

OPEN FORUM

Praise the Lord for Cynthia Belt and those like her (“New Beginnings” in March/April.) [However] I just finished the article by Lillian Smith (“New Agency Empowers the Young as Disciples.”)

1) It doesn't live up to its title. It sounds like more “programs.”

2) What makes us think that the people who were/are in charge as the young people were/are leaving the church are smart enough to bring them back?

3) What happened to “Making Disciples for Jesus Christ”? That should drive everything we do, at every level of the church—Local church, District and Conference.

4) Spiritual formation experiences—what does that mean?

5) Young Adult Summit, see item #2.

6) Workshop to create liturgies for worship: young people don't want liturgies, they want worship.

7) Grants with cutoff dates—Why cutoff dates?

8) Webcasts, more meetings that accomplish nothing, like SS contests and revivals that when they are over we return to “business as usual.”

9) Leadership development training, see item #2

10) Global Young People's Convocation, more meetings, see item #8

All this reminds me of our “outreach.” All of it says, “We have these things going on at our church, come and see us.” We, the church, need to get out into our community and establish relationships with the folks in our communities. When are the “leaders” in their ivory towers going to get out in the field and help us by showing us instead of sitting in the office coming up with all these ideas that have never been tried and in all likelihood won't work.

The world is going to hell and all we can do is come up with more programs.

Larry W. Noff

Fishersville, Virginia

I am one of the “disappearing” young elders of the UMC, now 31 and ordained in 2005.

From my perspective, the length of time it takes to be ordained and the bureaucratic complexity of candidacy are major hindrances to young people who feel called to vocational ministry, choosing the UMC to pursue this call. The 2004 *Discipline* has shortened the process a bit, but when I went through under the 2000 *Discipline*, the absolute lowest age a person could be ordained elder was 28 (high school grad at 18, four years of college, three years of seminary, three years probationer). In 1985, a candidate could be ordained deacon while in seminary and elder upon graduation, at age 25.

People of my generation are feeling called to ministry, but they do not have the institutional loyalty and identity of former generations of clergy. Many young clergy just jump ship to independent churches rather than labor for a decade to be ordained.

The itineracy itself is counter-intuitive to the lack of commitment that defines my generation. Many young adults live with their parents into their thirties and don't get married until their forties, if at all. The itineracy asks young people to give up the choice of where they will live and work and serve for the rest of their lives. In a mostly rural Conference like mine, this usually means that they will labor in isolation in small parishes full of congregants older than their grandparents. Young clergy also see the best appointments go to the best connected and those who have “paid their dues.” They realize that they will likely have little chance for dynamic ministry for a couple decades. When youth pastors of large churches in our region can easily make \$100,000 a year, it's easy to see why the old way seems

less appealing all the time.

The young clergy that I know see these trends and serve in the system anyway, because we feel called to a life that takes up the cross. But to my mind there's no mystery why young elders in the UMC are disappearing.

Nathan Attwood

Montgomery, Alabama

I resonate with Susan Cox-Johnson's description of Westport in Kansas City as “vintage clothing stores, art galleries, and coffeehouses,” but would add Old Westport's notoriety as a jumping-off place for the Sante Fe and Oregon Trails, later a battle site during the Civil War, and today an entertainment venue for young throngs that come for the dining, the drinking, the Blues, and perhaps the debauchery. As I heard one Westport jazz musician entreat, “The more you drink, they better we sound; pour more liquor!”

The established church surely has a mission “to build a new porch” in such environs, but it must be incarnational and not about saving “old Broadway Church.” Even as we become deft at emergent church conversation, beware the sub-tuning of that same old institutional cupidity, the goal of saving our properties through re-invention of ourselves.

