

Congratulations! You have heard God's call, and like Isaiah (6:8), you have said, "Send me!" You and the church have reason to celebrate because following God's call is a joy!

This time of excitement is also a time of conflicting emotions. You are not alone; you can count on help from many, including your home church and Committee on Preparation for Ministry. They can help you keep perspective so that you keep in mind not only the joy of pastoral ministry, but also the reality.

Here's a reality checklist:

Lifestyle reality

Your call may mean a drastic change in your life. If you grew up in a big city, you may be called to serve in a small town, or vice versa. Or you may be called from a monocultural environment to a multicultural context, or vice versa. Your call may force you to re-examine your relationships with others. One reality of a call to ordained ministry is that the values we hold in esteem in the church are often at odds with the values of the culture around us.

Your call may mean a small salary, and economic reality may force some hard questions. Seminary student debt is a serious problem. The average debt for Master of Divinity borrowers in 2001 was more than \$25,000, compared with about \$7,000 in 1991.

Still, though there may be small financial reward and you may have to live simply, there is a greater reward. Ask yourself: Where are my riches?

Status reality

Paul wrote, Whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ (Philippians 3:7). Your call may mean "losing" some things: a sense of entitlement; a vision of power and honor; an expectation that the church exists to serve or rescue you. On the other hand, for some women and racial ethnic persons struggling with being accepted as fully participating members of the church, a call to ministry may not be a story of loss; it may be a story of gain. It may not be a story of movement to the margins; it may be a story of movement to the center. No matter where you are, at the center or the margins, ministry is no longer a status vocation in the eyes of many people. Yet we remember the greater truth: Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all (Mark 9:35).

Societal, denominational reality

A call to ministry is not an easy life. It is not a journey away from the conflicts in society and in our denomination. Though you need to be aware of that reality, it need not discourage you. Remember this conversation? *When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" But Jesus ... said to them, "Does this offend you? ... Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:60-61, 67-68).*



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Consider . . . The Reality of Pastoral Ministry

*Consider your own call, sisters and brothers.
(1 Corinthians 1:26)*