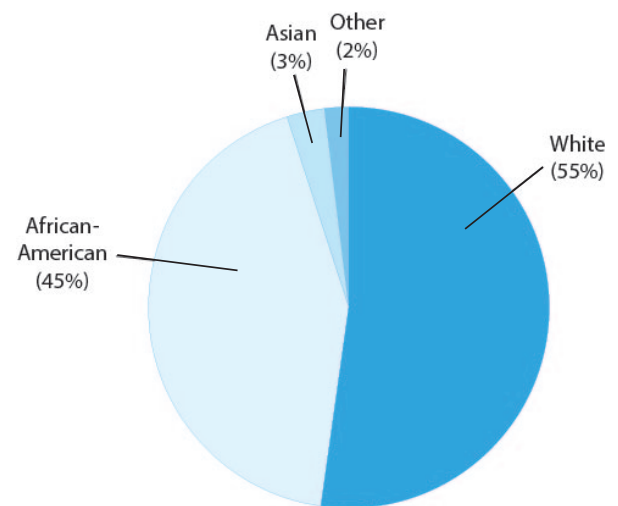
Over the last two quadrennia, the Young Clergy Initiative has helped to expand the opportunities offered to young adults to discern their call and has assisted in guiding young leaders in answering their call. The YCI has assisted the Church in identifying important trends among emerging clergy. Through

YCI, while there have been shifts in the types of call young people are hearing, they are still being called to serve Christ—and they are looking for guidance as they do so.

Why YCI Work is Important

Nearly 60 percent of YCI project participants are not yet members of The United Methodist Church. This fund provides outreach and engagement opportunities a local church could not provide on its own. Vocational discernment related to YCI may be the first point of contact these young adults have with the UMC. They may not understand much about the Church, but they know now that the UMC cares about who God is shaping them to be.

What we know about YCI participants:



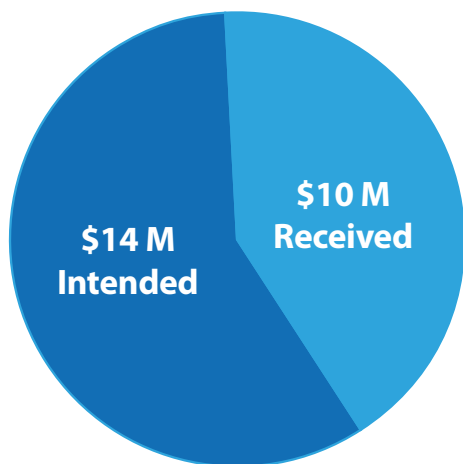
- Nearly 70 percent of participants state that their participation in a YCI project has strengthened the certainty of their call into church leadership.
- Nearly 30 percent of participants say that they plan to pursue ordained or licensed ministry in the UMC as a result of their YCI project.



- Nearly 70 percent of participants are female.
- Nearly 40 percent of participants are African American, about 3 percent are Asian, 55 percent are white and the remainder identify as “other.” Approximately 15 percent of all participants further identified as Hispanic, Latino/a or of Spanish origin.

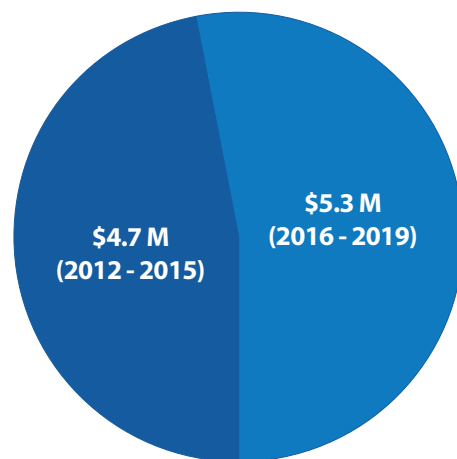
How Does YCI Operate?

