

Whippersnappers in the Pulpit

*“What influences adults under 30 years old to enter ordained ministry
as a first-time vocation?”*

by
Donald E. Sellsted

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Approved: The Rev. Dr. Susan Willhauck
Associate Professor
of Pastoral Theology

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**Whippersnappers in the Pulpit: What influences adults under 30 years old to enter
ordained ministry as a first-time vocation?**

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Abstract: This qualitative research study explores the faith journey and life experiences of young adults who chose a vocation of ordained ministry before the age of 30. Through the interviewing of participants who entered a United Church of Canada approved Theological College before the age of 30, and not having graduated more than five years earlier, this research explores the hypothesis that there are experiences in faith development of children and youth that can increase the likelihood that young adults will experience, and subsequently accept, a call into ordained ministry. Using the process of phenomenology and the themes of this investigation, the study identifies common experiences from the data, and opportunities for the church, that will affirm a call into ordained ministry for young adults.

REB Approval Certificate

Certificate of Ethical Acceptability for Research Involving Humans

This is to certify that the Research Ethics Board has examined the research proposal:

AST REB File number:	0012017
Title of Research Project:	Whippersnappers in the pulpit
Faculty Supervisor:	Dr. Susan Willhauck
Student Investigator	Donald E. Sellsted

and concludes that in all respects the proposed project meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability and is in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) and Atlantic School of Theology's relevant policies.

Approval Period: 8 September 2017 to 16 April 2018

Dated this 12th day of October, 2017 at Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Dr. Alyda Faber
Chair, Research Ethics Board
Atlantic School of Theology
660 Francklyn Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3H 3B5

Introduction

Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy.

Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."' (1 Sam. 3:8b-9a)¹

The Church is called, maybe more than ever, to work as Eli did, in recognizing and supporting today's Samuel's and Samantha's in discerning their call, and their gifts, so that they may also say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."

"The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread." (1 Sam. 3:1b)

The United Church of Canada (United Church) has acknowledged a desire to welcome and encourage young people to choose ministry as a vocation. *The Report of the Task Group on Demographics of Ministry Personnel* uses the scripture from 1 Samuel 3:1b in its theological statement as it acknowledges that the United Church is losing its diversity among age demographics for our clergy as fewer people are choosing ministry as a vocation, and in particular those under 35 years of age.²

At the age of 50, having been accepted into AST's Master of Divinity Summer Distance program, I arrived for my first day of summer residence in June of 2013, where I made initial contact with my companion AST students. I was struck by the diversity in

¹ All scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

² Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services, "Report of the Task Group on Demographics of Ministry Personnel" (Report presented to the Executive of the General Council, United Church of Canada, Toronto, Ontario, November 13, 2010): 106.

our ages, in particular the number of students over 30 years old. I had assumed a younger student body.

I initially considered the question of what influences lead people later in life to enter into the vocation of ministry in United Church. After reviewing reports from the United Church regarding demographics, I realized my age was not under-represented. Instead, it was the under 35 years of age that was of particular interest to the United Church. I can acknowledge having a long-standing call to ministry, beginning before the age of 30. I considered the possibility that there may have been experiences I could have had that would have lead me to accept a call to ministry at that time, instead of entering discernment at the age of 45 years. Therefore, I instead turned to look at the call to ministry in younger people.

In the title for this research project, I chose to use the term whippersnappers, which may have a harsh or judgemental tone to it, alluding to a dismissal of the value of our youth, particularly in the pulpit. This may be how some view young clergy. At the same time, whippersnapper can also be a term referring to a youth person, full of energy and enthusiasm. It is the juxtaposition of these definitions that I want to recognize.

As I considered my question, I contemplated including ordained, diaconal, and designated lay ministry in the study. After considerable reflection, I have chosen to focus on the ordination stream. This is not to minimize any other stream, nor to say I am not interested in them as well. I recognize that the call to each of these forms of ministry are different, therefore the experiences that lead to choosing a vocation of ministry in the other streams may also vary. I have chosen to focus on the call to the ordination stream.

I reviewed the *Report of the Task Group on Demographics of Ministry Personnel*³ presented to the Executive of the General Council, United Church of Canada. The first recommendation from this report was:

The United Church of Canada take intentional steps to attract ministry personnel from current and future forecast under-represented demographic groups, namely:⁴

- persons under the age of 35
- persons who come from racial minorities
- men

Along with this first recommendation, recommendation three calls for a recruitment strategy, four speaks to an emphasis on youth, five calls for a youth-friendly candidacy process, and six highlights the pressure our current demographics will have on the pension plan when the average time in the plan before retirement continues to drop.⁵

The *Report of the Task Group on Demographics of Ministry Personnel* discusses the three demographic profiles of interest in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of our current ministry personnel profile. They inform us that the age profile is an important indicator of the church's sustainability in terms of ministry personnel to serve the "current context and generation".⁶ Additionally, it is important to understand because it will be valuable to learn how younger people today come to the vocation of ministry.

Although this research will not solve the problem of an under-represented demographic of young adults entering into ministry, I hope to provide information that

³ Permanent Committee on Ministry, "Report of the Task Group," 106.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 109.

will be valuable in understanding what experiences the United Church can provide youth to nurture a call into ordained ministry.

Purpose and Research Question

My research question is, “What influences adults under 30 years old to enter ordained ministry as a vocation within the United Church of Canada?” The purpose is to identify common experiences among the participants that the United Church today may be able to provide. To achieve this, my goal is to examine what ideas and experiences participants may have; to increase the body of knowledge on the topic of inspiring young people to consider ordained ministry as a vocation; and to explore how these themes might filter into the life of the church.

Through my research I intend to understand what influences led young adults under the age of 30 to begin their educational journey toward ordained ministry. I want to know who influenced them, what activities or organizations helped to shape and encourage them, and how the church assisted in their development in order to desire and follow the call God gave them into a life of service to God and others.

Review of Literature

There is an abundance of books and journals enthusiastic about gaining a better understanding of how to minister to youth. These efforts are focused on how we can encourage youth to come to church, to stay in church, and to grow their faith.

There is also significant literature devoted to trying to understand why there is a decline in people under the age of 35 entering into seminary and ministry. Barbara Wheeler’s analysis of Auburn Center’s *Study of Theological Education* provides many valuable insights into the differences between younger and older-aged seminary

students.⁷ However, the work does not provide an understanding of the motivation for younger people to enter seminary. Her research rarely focused on what encouraged youth to enter into ministry positions, such as the United Church of Canada desires to do.⁸

A research project by Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis gathered qualitative data, through an online survey, from 39 self-selected ordinands and recently ordained clergy, all under the age of 30, within the Church of England.⁹ A relevant finding in their study was that the most effective encouragement toward their vocation was through relationships with parish priests. Of these, it was those clergy concerned about vocations, ordination training, and support that had the largest influence. This was followed by family and friends, and finally lay people.¹⁰

J. Matthew Price's qualitative study of undergraduate students regarding their perception of being called into Christian missions and ministry, focused on two questions: (1) In what ways have Christian university students experienced their call to ministry? and (2) How do they identify their experience of a divine call and personal response?¹¹ In this work, Price also identified the influence of positive reinforcement by family and peers.¹²

⁷ Barbara Wheeler, "Fit for Ministry? A New Profile of Seminarians," *The Christian Century* 118, no. 12 (2001): 16-23.