Gary Starkey

Yakima, Washington

I was excited to see that *Circuit Rider* was tackling the issues of young adult clergy folks. I'm a twenty-five-year-old probationer, younger than any of the folks that were quoted in the “Young Clergy Speak” article. And based on the Lewis Center for Church Leadership website, if I get ordained in 2008, as I hope to be, I will be the only elder under thirty in my conference. I heard the call for young adult pastors throughout the issue, but I didn't find what I was looking for. As a young clergyperson, what I need is support for me as a young adult in ministry. Our church cannot say we need young clergypeople and not be ready for us when we respond to God's call in our lives. We need support systems in place in our districts and conferences to help us along the path we're on, especially if we feel we're alone on it.

An equally important call to our church is missing from this March/April 2006 issue. We don't just need more young clergy for numbers, we need support and sustenance

for our young clergy so we can bring all the gifts and talents we have into a church who truly is ready for us, our ideas, and our energy. We need support inside our denomination that will help us avoid the burnout that Amanda Stein voiced in the article.

Only when pastors are sustained can we truly move our church in the ways God has empowered us to. If young adult congregants (or church seekers) see young pastors cared for and prioritized, won't they feel like a priority in the denomination, too?

Thanks for the article and for the focus of the *Circuit Rider*, I hope to see something else in a future issue that offers what I am truly seeking as a young adult pastor. What a resource that would be!

Emily A. Peck-McClain
New York, New York

WOW! What an amazing issue on Emerging Leaders! Why has this issue taken you so long? I am a thirty-six-year old ordained elder who has been growingly frustrated with the institutional egotism of the church that forces young pastors into a mold of chaplaincy to club members who have little interest in financing and doing mission to the unchurched or changing languages to reach the current and future generations.

You wonder why there are decreasing numbers of Methodist elders under age thirty-five? We long to use our energy and talent to give birth to new churches like Adam Hamilton's that are vital centers of evangelism; social justice ministries in the local community like Erwin McManus's church (Mosaic).

I believe that success is measured in how many ministry initiatives we are starting in the streets, how many conversations we are having with pre-Christians, how many volunteers we are releasing into local and global mission projects aimed at community transformation, how many different populations we are starting to reach, how many ethnic groups we are reaching or are using our facilities, how many generational or ethnic languages we worship in each week, how many "outside" groups use our facilities, how many church activities target people who aren't here yet, how many hours per week members spend in ministry where they work, go to school, and get the mail or a cup of coffee.

Lovett Weems was right—the real issue is the quality and vitality of the church

itself, yet I still love my United Methodist Church and hope to serve it for a lifetime, not as an institutional chaplain, but as a missionary to a changing culture.

Will Hoyle
Nashville, North Carolina

The statistics for young people coming into the ministry is telling. (March/April) What young person who essentially believes that the earth is round, sexual orientation isn't a choice, and the Bible is culturally influenced is going to go through the hell of a Bible-idolizing church? The local church does not want to hear that God is doing a new thing so much as indoctrinate their traditions, the quadrilateral notwithstanding. The issue IS biblical integrity and those who would use it, not to proclaim justice and mercy, but anthropological supremacy. Just as the ancient worldview is not our worldview, we ought to also be suspicious of its advocacy of beating children and trading in human slavery. Otherwise, let not women speak in church. When the Bible we love is being used to foster hatred of a person's God-given identity and to pervert loving and intimate relationships then we can say good-bye to our young people.

(name withheld at request of writer)

I continue to be fascinated by all the concern over the rising age of United Methodist clergy and the "need" to recruit young people to ordained ministry, particularly "elder." Does not the UM Church continue to have more active "elders" than they have available elder appointment churches?

Is there any data that suggests younger pastors are more "effective" than older pastors?

Any data that suggests the UM church will have churches or positions for all these new "elders" we want to recruit?

Does not God do the "calling" and the church does the "confirming" in UM theology? Do we know more than God about what God's people, the church needs?

I have been hearing about a coming shortage of UM pastors (now elders) since I was in seminary in the mid 1970s; it has not happened yet. Is there any more reliable data that suggests it will actually happen? (No, because church leadership needs are changing and the data that suggests we need younger clergy assumes an old paradigm of church leadership that is changing—see below.)