The Young Clergy Initiative was established to be a three-quadrannium focus on increasing the number of young clergy in The United Methodist Church. Created from the World Service Fund, an apportioned fund, General Conference 2012 intended to provide the Young Clergy Initiative with \$7 million each quadrannium through the end of 2024. Due to shortages in apportioned giving, only \$10 million of the intended \$14 million has been available for distribution during the first two quadrannia.



In 2012, GBHEM hosted a Young Clergy Summit with young adult ministry candidates, clergy and annual conference representatives to focus on the challenges and triumphs faced by young adults throughout the ordination process. Summit participants established goals to guide the fund's use.

GBHEM organized a team to develop a grant process for supporting projects that could leverage systemic, denominational change. Grant applications were to be evaluated based on the projects' potential to **prepare** participants to hear God's call and **assist** them in responding to God's call to licensed or ordained ministry.



Between 2012-2018, the number of young clergy increased from 1,486 to 1,699, adding 213 in total. However, in 2019 it decreased to 1,646, a loss of 53 young clergy. “Young clergy” are defined as elders, deacons and licensed local pastors who are 35-years-old or younger.

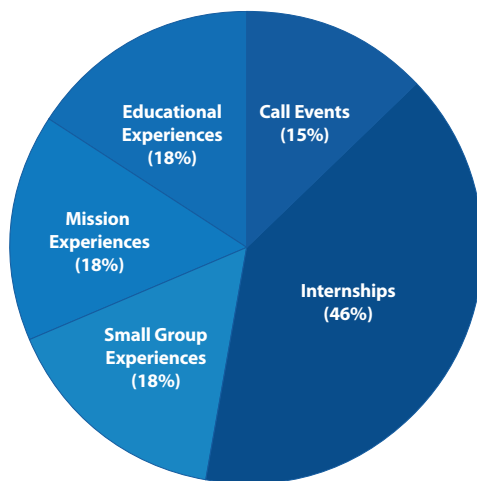
YCI Project Categories

YCI projects that receive funding have fallen into five categories:

- Call Events: retreats (1-3 days) to teach and inspire participants to think about vocation differently.
- Educational Experiences: short-term learning (4-12 weeks) to teach participants about call and vocational opportunities.
- Internships: short- or long-term programs (4-40 weeks) to give participants first-hand experience in a vocational ministry setting.



- Mission Experiences: short-term activities (1-14 days) to give participants awareness to service of others outside of a local church setting.
- Small Group Experiences: short-term communal opportunities (4-12 weeks) to give participants space to process their vocational discernment journey with peers.



Church leaders helping young adults discern vocation are placing a greater emphasis on internship programs. These “try and see” experiences are gaining the most traction with young adults considering a vocation in church leadership. While programs like this are typically more expensive and engage fewer participants at one time, they offer a high-quality, robust discernment experience — especially if paired with a strong mentor or small group.

“Call” events and educational and missional experiences are helpful in introducing vocational concepts and discussing options. More young adults can be engaged at a lower cost. But these experiences typically do not provide opportunities to interact more deeply with the vocation being considered.

Age Trends 2012-2019

	Elders	Deacons	LLPs	Total
2012	930	84	472	1486
2018	949	124	626	1699 ¹
2019	875	123	648	1646 ²

Clergy Age Trend Report 2019 by the Lewis Center

¹ (+213 since 2012) ² (-53 since 2018)

In 2019, the population of young elders experienced its largest decrease since 2000 and this downward trend continues. In contrast, the number of deacons has been trending up since 2006*. Furthermore, the number of licensed local pastors has been trending up since 1990.

The Young Clergy Initiative is designed to leverage resources and focus broader attention on vocational discernment work across jurisdictions. It is not expected to, in and of itself, “make more young clergy.” The decision to pursue a clerical vocation within the Church is influenced by more variables than can be controlled with any one fund, program, project or resource. YCI has allowed good work to grow, new work to begin, relationships to be strengthened and independent networks to connect.