⁸ Permanent Committee on Ministry, "Report of the Task Group," 106.

⁹ Jeff Astley and Leslie J Francis, "Young Vocation to Ordained Ministry: A Qualitative Study," *Practical Theology* 2, no. 2 (2009): 253.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 258-59.

¹¹ James Matthew Price, "Undergraduate Perceptions of Vocational Calling into Missions and Ministry," *Missiology* 41, no. 1 (2013): 87.

¹² *Ibid.*, 95.

Chapin Garner, in a personal reflection on her experience, writes on inviting youth to ministry. She emphasizes the positive affirmation from the congregation and other clergy as being key. She refutes the claim that God is not calling as many into ministry, as she suggests has been mentioned too often. For her, it is the encouragement of the congregation that makes the difference in nurturing youth to pursue ministry as a vocation, something denominations can do.¹³ She says that pastors have to take a personal interest in youth regardless of their opinion of the suitability of the youth. A pastor that takes the time to sit and talk with teenagers will positively impact their life of faith, and acknowledge God's love for them. This personal relationship can help the teenager envision themselves in a ministerial role.¹⁴

Wheeler agrees that clergy, spouses and friends are influential in youth's decision to attend seminary. However, she reports that it is their post-college involvement in congregational life that provides the strongest influence.¹⁵

Not surprisingly, many of those who were counted on for encouragement provided the opposite. In Astley and Francis' study, clergy, friends, and family were high on the list of those that discouraged the ordinands. These negative comments were described as either about young people overall, or the youthfulness of the particular individual. The church was also mentioned as a negative influence through either its selection process or the church's state of decline.¹⁶

¹³ Chapin Garner, "Call Waiting," *The Christian Century* 118, no. 12 (2001): 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁵ Wheeler, "Fit for Ministry," 16.

¹⁶ Astley and Francis, "Young Vocation," 259-60.

David J. Wood addresses the tension between church and college expectations of those entering seminary, and relates how friends and peers who are not in a ministry stream can be discouraging, including the inference that the seminary student, or clergy, would be viewed negatively by their social peer group.¹⁷ Garner relates the story of a woman explaining her sense of call to her bishop, only for him to respond that he has stopped recommending ministry as a vocation for young people, as it is too difficult and no longer as prestigious as it had been in the past.¹⁸

The interaction amongst the students themselves was documented by Astley and Francis. Many described younger ordinands as less mature, but were also sarcastic about older ordinands who felt they knew everything. They also mentioned they were less confident and more arrogant. This was countered by a view of having more energy and enthusiasm, as well as being more flexible.¹⁹

Astley and Francis' report contained relevant findings in the responses toward encouraging young vocations in ministry. They responded positively to whether the church should encourage young people to choose a vocation of ministry. Methods cited to enable this encouragement include allowing for a period for experience and practice in ministry. However, they also cited that an overall balance in ages was equally important, and that young clergy provided a model for other young people and a better understanding of them.²⁰

¹⁷ David J. Wood, "Where Are the Younger Clergy? Affirming Vocations." *The Christian Century* 118, no. 12 (2001): 18-19.

¹⁸ Garner, "Call Waiting," 20.

¹⁹ Astley and Francis, "Young Vocation," 262.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 263.

Astley and Francis further contributed ways the Church of England, the focus of their study, could encourage young vocations to ministry. The option for the provision of more work experience or internships to let them experience ministry in action would be beneficial. Secondly, the church should engage more with schools and universities to provide opportunities for young people to ask questions about ordination.

The third observation, articulated strongly, was that the church itself discouraged young vocations during the selection process by telling them to come back when they were older.²¹ This could be insightful to how we encourage young vocations leading up to, or during the discernment process, and whether we have prepared the people leading those discernment processes sufficiently to not let their views of what is too young interfere with a potential call to ministry.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. (1 Cor. 12:4-6)

According to this scripture, we are given different gifts, but all from the same Spirit, and each Christian has a Mission from God. In Luther's *De votis monasticis*, Wingren quotes Luther saying, "It is God's firm intention that all the saints are to live in the same faith, and be moved and guided by the same Spirit; but in external matters carry out different works."²² According to Donald McKim, we are to use these gifts in the

²¹ Ibid.

²² Wingren, Gustaf. *The Christian's Calling: Luther on Vocation* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), 173.

imitation of Jesus Christ.²³ Martin Luther would say Christ is to be accepted in faith.²⁴ According to Luther, Jesus acted for us as if he had been us. We are to do likewise. “Love is true and genuine where there is true and genuine faith.”²⁵ We all emerge from the water of baptism as clergy in our own right, regardless of our career. This allows us to be a parent or partner, clergy or lay, doctor or merchant.²⁶ In this, God calls some to active ministry. Those called are required to maintain the church, and keep the church’s faithful response to the gospel of Jesus the Christ.²⁷

Leaders in the church must aid young Christians to discover the gifts of grace as well as prepare them for ministries in the church, including as clergy. These leaders can place young and interested people into roles that they are either not suited for, or are not interested in.²⁸ This can happen by making assumptions about a youth’s value based on their age or perceived maturity. Those people, both clergy and lay, who are called to witness to those seeking a discernment towards ministry, need to serve that call faithfully and spiritually.

But Jesus called for them and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. (Luke 18:16)

²³ Donald K. McKim, *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 161.

²⁴ Wingren, *The Christian's Calling*, 172.

²⁵ McKim, *The Cambridge Companion*, 161.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ron Dalton, *Discovering Christian Ministry: Theology and Practice* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2015), 118.

²⁸ Ibid.

The disciples tried to chase the children away, and Jesus corrected them. When one of our Christian family feels God ‘tugging’ at them, calling them into a life of service in God’s name, it is the members of the discernment committee’s turn to serve, and not turn them away. The danger is that our committees want to see the attributes that they expect to see, or perhaps see in themselves. Or they expect them to have real-life experience, at least as the committee members would define ‘real-life experience’ to be.

Anyone called to ministry is likely to have questions of their own, such as feelings of unworthiness, or being too ordinary. Søren Kierkegaard struggled in 1835 when he journaled about not knowing what he was to do, trying to grasp what God wished him to do.²⁹ Each person’s call and understanding will be different, especially from that of our own. Listening to those sensing a call is vital, and filtering out our own ideas of what a call needs to sound like is imperative.

