

Cultivating the Call

A TEXAS ANNUAL CONFERENCE MAGAZINE FOR THE EMERGING LEADERS ENDOWMENT

Summer 2021



Advancing Pastoral Leadership creates a space for young pastors to flourish, helping them grow as leaders.

Illuminating the Path

Endowment supports young leaders' paths to ministry

For a young person, the path to ministry can often seem too complicated, cost prohibitive or filled with uncertainty. The Texas Annual Conference is working to eliminate the barriers that could stand in the way of talented future ministers, as well as newly ordained pastors who want to reach their full potential.

The Conference's Emerging Leaders Initiative illuminates the path forward and paves the way for success. Created in 2009, the Endowment

was set up to support four innovative programs: the Texas Youth Academy, College Pastoral Internship Program, Ambassador's Grants and Advancing Pastoral Leadership.

“We often hear stories of how younger people are no longer going to church and about how congregations are aging. It might seem like the best and brightest minds are going off to other careers and not even considering ministry as a viable profession. Take heart. God is still calling. He has a plan to use our best and brightest young minds for the transformation of the world.”

Combined, these initiatives create the infrastructure for young leaders to thrive, encouraging them to pursue and excel in a pastoral future.

“I am proud that the Texas Annual Conference has four programs in place to allow young people at every stage of vocational development to discern their call,” said Bishop Scott J. Jones.

The Texas Annual Conference is committed to cultivating vibrant, growing congregations, transforming both clergy and lay leaders, and investing in the young. The Emerging Leaders Endowment reflects that vision.



Texas Youth Academy is designed to encourage young adults still in high school to embark on a journey to ministry.



The two week program, modeled after the highly acclaimed Duke University Youth Academy, offers classes in theology on a college campus.

This summer, 15 participants gathered at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University for the academy. Katy resident Marcus Flory attended and said that days were spent in worship, prayer and discipleship. Afternoons were often dedicated to local service projects.

Students work alongside distinguished professors and noted clergy to learn Wesleyan theology, as well as fundamentals to Christianity. "It was nice to get a better understanding of the core principles of what we believe," Flory said.

James Teekell, an incoming junior in high school, also attended the 2021 session. His favorite part of the program was planning a worship service. "It helped me get to know the Holy Spirit a lot better," Teekell said.

He suggests that others interesting in growing in their faith apply for the TYA. "It's an incredible experience," he said. "You meet so many amazing people, and it just helps you go such much more in depth with the Bible."

Participants are often already active youth leaders in their congregation and come recommended by their pastors. They form a community with one another. Together, they learn, serve and discern God's unique call.

The College Pastoral Internship Program offers university students, ages 19-24, a unique opportunity to become immersed in the daily life of a congregation for 10 weeks. While serving the church, participants also explore the possibility that God is calling them to be pastors.



This summer, CPIP grew to include students interested in various ministries, as well as general pastoral calling. Of the six youth enrolled, two were former TYA participants.

Caleb Evans, who attends Texas A&M University, served Livingston FUMC through CPIP. After graduating, he plans to go to seminary. CPIP allowed him the chance to explore youth ministry, attend church meetings, lead Bible studies and gain insight into church finances and operations.

"You definitely find out where you can be the most effective in ministry," he said. "You get your feet wet in church life. If

you're feeling called, this is a great way to get experience in all categories."

Recent Texas A&M graduate Alex Howell served Jacksonville FUMC as a CPIP participant.

Howell first heard his call while still a freshman in high school. "CPIP has given me greater insight into what it means to be a pastor within the UMC, and the experience to better discern my calling into ministry," he said.

The program was expanded recently to include the fall and spring semesters for churches located near college campuses. CPIP 2.0 will fully fund 10 students for part-time internships. This will benefit both participating colleges and churches, as they build relationships and fulfill the career aspirations of students interested in ministry.

Out of the 128 College Pastoral Interns who have participated, **52** have continued in Texas Annual Conference ministry in some capacity.



And **27** of those interns have been commissioned or ordained in the Texas Annual Conference.

Ambassadors' Grants help promising young pastors repay debt incurred at seminary. Awards are given to gifted young clergy entering the Texas Annual Conference and are paid out over the pastor's first five years of service.