Have not church leadership needs changed to where we now need more "specialists" in ministry than "classically trained elders" especially in a large membership churches? (Yes, churches are hiring Christian educators, youth ministers, church musicians, worship designers, web masters, communication specialists who **may or may not** be elders with a seminary education but who must be able to demonstrate a competency in the specialized form of ministry they are being hired for **and** churches are getting rid of "appointed, classically-educated associate pastors.")

Are not small membership churches being priced out of having an "elder" by salary standards? (In some economically depressed counties the minimum salary level (with benefits) for a United Methodist pastor makes the clergy serving the local UM church part of the elite economically in that county (read "rich"). I believe Wesley would be incensed at the advantageous economic situation of most UM elders, even as we elders are incensed about our low economic status.

Ed Trimmer
Pfeiffer University, North Carolina

The UMC won't attract young clergy with the present candidacy system. My experience with candidacy in a Midwest conference is that the process is full of red tape, obstacles, and pointless delays and is legalistic, unfair, sexist, and abusive.

My interviews with dCOM and BOOM were stressful inquisitions that left me physically and emotionally drained. Every answer I gave was twisted around and ridiculed. The committee didn't support me, but fished around to find something "wrong."

After serving as a local pastor I was denied probationary membership and the BOOM committee didn't care that its decision left me heartbroken, angry, and in tears. I received no pastoral care and no exit counseling.

After serving three more years as a part-time lay pastor to a small church, I reapplied. Not only was I denied a second time, but told I could never reapply, ever.

Other clergy told me that this BOOM selected candidates "like them." The conference wasn't interested in passionate clergy, but in finding male fishing buddies.

I moved to another conference and tried for candidacy again. This conference dismissed my four years of pastoral service

and expected me to jump through an insane number of hoops (why do I need seventeen letters of recommendation?), retake all the tests, wait two years, and restart the process from the beginning. If there's a clergy shortage, it's because dCOMs and BOOMs drive away the best and brightest candidates.

Sally Carpenter

Moorpark, California

I read the articles about the need for and recruitment of younger clergy with amazement and scepticism. My under-thirty daughter, after graduating from seminary at the top of her class, has been trying for the last two years to become a candidate and be appointed in her home conference.

What she has consistently experienced is difficulty in getting responses from her district superintendent and confused and inadequate communication that has caused her more than one delay in her process. When she interviewed with the District Board of the Ministry she came away with the feeling that some of the participants were out to give her a hard time because she's young and a woman. She has had to deal with a system which says, "Wait till the last minute to see if we have anything for you, and if we don't, tough. Go find another job and talk to us next year."

Twice she has been contacted by senior pastors who were looking for associates and had been told by district superintendents to look for someone, and had initial interviews with them. And twice shortly before a second interview she has been contacted by those pastors to say that their superintendents have told them they have other plans for that church and to cancel her interviews.

Until we deal with a system that treats entering people more like problems than gifts we will continue to see a decline in younger clergy. Nobody deserves this kind of treatment. I've been a United Methodist pastor for over thirty years, as has my wife; we're both disgusted with our church over this. I've advised my daughter to make contact with the United Church of Christ.

Rick Miller

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

MORE LETTERS

To read more letters responding to the March/April issue of *Circuit Rider*, go to www.circuitrider.com. In the May/June issue, select Open Forum.

CIRCUIT RIDER

Reviews

CIRCUIT RIDER Reviews is a service to our readers. In each issue, 6 to 10 books, selected by Book Review Editor Kenneth Carter, are reviewed by several of your clergy colleagues. Listed below are the titles of books reviewed in the May/June 2006 issue (**electronic edition only**).

To find the reviews, go to:
www.circuitrider.com

Included with each review is a link to Cokesbury.com where you can buy most books at a **special 30% discount** off the suggested retail price **until June 15, 2006**. Books reviewed in future issues will also be offered at the special discount for a limited time following first publication.