It is valuable for those whose job it is to listen to the stories of God’s calling people to ministry, to understand that these people have options. Everyone can take on the role of listening and encouraging. Each of us has the ability to say ‘no’ to God, and all too often we do just that. God is always reaching out to us, asking us to say ‘yes’. We need to listen and encourage those people who hear God’s call and are brave enough to say ‘yes’, despite having many other paths in life to choose from. Parker Palmer would relate to this when he talks about seeking a path more purposeful than accumulating wealth and power, and learned to understand the need to let higher truths and values guide him.³⁰

²⁹ Suzanne G. Farnham, *Listening Hearts Discerning Call in Community* (New York: Morehouse Pub., 2011), 2.

³⁰ Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*.

In Joanna Gilbert's work, within Gemma Simmonds' collection of essays, she gives a voice to her observations of working pastorally with people in their 20's and 30's, as well as her own experience in a journey of discerning religious life.³¹ However, she has a different take on what attracts youth to ministry. She believes that the first attraction is marked by a dissatisfaction of fulfilment by the world, and religious life is to offer something different from the prevailing culture. They are seeking something more and believe that it may be found in Christ. She understands that our first indication of a desire for a religious life does not come out of nowhere. It is important to ask young people what they see, negative and positive, in a religious life. She finds that religious people need to be more visible to the young inquirer, not hiding their faith.³²

Much of Price's conclusions align with that of Astley and Francis. Price identified the reoccurring factor of active involvement in ministry, the role of spiritual mentors, the influence of positive reinforcement by family and peers, and the perception of God's engagement with them. The church was an obvious and essential ground to experience a vocational emergence.³³

Catherine Stonehouse reflects how the church claims to value children, but only gives tokenism to the importance of their Christian education and development. Spiritual formation is rarely held as being important in a church's approaches for youth.³⁴

(San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 2.

³¹ Gemma Simmonds, *A Future Full of Hope?* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013), 92.

³² *Ibid.*, 93-94.

³³ Price, "Undergraduate," 95.

³⁴ Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children On The Spiritual Journey: Nurturing A Life of Faith.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 62.

The studies identified here were largely conducted through surveys and personal observations, and none were conducted with a phenomenological methodology, nor did they involve direct interviews with ordinands. Several have interpreted from surveys what churches, pastors, friends, family, and other mentors can do to encourage youth in considering ministry as a vocation. There is a deficiency in hearing the faith journey of those who have entered into a life of service in Christ. There is a gap in understanding the impact of their faith formation, and how it may have led to their choice of ministry as a vocation.

In listening to the faith journeys of the participants in my study, I hope to better understand the significance that faith formation was to them, and how it formed who they were to become.

Further to the literature I have gathered, there is also a gap created by a lack of interviews with ordinands on what brought them to seminary and into, or towards, a life in active ministry. There is little information gathered on the whole life experience of those under 30 who have made the choice to follow God into a life of ministry.

I intend to listen to these life journeys of faith, and the events that helped to shape the people they became who, at a young age, made the choice to follow their call into the service and love of God.

Method

The methodology of qualitative research I plan to employ is Phenomenology. This methodology is a study of people's conscious experience of their life-world; their "everyday life and social action".³⁵ In researching the influences of young adults

³⁵ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide To Design And Implementation*

entering into ministry, I am interested in understanding the life experiences of multiple young adults who were under the age of 30 when they entered their theological college.³⁶ I am interested in what common experiences lead them to a process of discernment and ultimately into a theological college, thus enabling a composite description of the essence of that experience.³⁷ Phenomenology is used when there is an ‘essence to shared experience’, or a common essence, providing the core meanings mutually understood by the participants.³⁸ It is the experiences that these people shared that is of particular interest, leading to a better understanding of why young people choose ministry as a vocation at an early age, leading to an understanding of what they experienced, and how they experienced it.³⁹ Phenomenology is well-suited to studying these effective and emotional human experiences. The findings in this type of study enable the reader to better understand the experiences that lead young people into first vocation ministry.⁴⁰

The philosophical assumptions of phenomenological perspectives fit well into this research question. They are the study of lived experiences of people, that these are conscious experiences, and the development of the descriptions of the experiences as opposed to explaining or analyzing them.⁴¹

I will be using the empirical, transcendental-type approach to phenomenology where the emphasis focuses less on interpretation and instead centres more on the

(San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 24-25.

³⁶ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2007), 57.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁸ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 25.

³⁹ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 58.

⁴⁰ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 26.

⁴¹ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 58.

description of the experiences of the participants.⁴² As the researcher, I must set aside my own experiences in order to take a fresh perspective of the phenomenon. Everything is to be perceived without an assumed perspective.⁴³ Although I did not share the participants experience, I also felt called to ministry at a young age, so will bracket any experience from that time. Using the phenomenological methodology will enable the participants to tell their stories through open-ended questions.

It is my desire to engage the research partners in the stories of their experience. For this reason, I want the questions to be open enough for them to describe their experiences unencumbered by limitations some questions could impose.

Data Collection

The research partners were selected by nonprobability purposeful sampling. Names were provided through my peer network of fellow students and clergy, or a name gathered through my experience within the United Church or the Atlantic School of Theology. I strived to obtain a balance of genders and educational institutions. A written invitation was provided to each selected participant.

The six participants were geographically located in Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. All participants attended, or were attending, a Master of Divinity program at a recognized United Church Theological college. Two were still attending, and four were successful graduates, having obtained their degrees less than 5 years earlier.

All interviews took place using remote video conferencing technology, and conducted in the privacy of my church office. These interviews consisted of seven open-

⁴² Ibid., 59.

⁴³ Ibid., 59-60.

ended questions, with responses coming in a narrative form. An additional question was added as it aided a theme that was emerging from the first three participants. The key question was the first one, asking each participant to share their faith journey experience leading up to the decision of choosing a vocation of ordained ministry. Each subsequent question was intended to draw deeper into some of the details of that journey. After the first three interviews, it was apparent that there was a desire to speak of their discernment experience, which led to the last question for the remaining participants to share their discernment experience.

All interviews were transcribed and the data was open coded, axial coded, and selective coded. This data was then analyzed and categorized, resulting in the identification of five themes and one sub-theme.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the interviews, I read each through several times in order to gain a thorough appreciation for each participant's faith journey experience. Each appeared to share openly and without hesitation, and usually with a sense of enthusiasm to share their journey.

The experience of Christian Education, in particular youth group involvement, was easily a common occurrence in each experience. This was central to all participants, and contained many insights into what would become their future influences toward a vocation of ministry. This experience of participating with peers in a Christian environment extended beyond their youth and into early adulthood.

One participant who had been away from church after leaving for university had this to say:

“I think as a child having that foundation allowed me to leave the church, in a way, and come back to it. I think those early years were really important in somehow ending up in ministry now.”

However obvious this experience may seem, the data also contained repeated themes worthy of further consideration. From the participant’s experiences, six themes and one sub-theme ultimately emerged.