Jordan Czichos is this year's recipient of the funding. A graduate of Duke Divinity School and recently commissioned provisional elder, she is appointed to serve the FUMC in Houston as Associate Pastor.

Czichos is grateful for the award. "It is a tremendous blessing to have this

fiscal support, so that I could receive a wonderful seminary education," she said. "I appreciate the constant support I have received as a young person in ministry with the Texas Annual Conference. Thank you for all of your gifts because they are helping support and shape the lives of young ministers like me."



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Participants also find a family of other clergy to support them along the way. This transformational experience is reserved for individuals who demonstrate the highest commitment to future leadership.

The 10th session of the program began in May 2021 with 20 pastors. The clergy will gather for eight retreats over the next two years and then attend annual follow up sessions for another three years.

The Rev. Patricia Lund, Pastor at Centerville UMC, is among the young leaders who enrolled this year. Originally from Hearne, Texas, her call to ministry came in the midst of her undergraduate studies at Blinn College. Initially, she enrolled in accounting courses but later fell in love with a youth ministry she started at her home church.

"I realized that accounting was not for me, and around that time, I found out that there was the College Pastoral Internship Program," Lund said. "I applied, and it quickly became a snowball effect, being called to ordained ministry. It's just been affirmed since then, and I've been able to grow

in that role ever since."

Lund's mentors recommended that she sign up for Advancing Pastoral Leadership. "Those people who have been influential in my time in ministry have been in APL," Lund said. "They talk about how great it is and how much you grow from it."

Lund is ready for the challenge. "It can't hurt to get better as a pastor, because it can only help my congregation and wherever I will serve in the future," she said.

In the program, Lund explained pastors are encouraged to learn about themselves as leaders, instead of emulating others. She hopes to also apply these lessons to empower her congregation. "I want to influence my lay people to be who they are right now and know that God is calling them as who they are," she said.

The Rev. Chris Waks, Associate Pastor at Moody Memorial UMC in Galveston, is also enrolled in APL. "The running joke among pastors is that there are all those things you don't learn in seminary," he said with a smile. "You learn theology, which is great, but then you have to write a budget."

APL provides a balance, delving into practical skills from a theological perspective. Since participants have already begun their careers as pastors, the pragmatic lessons have even greater significance, Waks said.

He has already learned about his strengths and weaknesses as a leader. The curriculum has also provided insight into creating a mission, developing values, strategic planning, conducting demographic surveys, intaking data, forming concrete plans and learning to evaluate church programs.

APL has been a guiding force as Waks hones and shapes his ministerial skills. "Even just two sessions in, it's helped me," he said. "It's been really valuable. As a pastor, I'm super appreciative of programs like this."



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Take heart. God is still calling.



We often hear stories of how younger people are no longer going to church and about how congregations are aging. It might seem like the best and brightest minds are going off to other careers and not even considering ministry as a viable profession.

Take heart. God is still calling. He has a plan to use our best and brightest young minds for the transformation of the world.

I often hear young pastors tell me of the spark of their journey into ministry starting early. They might have been still in high school when they first began to realize their career would center on church. Or they might have been in college when their plans suddenly shifted, after hearing God's call.

The problem arises when obstacles stand in way of taking their next steps. Perhaps seminary seems too expensive or the fundamentals of ministry too illusive.

Answering a call to ministry should not be cost prohibitive. Diving into Wesleyan theology should be accessible. Learning the practical side of ministry should be a straightforward journey for interested students.

That is why, at the Texas Annual Conference, we have

created an infrastructure for discernment and pastoral development. In 2009, we launched our Emerging Leaders Endowment. That initiative produced four unique programs, which are designed for young people at any stage of their development to both hear and follow their call.

The process begins in high school, continues through college and seminary, and then provides young pastors opportunities for leadership development. We are developing the next generation of leaders.

Still, our work has only just begun. We must continue to evolve, advance and retain young, dynamic clergy. We need them ready to step in for retiring pastors and also to enliven our congregations with new ideas, fresh eyes and an energetic spirit.

Thank you for your continued support of the Emerging Leaders Endowment. Your help and support makes it possible for the Texas Annual Conference to respond in meaningful ways when young people discern a calling. Together, we secure a brighter future for our Church.

Grace & Peace,

Scott J. Jones, Bishop, Texas Annual Conference