

## Some “Right Questions” for United Methodist District Superintendents

*Leaders do not have to have the answers. Leaders must have the right questions.* — Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

### Questions to Use at Charge Conferences

One year at each Charge Conference a superintendent asked this question, modeled after Luke 10:29, of each church:

*Who are your neighbors?*

A response from a woman at one church was “Thirteen!” Asked for more information, she said, “Each morning while preparing breakfast I count. I look out my window and count them.” “Count what?” she was asked. “The children getting on the school bus. There are 13 and none of them attend any church.”

Today that congregation has an after-school program for 60 children, half from unchurched families. Many other churches developed after school ministries and trailer park ministries after considering this question.



A new district superintendent used this question at every Charge Conference during his first year as superintendent. His district was mostly smaller membership churches that had declined in membership and finances over a number of years. Instead of leading to a focus on a past “golden age,” the question actually provided the clues needed for renewed vitality in the future. It helped the district build on values already in place within the district:

*What was your church like when it was at its very best?*



A new superintendent wondered what the right question was for him to ask in the coming year as he visited the churches of his district. While his district was one of the stronger in the conference, he had been struck by the absence of candidates pursuing ordained ministry. This was the clue for which he was looking. At each Charge Conference throughout the fall he asked of each congregation:

*Tell me about the last person from your church who went into ordained ministry?*

While often some silence ensued, the question apparently made a difference. Within six months there were 12 persons from the district pursuing candidacy for ordained ministry!



*What is one thing that makes this church special to you?*



*What is one thing your church has done recently that you're really proud of?*



*What is a dream you think God has for your church and its future?*



*What ministry of the church are you passionate about?*



*What character of the Bible tells some aspect of your personal story?*



*Tell me what else I need to know about your church.*

### **Questions to Use in Conversations with Pastors**

A pastor tells of a conversation with her district superintendent. The pastor, not long out of seminary, was completing her fourth year at a church. The question asked by the superintendent caused her to think about her ministry in the coming year very differently. The question her superintendent asked was:

*If you knew you were staying here for five more years, what would you do?*

Then, there was a follow up question:

*Why aren't you doing it now?*



Some questions used by a new superintendent in his first round of meetings with pastors:

1. *What are three things you want me to know about you?*
2. *Tell me about a time that you were thankful that God called you into ordained ministry?*
3. *Tell me about a time when you were acknowledged for something well done in a way that made a lot of difference to you.*

Questions this superintendent used in the second round with pastors:

1. *What are you doing to pay attention to your spiritual life?*
2. *What are you doing with your Sabbath day?*
3. *What risk have you taken in the last year?*
4. *What are three goals you have for the coming year that are measurable?*
5. *Do you want to move or stay?*



Tell me about the two or three people who are most likely to join your church in the next six weeks?



Tell me about one of the youth leaders in your church and what the two of you have talked about recently?



If the youth in your church could change one thing about the church, what would it be?



When do you visit the jail and could I go with you the next time?



A superintendent had a number of pastors serving “family” churches where there was a high expectation of pastoral calling in homes but where the pastors were not doing the calling. The superintendent used these questions:

1. *Will you make three pastoral visits in homes and tell me about those visits when we meet again in a month?*
2. *(at the next meeting) Will you make three pastoral visits in homes each week and tell me about them when we meet again in a month?*