Themes

Support

Each participant reflected on the support they received. The parent’s perspective was of particular importance, where four participants were concerned with how their parents would respond to this call to a vocation of ministry. Two participants were not concerned at all because of their family heritage of ministry. They were confident their call to ministry would be accepted. Of all the parents, only one held reservations initially. This hesitation was eventually alleviated.

This is not to say that all family members outside of the parents were supportive, with one participant describing a family member who remains hostile to the idea of ministry. But in this study, it was an exception.

It is also significant to note that no one suggested they would have not have chosen ministry as their vocation if support was not given, nor their vocational choice accepted.

Support – Father

“It’s going to be big, it’s going to affect my relationship with my father.”

As a sub-theme to support, four of the participants spoke specifically about their experience as it related to their father. About their father, two mentioned being apprehensive of telling him. None of the participants spoke similarly by singling out the support of their mother. I am not suggesting that the support of the mother was any less important to the participants. It was simply not articulated in the interviews. In this study, with the data received from the participants, I do not have sufficient data to suggest why the father was singularly identified by these participants.

Affirmation

To differentiate the use of the term affirmation from the term support, I use affirmation where the participants call is confirmed by someone of significance to the participant, usually before the participant has understood or accepted their own call to ordained ministry.

The experience of independent affirmation was common amongst each participant, but the source of that confirmation did vary. Where Astley and Francis found that the most effective encouragement towards their vocation was through relationships with parish priests,⁴⁴ that was not the specific findings of my study.

For two of the participants, this was the case, specifically acknowledging that is was a member of the clergy that recognized a call to ministry in them, and this observation was instrumental in their choice of ordained ministry as a vocation.

⁴⁴ Astley and Francis, “Young Vocation,” 258-59.

When the pastor of one participant said they would be good at ministry, and should consider it, the participant's response, in light of their existing investment in university in an unrelated field, was:

“why didn't you tell me this 2 years ago - I just wasted how much money on this thing?!”

Another felt that they were on a path to ministry without being conscientiously aware of it until another student in university made a short comment, “you're going to be a minister.” This affirmation confirmed what the participant had not yet acknowledged to themselves.

Those who were affirmed by clergy had previously experienced what each would describe as a Holy Spirit moment, and the decision to accept ministry as their vocation was confirmed by clergy.

Denominational Influences

Our United Church is not unique when the question is asked, “where are all the youth?” This theme is difficult to untangle completely with the theme of Christian Education and Youth Groups.

The participants in this study, with one exception, were influenced by other denominations in some way prior to completing high school. Some were left with a decision to make between denominations to commit to in order to participate in Christian based youth groups.

Some of the stats include:

- Five participants were involved with other Christian denominations
- Four attended youth groups at other denominations

- Two left their United Churches to attend a youth group in another denomination
- Two were influenced by an Evangelical denomination during college

Alliance, Evangelical, and Anglican denominations figured prominently, as did the Catholic and Lutheran churches to a lesser degree. A completion of the analysis on the influence of other denominations will be benefited by first examining their youth group experiences before returning to the denomination discussion.

Youth Group and Christian Education

Nothing was more universal to the participants than their involvement in Christian Education. This included Sunday School, Christian youth peer groups, youth programming and leadership, and other faith communities in high school or university.

Five spoke specifically about being raised in the church, with comments such as this participant's:

“I grew up in the United Church so I was always going to Sunday school and youth group.”

Two participants mentioned that their congregations were an extension of their family, and how it manifested into their life as part of the United Church. One participant commented:

“Basically, I cannot remember a time in my life when I was not involved and nurtured by the church, specifically the United Church of Canada.”

All six also provided leadership in youth groups, often including the development of the programming.

No one single factor was as common as youth involvement in church families that either kept, or returned, the participants to the United Church. And this is where the theme of youth group and other denominations overlap.

Youth Group and other Denominations

It is difficult to trace the interconnections between our youth's desire to participate in Christian peer groups, and the influence of other denominations. I will attempt to explain the relationships as they were experienced by the participants.

Two of the participants attended youth groups at another denomination, in this case the Anglican and Evangelical churches, specifically so they could participate in youth programming. Five of the participants became active in youth programming in other denominations at some point before their call to the vocation of ministry.

One participant spoke of their United Church investing in youth programming, even though they did not have any youth. They believed they were making an investment in their church, understanding the importance of having youth involvement. However, after a relocation, this participant had to leave the United Church in order to be connected to a youth program. They returned to the United Church by request to help them develop and lead youth programming.

Three had involvement in other denominations while in university before making the conscientious and informed decision to make the United Church their church home for discernment.

From this data, when there was a lack of youth programming in the United Church, the participants found it at other denominations. The one participant who did

not mention any other denominational influence before university did not experience a lack of United Church youth programming.

It is interesting that two of the participants identified their participation in evangelical denominations as contributing to their faith understanding today, allowing that influence to be part of their identity as a minister in the United Church.

University Undergrad Experience

The timing of the call to a vocation of ordained ministry formed the basis of the theme of University Undergrad Experience. Five of the participants were taking their university undergrad degree when they accepted their call. The one participant who was not currently in university had started and left university, and then returned to University after acknowledging their call to ministry.

Four of the participants were actively working toward a degree in another field when their call came, and each of them switched their degree program, transferring their accumulated credits in order to obtain an undergrad degree sufficient to go into their chosen United Church approved theological college to obtain their Master of Divinity degree.

One participant had been in university for several years, and was just completing their undergrad degree with a religious emphasis, when called into ministry. For this person, it was a sudden awareness of a call that they felt had been there all along, but only a few weeks before completing their degree, realized that a vocation of ministry was what they needed to do, and enrolled in a United Church theological college within a few weeks.

What I found of particular interest is that of all the participants, none initially entered university with the intention of accepting a call to ministry as their vocation.

Call Experience

Each participant described their personal call experience, and their similarities form the basis of a common theme. Each described their call coming from God, and that is was undeniable, and unmistakable. When this individual, unique call experience occurred, each described their decision to go into ministry as being beyond their choice. Four participants specifically said that they would do something else if they could, but they could not. As one participant explained:

“I don’t think I could resist it if I wanted to, and there is certainly times when I look at the future of the church, the uncertainty of finding full time positions, the stress of a 24/7 vague occupation, the worries that it brings home for writing sermons, and pastoral care issues, why would I want to enter that?”

Five of the participants were able to identify the specific moment where they described the presence of the Holy Spirit coming upon them, knowing they had been called, although not necessarily yet to a vocation of ministry. Their description of the Holy Spirit came to them during a youth group prayer experience, a youth group educational event, a time of grieving for the loss of a loved one, in a single moment during a conversation, and at a rock concert.

