

Calling Conversation: Calling and Teaching New Leaders

Excerpt from "Called and Sent Out"

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As to what caused that proliferation of future ministers [*which she had seen in churches she'd been a part of*], I have a few theories. First, churches that are fortunate enough to help train ministers through seminary internship programs have a leg up. They are constantly sending the message to their members that God calls a rich variety of people to the ministry. Rather than present one model of pastoral ministry week after week—or perhaps a few models if the staff is large—churches with a stream of interns in all their quirky eccentricity remind us of the wideness of God's mercy, and present the delightfully disturbing idea that any one of us could be called to this work.

Second, members of a calling church recognize one another's gifts in all areas. They have the nerve to point out, and to nurture in one another, that particular set of qualities that may lead someone to seminary. In sales terms, calling churches have the courage and the vocabulary to ask for the business and to close the deal.

Third, calling churches house happy ministers. Is it too simple to say that when we look like we're having fun, other people want to join in? A minister who obviously enjoys the call, who is treated lovingly by the church and who seems to live a satisfying life, helps create a climate of calling. And conversely, churches in which the minister is not respected, or which tolerate ministers who do not respect themselves and the church, are not likely to produce future leaders—or will produce leaders in their own image. Can a church like that still produce gifted leaders? As surely as good things can come out of Nazareth. But still, churches and ministers who are enjoying ministry have a powerful witness.

The local church is the place where disciples are nurtured, called and sent out. Some of those Christ followers are sent to sojourn in the strange land of seminary, and then into the leadership of churches. When those leaders are asked to reflect upon their theological formation, I hope they recall their first teachers, the ones who, long before any class in practical theology, sat them down and said, "You have the gifts for ministry." Perhaps it happened on a confirmation retreat at the campfire. Perhaps it happened over coffee, after a long and difficult deacons meeting. Perhaps it happened on the way home from a mission trip. Perhaps it happened after someone read the scripture in church beautifully, or painted the church basement patiently. At some point, someone in the body of Christ called another forward.

Questions for Conversation:

Think of someone who has been called into ministry from our congregation. How did FCC nurture him or her?

Can you identify anyone currently in our congregation who has gifts for ministry or church leadership?

What would our congregation gain by becoming a “teaching congregation” in which we hosted interns who are considering ministry? What would we need to give in order to do so?

What gifts does the congregation have that makes us able to identify and nurture new church leaders?

What are some “next steps” we might take to continue exploring this calling?