Books reviewed in this issue:

Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading by Eugene Peterson

How Great a Flame! Contemporary Lessons from the Wesleyan Revival by James Logan

Let Every Soul Be Jesus' Guest: A Theology of the Open Table by Mark Stamm

Mrs. Hunter's Happy Death: Lessons on Living from People Preparing to Die by John Fanestil

Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry by Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger

Proclamation and Theology by William Willimon

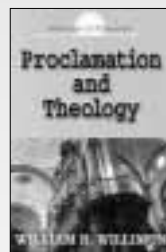
The Truce of God by Rowan Williams



Book Review Editor

Kenneth H. Carter Jr. is pastor of Providence United Methodist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. He is the author of *A Way of Life in the World:*

***Spiritual Practices for United Methodists* (Abingdon Press, 2004).**



E-mail any comments to Managing Editor Jill Reddig: jreddig@umpublishing.org.

CIRCUIT RIDER MAGAZINE www.circuitrider.com

The article in the March-April issue of *Circuit Rider* by Lovett Weems, highlighting the aging of United Methodist clergy and calling attention to a decline in the number of younger clergy, prompts me to comment on my experience and observations over my 40 plus years in the pastorate. Apparently there is great concern among our denominational leaders over this matter. I have also noticed that Dr. Weems has been quoted on this same matter in other publications, including the *United Methodist Reporter* and *The Christian Century*.

I began my ministry in 1963 as a college student involved in the Wesley Foundation at Indiana University. I and a team of other students, drawn together by the District Superintendent, provided pastoral care and worship leadership for a small congregation which could not afford a pastor. It was a service for the church and a testing ground for the students. Most of us sharpened our call to the ministry through the experience.

The following year, my senior year in college, that same DS appointed me as a "student supply" to a three-point charge. My new wife and I moved into the parsonage, and we commuted to college daily. In our district several other students also served as pastors, one even served a four-point charge. This was a common practice, not only in our conference, but across the church in that era. Young men (this was a few years before the growth of women in ministry), tested their calls to ministry, gained valuable experience, and provided a huge service to small congregations which would have otherwise not had pastors.

In 1965 I entered seminary. Once again I was appointed as a "student supply" to a small congregation 30 miles from campus. My wife, baby, and I lived in the parsonage, and I commuted daily with two other students, also serving in nearby congregations. Probably half of the students at my seminary also served churches. I graduated three years later in 1968. Today many students spend four or even five years in seminary.

In those days the *Discipline* required two years of service under the supervision of a DS for ordination. I graduated from seminary one week, was ordained elder the following week, and moved to my first full-time charge the following week. I had just passed my 26th birthday.

Today, the candidacy process requires a

minimum of three years full time service after graduation from seminary. I have served as a candidacy mentor for nearly 30 years and fully believe in the value of our candidacy program. However, we have made it so difficult to get into the ministry, and we have extended the process over such a long period of time, is it any wonder that we have so few young clergy?

William Kaster
Indiana

Rev. David Wilson makes a sound case for culture and tradition's being part of the worship and religious experience for young Native Americans; his arguments are most likely true for all ethnic groups that still have identifiable culture and traditions.

Dallas has the only Native American UMC in the state of Texas, yet Houston is listed as having the fourth largest population of Native Americans in the US [45,000 reported in 2005 by Houston Native American Chamber of Commerce]. We would hope they are in a church somewhere—but what if they aren't? What if young people are looking for a church where, as Rev. Wilson outlined, they are included in activities such as taking the offering, where someone intentionally identifies their leadership qualities, where they are mentored by an elder, where they are comfortable worshipping God and developing a relationship with Jesus, and where they get all of this wrapped in their culture and traditions?

In a racially-mixed environment, however, Native American youth are usually not singled out to participate in any of the above because they are quiet and appear not to need or want any attention or guidance.