Attitude

There were comments made in regard to discernment that I believe are noteworthy. To place these comments in perspective with our scripture, I offer this passage:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. (Matthew 18:1-5)

The participants are not children of course, but Jesus welcomed the young, and told the old to be like the young. God called these young adults who felt they didn't have another option. But there are others who do. Parker Palmer relates to this when he talks about seeking a path more purposeful than accumulating wealth and power, and learned to understand the need to let higher truths and values guide him.⁴⁵

Of those that discussed discernment, some were very positive experiences. Others were not. Two of the participants were openly discouraged during the discernment process, encouraging them to go learn about life first. Those involved in the process were not always sensitive to the magnitude of the decision that the candidate was embracing.

⁴⁵ Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 2.

As Astley and Francis reported, many of those who were counted on for encouragement provided the opposite, with clergy, friends, and family high on the list of those that discouraged the ordinands, negatively describing young people overall, or the youthfulness of the particular individual. The church can also be a negative influence in its selection process.⁴⁶

Report on Demographics recommendation five is to create a youth-friendly candidacy process.

Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, "I am only a boy"; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. (Jer. 1:6-7)

Theology, built upon scriptures like Jerimiah and others, tell us that God can use all those called, and God will put the words into their mouths. The 13th century philosopher and theologian St. Thomas Aquinas, in writing about the religious life, supported young men entering into religious vocations, and against those who argued that they should be held back for an extended period of time. He argued that the call to enter religious life comes directly from God by declaring the distinction between God's external call (scripture), and God's internal call (grace).⁴⁷

As Jesus welcomed the young, we are required to follow this example. But some of the literature I have reviewed has shown, like that of Astley and Francis, we need to accept into our theology a biblical understanding that our young people can be an equal

⁴⁶ Astley and Francis, "Young Vocation," 259-60.

⁴⁷ Edward P. Hahnenberg, *Awakening Vocation: A Theology of Christian Call* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 52.

partner in positions of ministry.⁴⁸ That theology, built upon scriptures like Jerimiah and others, tell us that God can use all those called, and God will put the words into their mouths. Astley and Francis echoed one of the participants in that the church can discourage young people from a vocation of ministry during discernment by telling them to come back when they are older.⁴⁹

Gilbert says it very well with, “those of us that have long surpassed the age of 30, it can be challenging to listen to the ideas, hopes, and fears of this younger generation.” But she also says listening to this younger generation can be encouraging as long as we are courageous, generous in spirit, and open to the challenges of what we may hear.⁵⁰

Evaluation and Implications

The *Report of the Task Group on Demographics of Ministry Personnel*⁵¹ discusses profiles of interest in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of our current ministry personnel profile. They inform us that the age profile is an important indicator of the church’s sustainability in terms of ministry personnel to serve the “current context and generation”.⁵² In other words, we need leadership that can relate to each generation we desire to have in our churches, and understand the context of their lives. The title of this project, *Whippersnappers in the Pulpit*, alludes to an imbedded question of whether we want young clergy to relate to all generations, their generation, or only the existing predominant generations. In other words, are young clergy fine as long as they act like the old clergy? It is difficult to be a welcoming church when we don’t

⁴⁸ Astley and Francis, “Young Vocation,” 262.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Simmonds, “A Future Full of Hope?”, 92.

⁵¹ Permanent Committee on Ministry, “Report of the Task Group,” 106.

⁵² Permanent Committee on Ministry, “Report of the Task Group,” 109.

understand the context that each generation lives in. We need leadership in each generation.

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. (Luke 2:41-42)

... they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. (Luke 2:45b-47)

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor. (Luke 2:52)

I do not know how much ‘real-life experience’ Jesus, who came to us as fully human, had by the age of 12, but I would not think a lot. Jesus was not only sitting in the midst of adults, he was teaching to the temple teachers, the rabbis. Granted Jesus was an exception, but he is an example of what youth can do.

But Jesus called for them and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. (Luke 18:16)

Jesus did not ask children to be like us. It is us who Jesus tells to be like children. We should not be discerning their perceived maturity by our standard. Having been in seminary for over 4 years now, I have watched youthful people enter seminary and am

amazed by their growth in maturity, faith and spirit in the span of a year. Their life experience is richer than some might expect.

Whether in the church or in the secular world, we worship youth. We often try to look like them, even to the point of allowing our natural and God given bodies to be altered medically in an attempt to achieve this goal. We want to see children and youth in our churches. We want to celebrate the annual Christmas pageant with them and feel their excitement within our own souls. They are our fountain of youth.

However, we often do not want the guidance, wisdom, or leadership of our youth. We undervalue the contributions they are fully able to make in our congregations, and in our spiritual lives. When we make space for our youth, and choose to know them as individuals, we can learn to understand the spiritual gifts they have to share.⁵³

God calls people of all ages, from Samuel to Abram, from Mary to Sarai, and from Joseph to Moses. The United Church understands the value of having diversity among its clergy, including a diversity in age.⁵⁴

Those adults under 30 are certainly not children, and Jesus was not far from 30 years old when he was crucified. Clearly Jesus understood that we need to be influenced by our youth. Coming to faith is not something we are to do alone, and Jesus knew we needed the example that innocence can bring, and the example of those where faith is uncomplicated.

⁵³ Jill Schwendeman, *When Youth Lead: A Guide To Intergenerational Social Justice Ministry, Plus 101 Youth Projects* (Boston, MA: Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, 2007), viii.

⁵⁴ Permanent Committee on Ministry, "Report of the Task Group," 106.

Support, Affirmation and Attitude

Support and affirmation were key themes in the participants' experiences. Most of the literature documented earlier would support this. However, where the literature, such as the work by Astley and Francis⁵⁵, Price⁵⁶, and Garner⁵⁷, identifies the value of support by clergy, family, and peers, this research cannot make that specific claim. It appeared that the key affirmation came from a variety of source, including clergy and peers. However, in the decision to choose ministry as a vocation, family support was important, but there was not confirmation that any lack of support would have altered the decision. In most cases, this support was sought after their call experience had already occurred and a vocation of ministry chosen.

Parental support was important to each participant. Those who experienced their parent's involvement in church spoke with more certainty of their parent's acceptance of ministry as a vocation. The correlation of being raised in the church and their parent's involvement is clear. This research indicates among several participants that their parent's involvement kept them in church and connected to youth group involvement. Christian Smith and Patricia Snell report highly religious parents as one of the highest factors to youth continuing their church involvement into adulthood, and only slightly behind religious service attendance.⁵⁸

The influence of leadership, even at a young age, can have lasting effects. Garner, who said that a pastor that takes the time to sit and talk with teenagers will

⁵⁵ Astley and Francis, "Young Vocation," 253.

⁵⁶ Price, "Undergraduate," 87.

⁵⁷ Garner, "Call Waiting," 20.

⁵⁸ Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 215.

positively impact their life of faith, and acknowledge God’s love for them.⁵⁹ This is confirmed by one of the participants after describing a minister taking an afternoon to spend talking with him and a friend. The summary quote from the participant was:

“And he talked to us like we were actual people, not just little kids. And I’ve never, ever forgot that, even though it seems small and trivial.”

