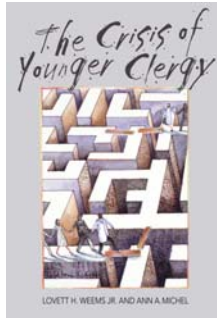


CIRCUITRIDER *Reviews*



The Crisis of Younger Clergy

by Lovett H. Weems Jr. and Ann A. Michel

(Abingdon Press, 2008 ISBN-13 9780687651092)

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The statistics are not encouraging, but surely have been intuited at countless denominational gatherings. The Lewis Center for Church Leadership's report on *Age Trends in the United Methodist Church, 1985-2005* documented the dramatic drop in the number and percentage of UM clergy under the age of 35 in the last twenty years in the United States. In the UMC and in many other denominations, the percentage of clergy under the age of 35 has dropped to below 5%.

Building on that work, Lovett Weems, Distinguished Professor of Church Leadership and Director of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary and Ann Michel, Associate Director of the Lewis Center, have written this important and timely analysis of this crisis. Their book reveals the complex and multi-faceted layers of the crisis. No single factor can explain it—or solve it. Weems and Michel examine seminary culture and practices, financial considerations, support structures, the ordination process, the role of youth and young adults in congregational life and ageism.

One of the values of the book is the way in which its findings dispel any notion that there is a singular cause of the declining numbers of young clergy.

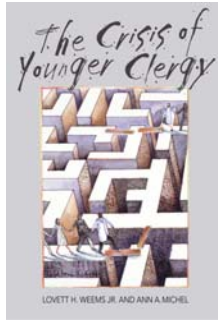
A wide range of factors contribute to youth and young adults not hearing a call from God, not responding, and/or being discouraged by institutional hurdles and roadblocks. In important and helpful ways, each of the many over-lapping factors is examined and addressed. Seminaries, local churches, youth leaders, campus ministers, Boards of Ordained Ministry, district superintendents and bishops, parents, teachers and others can all benefit from reading and discussing the book.

The Weems/Michel analysis would be strengthened by examining any distinctions that might be found among racial/ethnic groups within the UMC. More refined and focused strategies of addressing underlying issues might emerge, as well as more pointed suggestions for change.

Nevertheless, Weems and Michel point to myriad ways in which intentional choices can be made to encourage and support both hearing and living into a call to ministry and leadership in the church. For despite staggering levels of financial debt due to educational loans and despite ministry in aging congregations, the great majority of young clergy express satisfaction in ministry, are optimistic, and remain dedicated to their calling.

As Lovett Weems has said: “Young clergy aren’t necessarily better. They’re just younger. And that matters.” For if, as this work maintains, what is at stake is not only the leadership of young clergy but the very quality and vitality of the church itself, then the creativity, energy and perspective of younger clergy is essential to the future of the church. In a deeply Wesleyan sense, young clergy witness to an outward looking church, in which shared mission can bridge generation gaps with a sense of faithful purpose. And they will enable a more inclusive church, with greater diversity of people and thought, a church open to the needs and challenges of the world.

In *The Crisis of Younger Clergy*, Weems and Michel remain hopeful. They are clear that what is at stake is the very revitalization and future of the church itself. Readers passionate about church renewal will find much to ponder here, as well as many avenues for implementation and action.



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