Our Conference Committee on Native American Ministry [CONAM] is preparing for its second annual Christian, ecumenical, competition powwow to honor children and youth. We want to be "a ministry of presence" among Native people. Christian churches are encouraged to bring literature inviting Natives and non-Natives to their churches for all of the things listed in Rev. Wilson's article. But after reading that article again, maybe we need to consider establishing

another church based on Christian precepts in the Native American tradition. It's something to think about.

Glenna Kyker Brayton, PhD, Chair
Texas Conference Committee on
Native American Ministry

A response to the article, "Young Clergy Speak." I entered into candidacy for ordained ministry within the United Methodist Church when I was seventeen years old. This June I will be ordained an Elder in Full Connection within the Florida Conference. I am now thirty. It has been a long journey from there to here.

I have been under full time appointment, either as a local pastor or probationary elder, for the past six years and have experienced much of the same emotions as those quoted in this past issue.

However, reading the article "Young Clergy Speak" by Ann Michel evoked a new emotion in me, fear.

I am afraid for the future of our denomination when I read the sentiments in this article. If the quotes in this article are indicative of the positions of young clergy, we are headed for trouble.

First and foremost, there seems to be a false dichotomy here. The idea put forth is that young people like to be stimulated and challenged and old people like to be bored to death. It was not stated in those terms, but that is the idea that came across. Old people want to come to church because they are supposed to do so, and want to have the same leadership doing the same things they have always done for the past forty years; whereas young people want to be on the front lines ministering to people, get challenged in their beliefs, and have an environment where they can explore a relationship with God more fully. This idea is ridiculous. Older people want to have a vibrant faith and experience energy and dynamism in church just as much as younger people, however because many older people are not comfortable with bands in church, this is seen as a rejection of anything that does not resemble boring, dull church from 1953.

Second, several of the younger clergy interviewed said they thought the denomination was looking to them to save it. That is very dangerous. Jesus Christ is the only savior of the Church, and even he enlisted coworkers. For someone to feel

the weight of needing to "save the church" to the extreme that this pastor is sitting on five different committees simply because this person is under 35 is not healthy. This is the same enabling sin that has put our denomination in the position it is today. "Give the job to the pastor. I don't want to do it." We pastors took those jobs, enabled the denomination to become *laissez-faire*, and have been trying to mobilize the laity ever since.

Third, there was an attitude in this article that the future will be better than the present because in the future all the old people, who do not understand new and inventive ministries designed to reach out to young people, will be dead (or at least incapacitated enough that they will not be able to raise any objections). If we are called to be pastors within the United Methodist Church, we are called to minister to the congregants we have, as well as those who are not yet here. The older people in our churches deserve our ministry just as much as the young. Each one of us must go through a lengthy process towards ordination and by that time, we are all well aware of who this denomination is we are endeavoring to join. We are given ample time to reconsider and join another tradition or become independent. Each of us is here because we see something of worth in the United Methodist Church today. We must never lose sight of that fact.

The reality is that young clergy limit themselves. John Wesley was 35 years old when he had his Aldersgate experience. When the established Church did not understand, or even condone, his ministry he simply created new structures parallel to that Church. Francis Asbury was overwhelmingly elected to be the General Assistant for the Methodist societies in America during the Revolutionary War mainly because he was the most senior of the itinerant preachers at age 33.

Yet all too often I hear clergy my age want to blame everyone and anyone they can for the lack of people our age in the Church. There may have been systemic sin that kept our parents out of Church, which in turn has kept our generation out of Church, but God is all about overcoming sin. We younger clergy must evidence the power and grace of God in our lives before the message or ministry becomes attractive to others around us. We are not peddling some self-help program or a new group in town to gush over and "talk

openly." We are not here to entertain people. Hollywood can do that much better. We are not here to feed people Krispy Kreme and Starbucks. They can go to those stores and get the goods fresh. We are offering the very power of God to redeem and transform lives. Yes, we need to find new ways to convey this truth, but it must be, before all else, evident in the one doing the presenting. Are we growing in grace and power? Are we pressing on toward perfection? This is a continual process, and my generation, with its instant gratification complex, seriously dislikes anything that may take time. But we need to get over it.