Our committees will reflect their attitude toward young people choosing a vocation of ministry. Our discernment committees, staffed with valuable volunteers, would be well served if given training for their objective. There will be volunteers who would benefit from understanding that youthfulness is not a deterrent, and life experience is found at all ages. The apostle Paul became a minister, not by human decree, but by the will of God.⁶⁰

Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead- (Galatians 1:1)

To maintain consistency in the discernment process toward candidacy, all committee members need to understand the criteria that a potential candidate will be measured against.

Christian Youth Peer Groups

No other experience in this study was more evident than the experience of growing up in the church, and participating with Christian peers in Sunday School and

⁵⁹ Garner, “Call Waiting”, 20.

⁶⁰ John Line, *The Doctrine of the Christian Ministry* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1959), 162.

Youth Group activities. The participants in this study have often taken their own initiative to remain connected to a youth peer community, including leaving their denomination to accomplish this. Gilbert acknowledges the importance that a sense of belonging is to youth. She goes further in her study to claim that all people seek community, and if that community cannot be found in their religious life, they will find it in other communities.⁶¹ This is evident in this research where the participants found a community of Christian peers in other denominations. The number of youth who followed this same path of finding another denomination for their peer community, then chose ministry as their vocation, and did not return to the United Church, would be interesting to know.

Smith and Snell correlate that 25% of youth who attend youth groups will continue their religious life after entering into adulthood. This may appear small if we look at 75% not attending, but the impact on the 25% cannot be underestimated.⁶²

It is evident from this research, and from the in-depth research done by Smith and Snell,⁶³ that our future young ministers will almost certainly be those who experienced a Christian Education and a Christian Peer group community. From this information, it is imperative that the United Church find ways to involve youth in church, and in Christian-based peer communities. We know that parental involvement in the church is important, so when there is no parental involvement, the challenge is extreme. This research did not address or answer that question. And as described by one of the participants, Sunday School and Youth Group experience was critical for the youth's return to church after

⁶¹ Simmonds, "A Future Full of Hope?," 94.

⁶² Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 219.

⁶³ Ibid.

entering into adulthood. I consider the research and findings documented by Smith and Snell in *Souls in Transition* to be a valuable guide in understanding the experiences of youth.⁶⁴

University Undergrad Experience

As our youth become young adults, their faith journey is not over. They may be out of our sight, but cannot be forgotten. In light of the experiences of the participants in this study, it is actually the beginning of a new faith journey, one that includes a commitment to the vocation of ministry. The call from God, the affirmation of an important person, the support of loved ones, are valuable in the formation of youth, but these actions remain equally vital after high school and into adulthood. The possibility of God's call to them even after investing in a secular vocation is evident by this research. When God's call is accepted, things previously considered fixed can change. This is evidenced by the changes in the participants initial undergraduate studies. As mentioned earlier, Wheeler agrees that clergy, spouses and friends are influential in youth's decision to attend seminary, but it is their post-college involvement in congregational life that provides the strongest influence.⁶⁵

The implication of this is that we need to stay connected to these emerging adults as they enter into a new phase in their lives. And the influence of a respected minister or other church leader, is still of significant value to these young adults in helping to confirm a call they may have already experienced, but not yet accepted within

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Wheeler, "Fit for Ministry," 16.

themselves. One of my advisors used the appropriate term in describing this as an “outward affirmation of an inner call”.⁶⁶

The church needs to find ways to stay in communication with them. Don’t underestimate how our affirmation can awaken a calling that was already there, but just needing that confirmation that someone else, someone meaningful to them, also sees it. Plant the seeds of faith and affirmation and see if they don’t grow.

In this regard, the United Church can be active in career fairs at high schools or universities, by volunteering time at colleges and universities, or by leading youth groups and other Christian based community groups or exercises. Posters of local United Churches can be placed at colleges or universities. A local United Church can set aside a specific time for college students to stop by. A relationship with the Chaplain for the local colleges or universities could give opportunities to meet with students or prepare presentations.

Conclusion

This study is not going to resolve any demographic recommendations from involving young adults choosing ministry as a vocation in the United Church of Canada. It does highlight investments that we will have to make in order to nurture our youth in the Christian faith. These include finding ways to enable Christian Education programming. When the youth are not in our churches, nor are their parents, a Sunday School or a Youth Group program may feel impossible. But it is imperative to find a way. Understanding the timing of God’s call to them, or connecting with them once they

⁶⁶ Dave Csinos, Assistant Professor of Practical Theology and one of my research consultants, during a meeting to discuss this project.

have left in pursuit of their future vocation, are of limited value if they have entered into adulthood without a faith community that they can call home, and one they can return to.

We need to meet them where they are in life, and stay connected.

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

(Ecclesiastes 3:2b)

This project, *Whippersnappers in the Pulpit*, has renewed my enthusiasm to find ways to engage our youth in a Christian community, connecting them with their peers in a spiritual journey. It is a call to be more intentional in inviting people, including the young, to explore a call to ministry. Regardless of where the future vocations of our youth lie, the seeds of a spiritual life need to be planted.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Research Ethics Board Proposal

Name of Student Investigator: Donald E. Sellsted
Title of Research Project: Whippersnappers in the Pulpit

Summary of Proposed Research

Description

This proposed research will address the question, “What influences adults under 30 years old to enter ordained ministry as a vocation within the United Church of Canada?” At the age of 50, having been accepted into AST’s Master of Divinity Summer Distance program, I arrived for my first day of summer residence in June of 2013, where I made initial contact with my companion AST students. I was struck by the diversity in our ages, in particular the number of students over 30 years old.

I initially considered the question of what influences lead to people later in life to enter into ministry in United Church of Canada (United Church). After reviewing reports from the United Church regarding demographics, I realized my age was not under represented. Instead, it was the under 35 years of age that was of particular interest to the United Church. I can acknowledge having a long-standing call to ministry, beginning before the age of 30. Perhaps there were experiences I could have had that could have lead me to accept a call at that time, instead of entering discernment at 45 years old. Therefore, I instead turned to look at the call to ministry in younger people.

As I considered my question, I contemplated including ordained, diaconal, and designated lay ministry in the study. After considerable reflection, I have chosen to focus on the ordination stream. This is not to minimize any other stream, nor to say I am not interested in them as well. I recognize that the call to each of these forms of ministry are different, therefore the experiences may vary with them. I have chosen to focus on one call, the ordination stream.

I reviewed the *Report of the Task Group on Demographics of Ministry Personnel*⁶⁷ presented to the Executive of the General Council, United Church of Canada. The first recommendation from this report was:

The United Church of Canada take intentional steps to attract ministry personnel from current and future forecast under-represented demographic groups, namely:⁶⁸

- **persons under the age of 35**
- persons who come from racial minorities
- men

⁶⁷ Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services, “Report of the Task Group on Demographics of Ministry Personnel”. (Report presented to the Executive of the General Council, United Church of Canada, Toronto, Ontario. November 13, 2010).

