

Young clergy crisis part two

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

December 13, 2011

I've been getting a lot of feedback on [this post](#) on the Young Clergy Crisis. I know of three people who wrote posts in order to contribute to the conversation (if you responded on your blog, you can link it in the comments and I'll add it to the list).

- [James Michael East](#),

a young seminary student who realizes how much things are changing,

- [Dennis Sanders](#), a young pastor who cautions young pastors not to feel entitled, and

- [Jan Edmiston](#) who delves deeper into the fact that there are high-energy, qualified pastors over 70 who need the money.

(As promised, here's an additional response...)

- [Theresa Cho](#) writes about what they are doing in San Francisco. I'm particularly encouraged by the shift from "death" to "legacy."

Most of the personal feedback I've received has been with pastors who are in their mid-fifties, who are telling me that it's very difficult for people on the other end of the spectrum as well. So one thing is clear--there's a job shortage. It's affecting all of us.

So what can we do? As we wander through this desert, where's the milk and honey? What is God calling us to do and who is God calling us to be? There are many ways to solve this, or at least alleviate the pressure. Here are some possibilities which are focused on starting new ministries:

- 1) Make planting churches, recognizing new immigrant fellowships, and starting new**

ministries our top priorities. I know that we have a million things that we need to do as denominations, but when we have so many churches closing at one time, we will need to put all of our effort into nurturing new bodies.

I can hear the protests right now. Some people are thinking that we need to do social justice work, and they will act as if feeding the hungry is somehow at odds with starting new ministries.

It's not. We can do both, and new ministries that are geared for social justice right from the start will be well suited for a new generation. I know that we're used to thinking of things in red and blue, Republican and Democrat, evangelical and social justice. But the new church development vs. social justice construct is tired and unnecessary.

2) **Support innovative ministers.** One governing body leader suggested that we think of NCD pastors as "missionaries" and support them in the same ways that we have historically supported people who served overseas.

That way, we can allow women and men to understand their context and start the ministry that makes sense in their neighborhood. It also means that churches or denominational bodies come together to support that pastor with a salary and benefits. That would also free the pastor from the pressure of growing a self-sustaining body within three years.

3) **Provide insurance and benefits for bi-vocational ministers.** Many of us realize that bi-vocational ministry will be a reality in the years to come. And many are willing to take up that calling. But, if there's a health issue in our family, then we usually have a calling to take care of our family that becomes louder.

You might be tempted to call foul right now.

"Pastors are too entitled!" But... are denominations too entitled? Shouldn't we be caring for the bodily needs of our leaders? Now you might be asking, "How do we pay for it?" That leads me to my next point.

4) **Reinvest the money, property and resources.** The PCUSA had 88 churches close last year, and there's no sign of church closures slowing down any time soon. Are we reinvesting that money into hiring innovative pastors? If the property is in a good area and in decent condition, are we using it wisely? Are we making it into a bookstore, coffeehouse, art gallery, apartments, preschool or school? Then can we use the money to reinvest into new ministers and ministries?

5)

Encourage innovative partnerships. There are many churches with great resources, and a few of them would like to share those resources with a start-up ministry. I have seen this in a variety of ways. The pastor can be on-call staff at one church while she or he is starting another one.

There are also churches with little resources that wouldn't mind a new church nesting in their building.

What ideas do you have?