John Wesley said in 1786, "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this will undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out." If we want our denomination to regain the power it once had, it is up to us, as clergy, to hold fast the doctrine, spirit and discipline.

We can only lead where we have already been. Otherwise we are simply the blind leading the blind where we do not know the way.

To the young clergy I would say this: God has called you with your gifts and your passions. God has not called you to emulate someone else. God has called you to be you. There is ministry which you are uniquely qualified to lead. If you are convinced of your call, and you are convinced of the ministry you wish to lead, do it. If the church you are serving does not understand, explain it to them.

If they still do not understand, do it anyway. We must serve God first. If the young people in your community do not feel they have to be in church Sunday mornings, but the older ones do, have your Sunday morning services and then go meet the younger people to minister to them some other time. If you are ministering in the power and presence of the Living God, lives will be changed and the congregation will recognize that fact.

To the churches that would try to limit younger clergy I would say this: Watch out. If these clergy have been called by God, and the ministries they are wanting to institute are leading new people to God, you may find yourselves fighting

against God. And that is a very dangerous place to be. Francis Asbury once said, "I fear religion is extinguished by confining it too much to church and Sunday service and reading of sermons." Those words are as true today as they were in 1791 when he wrote them down.

If the denomination is not ready for a fresh work of God, perhaps it is time for it to die. Yet I believe that God is not done with the United Methodist Church. Of all the denominations today, we are singularly gifted to speak to new generations because we have the one word in our theological heritage that make us stand out: *and*. Justification *and* Sanctification. Faith *and* Works. Nurture *and* Mission. Individual *and* Communal. We bridge the gap on so many issues within the theological spectrum that we were designed to reach out to the broadest number of people in society, young and old.

The younger members of our churches need the older members for theological instruction and training. The older members need the younger ones for life and vitality. To set one against the other is a dangerous precedent, and that is a road down which I am not comfortable walking.

Steven Bruns

Marathon, Florida

In response to the recent issue on "Emerging Leaders, I offer the following "Parable for the Church." There once was a civil engineer whose training was from the best of programs and whose experience in his profession had honed his skills of analysis and insight. It happened one day that he observed the construction of a new bridge across a river near his home. [The company was well publicized in the national media and much in demand.] However, the engineer noticed that the foundations for the bridge were not footed upon bedrock and that, sooner or later, the bridge would collapse. Apparently, the job had been a response to speed of action, and the firm had not taken time to consult the geologists.

When the engineer warned that the bridge would eventually collapse, the responses were loud and strong: "The bridge has made our daily commute so easy. We don't have to take the long way now." "Just look at the number of people that use the bridge." "Our Sirius recep-

tion on the bridge is so good; No tunnels to interfere; Our music just booms out.” “People use this bridge who never crossed this river before.” Our children refuse to use the old routes.” “The people at the construction company are young; they are of our generation, so they must know what they are doing.” “The bridge has been so well publicized, even in professional journals.” And the older folk, those who should know better, said, “Perhaps we should give the younger construction people their day. Let’s look to the future, for a change, and not to the past.” The cynics simply said what some of the rest may have felt, “Perhaps it won’t collapse in our lifetimes.” And the engineer could not convince them of their folly, so he muttered, “Oh Jerusalem.”

There once was a church. . . .

Maurice Luker

Virginia Conference
Professor of Religion Emeritus
Emory & Henry College

I am a retired female Elder, Northern Ill Conference, & have served in rural churches in Iowa & Illinois. Your March/April issue featuring the young as opposed to the old, especially in smaller rural churches, did mention the need for “change.” But, in my experience, until older folks accept the fact that programming absolutely HAS to change & trim down in terms of committee meetings & expectations, NOTHING will change. Examples; Realize that there are few if any more stay-at-home moms, so women, who were once the volunteer backbone of most small churches, are now on their own professional racetrack. Also...kids are busier than ever, in sports, band, drama, music. Church is vital of course, but this is the 21st century! I speak from experience...as mom of 6, wife of Presbyterian clergy/college professor, and again, as retired UM Elder! SO...old folks...quit the gritchin in the kitchen! Remember that Jesus Christ our Lord ushered in radical change...so did John Wesley!