⁶⁸ Ibid., 106.

Along with this recommendation, recommendation #3 calls for a recruitment strategy, #4 speaks to an emphasis on youth, #5 calls for a youth friendly candidacy process, and #6 highlights the pressure our current demographics will have on the pension plan when the average time in the plan before retirement continues to drop.⁶⁹

The *Report of the Task Group on Demographics of Ministry Personnel* discusses the three demographic profiles of interest in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of our current ministry personnel profile. They inform us that the age profile is an important indicator of the church's sustainability in terms of ministry personnel to serve the "current context and generation"⁷⁰. Additionally, it is important to understand because it will be valuable to learn about how younger people today come to the vocation of ministry.

Although this research will not solve the problem of an under represented demographic of young adults entering into ministry, I hope to provide information that will be valuable in understanding what experiences the United Church can provide youth to nurture a call into ordained ministry.

Proposed Research Field Sites

I will be interviewing 6 participants who were under 30 years of age at the time of their entry into a Master of Divinity degree program from a United Church Theological School (see invitation to participate in Appendix B). They will be in at least their second year of their Master of Divinity program, and not have graduated more than 5 years ago.

The research partners will be selected by nonprobability purposeful sampling. Names will be provided through my peer network of fellow students and clergy, or a name have learned through my experience within the United Church or the Atlantic School of Theology. I will strive to obtain a balance of genders and educational institutions. A written invitation will be provided to each selected participant.⁷¹

Interviews will be conducted through Skype (or an equivalent which is familiar to the participant) as no participants will be in easy proximity to my location in Oak Lake, MB.

Principal Research Consultants

Andrew Scollick – Director, Vocations & Recruitment, AST

David Csinos – Assistant Professor of Practical Theology,
Coordinator of Summer Distance M.Div. Program, AST

Methodology

The methodology of qualitative research I plan to employ is *Phenomenology*. This methodology is a study of people's conscious experience of their life-world; their

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 109.

⁷¹ See Appendix C.

“everyday life and social action”.⁷² In researching the influences of young adults entering into ministry, I am interested in understanding the life experiences of multiple young adults under the age of 30 when they entered their theological college.⁷³ I am interested in what common experiences lead them to a process of discernment and ultimately into a theological college, thus enabling a composite description of the essence of that experience.⁷⁴ Phenomenology is used when there is an ‘essence to shared experience,’ or a common essence, providing the core meanings mutually understood by the participants.⁷⁵ It is the experiences that these people shared that is of particular interest, leading to a better understanding of why young people choose ministry as a vocation at an early age, leading to an understanding of what they experienced, and how they experienced it.⁷⁶ Phenomenology is well suited to studying these effective and emotional human experiences. The findings of this type of study will enable an understanding of what experiences lead young people into the of vocation ministry.⁷⁷

I will be interviewing 6 volunteer participants who were under 30 years of age at the time of their entry into a Master of Divinity program at a recognized United Church of Canada theological college. They will be in at least their second year of their Master of Divinity program, and not have graduated more than 5 years ago.

The philosophical assumptions of phenomenological perspectives fit well into this research question. They are the study of lived experiences of people, that these are conscious experiences, and the development of the descriptions of the experiences as opposed to explaining or analyzing them.⁷⁸

I will be using the hermeneutic type approach to phenomenology where the emphasis focuses on interpretation and on the description of the experiences of the participants.⁷⁹ Although I did not share the participants experience, I also felt called to ministry at a young age, so will bracket any experience from that time. Using the phenomenological methodology will enable the participants to tell their stories through open questions.

Potential Benefits from Study

The *Report of the Task Group on Demographics of Ministry Personnel*⁸⁰ as presented to the Executive of the General Council, United Church of Canada has

⁷² Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 24-25.

⁷³ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2007), 57.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁷⁵ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 25.

⁷⁶ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 58.

⁷⁷ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 26.

⁷⁸ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 58.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 59

⁸⁰ Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services, “Report of the Task Group on Demographics of Ministry Personnel”. (report presented to the Executive of the General Council, United Church of Canada, Toronto, Ontario. November 13, 2010).

highlighted the United Church of Canada's recommendation to attract ministry personnel from an under 35 years of age demographic. They inform us that the age profile is an important indicator of the church's sustainability in terms of ministry personnel to serve the "current context and generation".⁸¹ This age group is under represented in the United Church's ministry profile. I hope to provide information that will be valuable in understanding what experiences the United Church can provide youth to nurture a call into ordained ministry by better understanding what influenced the participants of this study to commit themselves to a life in ministry to the United Church, to its members, and to God. I hope to provide information that will be valuable in understanding what experiences the United Church can provide youth to nurture a call into ordained ministry.

Potential Risks from Study

No risks are anticipated arising from this study, and participants can choose to end their participation at any time. Each participant will receive a phone call one to two weeks after the interview as a courtesy check in. In addition, I have confirmed that Rev. Natasha Pearen, Minnedosa United Church in Manitoba, will be available to attend to any unexpected pastoral care that may be required, and is available as required.

Process for Obtaining Informed Consent

After I have identified potential participants, I will telephone or email them to ask if they are willing, in principle, to participate. If their answer is affirmative, I will arrange an interview place and time. I will indicate to them that I will send ahead of time a consent form they will be asked to sign, but their participation is voluntary and they are free to decide ahead of time or at any point to withdraw. At the beginning of the meeting and before the interview begins, I will share the background of my project, answer questions they might have and ask them to sign the consent form (see appendix C). I will inform them that should they become distressed in any way during the interview that I can refer them to a helping professional. They will be able to end the interview at any point and I will delete the recording if they decide to withdraw from the study.

Process for Protecting Identity of Participants and Confidentiality of Data

Protecting Identity of Participants and Storage and Destruction of Data:

1. Upon receiving a signed Informed Consent from research participants by the time of the scheduled interview, I will:
 - a) provide one copy for the participants
 - b) keep one copy for myself which I will place in an envelope separate from all other materials and store in a locked file cabinet in my home office.
 - c) provide one copy for my supervisor Dr. Susan Willhauck, also placed in a separate envelope, who will store it in a locked file cabinet in her office at AST.

2. Participants will be given code names. Audio tapes of interviews will be recorded on a digital recording device. These digital recording devices will be kept in locked brief cases or safes and secured at all times during data collection from the

⁸¹ Ibid., 109.

time of Informed Consent until deleted permanently from my device at the completion of the research January 9, 2018.

3. Within two weeks of each interview, I will transcribe the interviews onto a Word document. The Word Document transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer from the time of data collection until the final paper is due December 9, 2017.
4. When the final paper is submitted to my supervisor on December 9, 2017, the Word Document transcripts of interviews will also be submitted to her, either printed as hard copies or disposable CDs and deleted from my computer and trash bin.
5. My supervisor Dr. Susan Willhauck will store transcripts of interviews in a locked file cabinet in her office at AST for one year and all data materials will be destroyed by shredding or crushing.