**Because age trend report numbers are gathered from pension sources, deacon numbers do not reflect deacons employed outside the local church. Actual deacon numbers will be higher than indicated in the age trend report.*

YCI Learnings

The Young Clergy Initiative has been instrumental in uncovering some broad findings that are important as we seek to provide effective vocational discernment opportunities to people of all ages:



1. God is still calling.

We have an elder shortage. We do not have a call shortage.

God is still calling youth and young adults and many are discerning calls to ordained and licensed leadership.

2. Young adults are called to nontraditional settings.

In increasing numbers, young adults are feeling called to ministries of social justice, compassion and community activism. They are expressing calls to ministry settings outside the walls of the local church.

The office of the elder is understood by young adults differently today. Many young adults are feeling called to serve as chaplains, deacons, missionaries or in other ministries outside a local church.

3. It takes time to change a culture.

Changing the way the Church understands and engages around vocational discernment cannot be accomplished in a year or in a few quadrennia. Meaningful change will take a generation and require the old understandings to be usurped by the new. Changes to the ecology of the Church is a long game. In the meantime, we should remain focused and diligent because YCI-related work has great value to individuals, the Church and the world.

4. We must help leaders have vocational discernment conversations.

Not all leaders are gifted in assisting young adults as they listen, discern and respond to God's call. Other leaders understand that the work of discernment is vital to the future of the Church but do not feel confident in having those conversations. The Young Clergy Initiative has created, supported, and shared resources to facilitate those conversations. Vocational discernment resources from our agencies, annual conferences and other organizations are available at www.explorecalling.org/resources.

5. Youth want to be in conversation with other youth about vocational discernment.

Although time with more experienced leaders is important to young adults, they also place a great value on time spent processing their calls with peers. These peer conversations remind young adults they are not alone in this journey, there are others struggling with similar issues and celebrating similar experiences, and they can lean on each other as they discern their calls together. Peer conversations honor the experiences young adults have had in their own discernment and help them develop deep listening skills and empathy that can only come from conversations with people in a similar season of life.

Examples of YCI Projects in Action

Texas State's United Campus Ministry

Supported by the YCI fund, the United Campus Ministry (UCM) helps Texas State students discern God's call to service on behalf of Jesus Christ. UCM gives students a chance to personally experience seminaries and ministry conferences while helping them understand the realities and possibilities of ordained ministry. Participants visited United Methodist-accredited seminaries, attended ministry conferences, and spent time at Perkins School of Theology during Minister's Week.

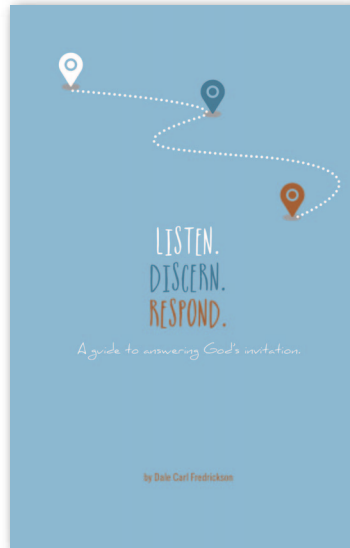
"The YCI project helped our young adults explore new ways of leading the church including music ministry, non-profit causes and global missions. It was beautiful to see young adults strengthen their personal call to ministry while building an encouraging community to support each other in their gifts and graces. The YCI grant was transformative to our ministry culture and student leadership team," Rev. Todd Salmi, Texas State University Campus Ministry project director.



The Discernment Journal

A new guide for answering God's invitation was designed and published by GBHEM in 2019. "Listen. Discern. Respond. A Guide to Answering God's Invitation" is an interactive journal offering more than 80 exercises to help readers sketch, pray, color, sing, scribble, study, ponder, observe, question, dream and uncover what their purpose and call might be. This resource, written and compiled by Rev. Dale Carl Fredrickson, helps readers listen to what God and others are saying, discern the meaning of what they are hearing and respond with faithful next steps.