Laura Lee Odegard

Waukon, Iowa

The term church “elder” has been quizzical from the first. I remember the day in my late twenties when I was dubbed elder I half expected age spots by morning.

Now comes the March/April 2006 issue of *Circuit Rider* largely devoted to the dwindling supply of “younger elders” in the United Methodist Church. We learn the church is going through something akin to porphyria, premature clergy aging. “We are an aging church,” the writers intone.

“Aging,” said George Burns, “is something you do only if you are fortunate.”

For some, “elder” has become a matter of stole catalogs, grape juice and pecking order. But when the church was young, with due regards to the John Marks, Timothys and Tituses “elder” meant like, you know... old. People capable of second thoughts and knowing better.

Volumes have questioned whether “elder” meant a rank or a function in the New Testament. The tale is told of the backwoods preacher who asked his counterpart, “Does you believe in baptism by emersion?” “course I does,” said the other, “I’s seen it done!”

Empirical answers always bump theoretical questions sideways and the voice most needed in the midst of youthful strategizing is “I’s seen it done—and here’s what came of it.”

Documented experience and practical memory form a large part of Wesley’s Quadrilateral enlargement on the scripture. Elder elders. It is a youthful trait of some pastors and parishioners to confuse impractical idealism with “spirituality” and even mysticism. Sometimes it is better that the Word become flesh complete with wrinkles.

As a college professor, I have spent my Sundays in everybody else’s pulpit or sitting back in the cheap seats of many churches. “I has seen it done”—pastoring so bizarre as to make me suspect my own sanity, which, after all, suggests some humility on my part.

I have sat under preachers with weak sound systems who insisted on making sermon arabesques wide of the mike, or who would attach their clip-on some three chins too low to be heard. More often, I have heard pastors who, to emphasize a point or a conclusion, would whisper it, for effect. No effect.

When I’ve later asked them if, while shaking hands with their aging church, it

has ever occurred to them to count the hearing aids, the typical response has been, “No. Why?”

Add to that the ones mimicking TV preachers making apoplectic house calls on the main floor during the sermon, who are thereby invisible past the fifth pew unless the floor is canted like Mars Hill. And when I’ve mentioned it that way not infrequently the response has been, “Mars Hill?” Encounters like that give me whiplash.

All my references here to wrinkles and hearing aids make this sound like a patristic epistle from a nursing home, which might suggest dismissing it out of hand—to a younger elder. Yes, the Seventies are still with us: “Trust no one over thirty.” Add to that the fact that I demonstrate here how elders can be a pain in the lower neck. But while I’m still in stable condition, I felt that one of us had to say something.

The Bible admonishes us to consult with the elder. It’s worked for the Jews a long time.

For many of us retirement is a frightening metamorphosis, especially if our ministry was a passion more than a pension plan. We have in the churches elder clergy and laity so competent that if they were not volunteers we couldn’t afford them. And though people past their prime can be a liability, some of them, refurbished by Geritol, bionic joints and bypasses, have time, precious time.

But, if your church is like the ones that give me whiplash, the over-sixties are subtly removed or bypassed for accountable committee functions. “I’s seen it done.”

For years I taught an advanced theology course in the Lay Minister program of our Conference. Many of my students were retired from awesome vocations, this being a second career. To me, these became the strongest argument against the seminary route I’d ever seen, and to date, none has let me down. True, when we would discuss church life they could be exasperatingly diplomatic (What are meetings for?) but no hierarchical council I have ever known made more sense. I’d like to invite younger clergy. I doubt they’ll invite us.

George LaMore

Emeritus Professor of Religion and Philosophy
Iowa Wesleyan College