Appendix B: Proposed Interview Questions

It is my desire to engage the research partners in the stories of their experience. For this reason, I want the questions to be open enough for them to describe their experiences unencumbered by limitations some questions could impose. The primary question is #1 below and the others will be used as needed.

1. Tell me your faith journey experience before entering seminary.
2. Did your journey lead you into ministry? If so, how? If not, why?
3. Were you involved in any faith communities during your educational experience?
4. Tell me about your educational experiences prior to entering theological college.
5. Are there other influences that aided your vocation choice? If so, what are they?
6. Have any of your relationships with others been impacted by your vocational choice? If so, how?
7. Would you describe your decision to enter ministry as a call from God? If so, how? If not, why?

Appendix C: Invitation to Participate

My name is Don Sellsted, and I am in my final year of the Master of Divinity program at the Atlantic School of Theology, and am a candidate for ordained ministry from the United Church of Canada. My final requirement is to complete a qualitative research project. My project is looking at the experiences of young adults who entered into a Master of Divinity program as a candidate for ministry into the United Church of Canada. Your name was provided to me by one of your peers, or you are someone I know or learned through my experience within the United Church or the Atlantic School of Theology.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study if:

- You were under 30 years of age when you entered into a Master of Divinity Degree Program from a United Church Theological School
- Are at least in your second year of the Master of Divinity Degree Program
- Have not graduated more than 5 years ago

This is a phenomenological study and data will be collected through interviews with participants. These interviews will be conducted over a video call (e.g. Skype), and will last approximately 1 hour. The questions will focus on the experience of your faith journey leading up to your decision to enter into a Master of Divinity Degree Program. An audio recording will be made of the interview, and I will be taking field notes during this interview. The time of the interview will be schedule at a time convenient for you.

Participation is fully voluntary. You will be asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview, and at any time before or during the interview, you can choose to end your participation, in which case the interview will be ended and the recording destroyed.

The results of this study will be presented at Central United Church in Brandon, Manitoba on November 21, 2017. Attendees are welcome to in person or through Skype. The written report will be made available in the Atlantic School of Theology library.

This is an opportunity for you to share your experience and insight with the church, that will be valuable in understanding what experiences the United Church can provide young adults to nurture a call into ordained ministry by understanding what influenced the participants of this study to commit themselves to a life in ministry to the United Church, to its members, and to God. I hope to provide information that will be valuable in understanding what experiences the United Church can provide youth to nurture a call into ordained ministry.

If you would like to know more, or if you are interested in participating, I can be reached by phone at (204) 851-3466, or by confidential email at don.sellsted@gmail.com.

Please consider participating, and thank you for that consideration!

Don Sellsted

Appendix D: Informed Consent

Whippersnappers in the Pulpit
Donald E. Sellsted
Atlantic School of Theology
660 Francklyn Street
Halifax, NS B3H 3B5
Phone (cell): (204) 851-3466

E-mail: don.sellsted@gmail.com

I am a student enrolled in the Master of Divinity Program at Atlantic School of Theology. As part of my course work under the supervision of Dr. Susan Willhauck, I am conducting a study on what influences adults under 30 years old to enter ordained ministry as a vocation within the United Church of Canada?

I will be interviewing people who:

- Were under 30 years old when they entered into a Master of Divinity Program at a United Church of Canada Theological School.
- If not yet ordained, are at least in the second year of the Master of Divinity Degree Program
- If ordained, have been ordained for less than 5 years.

I am inviting you to participate in my study. The purposes of this work are to examine what ideas and experiences participants may have; to increase the body of knowledge on the topic of inspiring young people to consider ordained ministry as a vocation; and to explore how these themes might filter into the life of the church.

Your participation in this project is appreciated. I will ask you a series of questions on your experience and will audio tape your responses.

The recordings and transcript will be held in a secure environment throughout this study and after the final project is completed, they will be held in a locked file in the supervisor's office for one year, at which time they will be destroyed.

If you are willing to participate in this project, please read the following and indicate your willingness to be involved by giving your signature at the end.

I acknowledge that the research procedures outlined have been explained to me, and that I have been given a copy of this consent. Any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction. I know that I can contact the researcher at any time should I have further questions. I am aware that my participation in this study is purely voluntary and I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time. I understand that the personal record relating to this study will be kept confidential.

I know that the researcher will make every effort to keep all information obtained in this Study as confidential and anonymous as possible. Names and potentially revealing facts will be changed, thus affording me anonymity. To further protect individual identities, this consent form will be sealed in an envelope and stores separately. Furthermore, the results of this study will be aggregated and no individual participant will be identified.

The following is a timeline for the storage and destruction of data:

1. Upon receiving a signed Informed Consent form from research participants, the researcher will:
 - a) Provide one copy for the participants.
 - b) Keep one copy which will be placed in an envelope separate from all other materials and stored in a secure location.
 - c) Provide one copy for my supervisor, Dr. Susan Willhauck, also placed in a separate envelope. The supervisor will store these in a locked file cabinet.

2. Audio files of interviews will be recorded on a digital recording device or password protected computer. These devices will be kept locked and secured at all times during data collection from the time of Informed Consent through the public Grad Project presentations and until deleted permanently from the device on January 9, 2018.

3. Within two weeks of each interview, I will transcribe the interviews onto a Word document or pdf. The Word document transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer from the time of data collection until the final Grad Project paper is due on December 9, 2017.

4. The public Grad Project Presentations take place on November 21, 2017 and the final project paper is due December 9, 2017. On that day, I will delete recordings of interviews and bring all transcriptions and copies of Informed Consent to my supervisor by January 9, 2018. The supervisor will store these documents in a locked file cabinet at AST for one year, at which time they will be shredded on December 9, 2018.

If you have questions, please contact me, the principle researcher by phone at (204) 851-3466 or by email at don.sellsted@gmail.com.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Atlantic School of Theology in keeping with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. If you have questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Alyda Faber, chair of the Research Ethics Board, at afaber@astheology.ns.ca.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please keep one copy of this form for your own records.

Appendix E: Thank you letter to Participants

(Date)

Dear (Name),

Thank you very much for your participation in the research study, “What influences adults under 30 years old to enter ordained ministry as a vocation within the United Church of Canada?” The time that you have taken out of your busy schedule is very much appreciated; and your experiences are very valuable to the research.

If you are interested in the results of this study, they will be presented at Central United Church in Brandon, Manitoba on November 21, 2017. Attendees are welcome to in person or through Skype. The written report will be made available in the Atlantic School of Theology library. A video recording of the presentation will be made available on YouTube at some point after that. A written summary of the project will also be available through the Atlantic School of Theology Library. Your name as well as any other personal identifiers will be changed in both the presentation and the written report in order to maintain your confidentiality.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at any time. Thank you again for your participation, and it was a pleasure speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Don Sellsted