"In a loud world, people across the globe are finding a quiet whisper through pen and paper. The growing popularity of journaling provides students (and other courageous people) a powerful tool to listen, discern and respond to God's calling. Through carefully written prompts and thought-provoking quotes, journaling challenges people to shut down their screens and listen again to the ancient call of discipleship that transforms the world," writes Fredrickson.



This resource is available at www.explorecalling.org/journal for \$10 while supplies last. All proceeds support the future work of the Young Clergy Initiative.

DiscoverU

DiscoverU, sponsored by YCI, was a week-long shadowing experience for young people ages 15-25 in the West Virginia Annual Conference. It was an idea born from a conversation between passionate young people who wanted to see their peers find their path of ministry.

Participants had the opportunity to follow a ministry leader from a different ministry setting each day – elders, deacons, those who are ordained serving in various areas, laity and others. The young people reported to a group of peers to debrief what they had learned that day and pray together.

"By exposing young people to various forms of ministry, they can better discern what God is calling them to do," said Rev. Shea James, the DiscoverU project director.

Raices Latinas Institute

The Boston University School of Theology organized the Raices Latinas Institute to help Hispanic and Latino/a students better discern God's call to ordained ministry. During its first year, the Institute, with the help of YCI, engaged 48 master's level students and facilitated space to nurture new generations of Latin 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."

The Leading in Transformation Conference

As part of the work of Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century, the Leading in Transformation (LIT) conference establishes a national network of principled African American young adults to help them hear, discern and practice their call to ministry. This annual conference, underwritten by YCI, creates a pipeline of effective leaders to serve within the Church and United Methodist-affiliated Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

"This is an urgent time, not only in predominately African American congregations, but in the body of Christ at large. We must aggressively engage young adults and make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of this world," said Nathalie Nelson Parker, LIT Conference project director.



Project Transformation

Project Transformation (PT) invites young adults discerning a vocational call to ministry to serve with children who are experiencing poverty and are at-risk for lower educational accomplishments. They use a proven model that has been successfully replicated in many other regions of the country. YCI has supported PT's vocational discernment and leadership development at sites in Tennessee, Texas and Georgia. Support has also been provided to the national office to help PT expand into new regions across the country. PT has grown to provide programming for more than 370 young adults and 3,200 children annually in 43 host churches and communities.

See www.explorecalling.org/yici for a complete list and to learn more about Young Clergy Initiative projects.

Systemic Change in Young Clergy Recruitment and Development

Much consideration has been given to using the YCI fund for direct scholarship support and debt relief for candidates and clergy. However, the number of people the fund would be able to directly support was drastically fewer than the number of people who could benefit from the diversity of the project grants that were ultimately provided.

Given the fund's \$7 million per quadrennium allocation, along with the number of seminary graduates and the average accumulated student debt of \$66,000 per student, direct support could assist only 105 of our current young adult candidates and clergy. Even if the YCI awarded \$10,000 grants to individuals, the fund would only be able to assist about 700 people. As a result, the YCI fund supports projects with the most far-reaching and strategic impact.

Matching Support and Additional Funding

GBHEM has encouraged grant recipients to seek project support from sources other than YCI. Grant leaders have secured supplemental funds from sources such as annual conference initiatives, special collections within local churches, theological schools, colleges and universities, districts, endowments and more. In the last two quadrennia, grant recipients raised \$12 million to support their work in addition to YCI funds. By seeking additional funds, projects increased the scope of their work and broadened the impact of YCI grant funds. This makes the fund's impact more than double the General Conference's investment in vocational discernment and young clergy development.

Funding Request

GBHEM requests an additional \$7 million for YCI for the 2021-2024 quadrennium. In the diversity of grants awarded and by encouraging grant recipients to secure additional funding, YCI has been able to more than double the Church's investment in youth and young adults who are discerning a call to ordained ministry. The fund's renewal will enable the Church to continue its investment into the next quadrennium and find new and innovative ways to increase the number of young adult clergy for The United Methodist Church.