

What Can Be Done to Increase the Number of Clergy Who at Least Graduate from College?

by Alonzo J. Campbell

Alonzo Campbell pastored United Methodist Churches and worked on the staff of the Louisiana Conference of The United Methodist Church until he retired in 2008. Currently, he and his wife, Jackie, recruit students for the Interdenominational Theological Center Certificate in Theology program that is located in Louisiana and operated by Reverend Campbell.

When I was a high school student, my pastor, Reverend Alfred Norris, promoted the belief that clergy should be trained. As an instructor/recruiter for the Interdenominational Theological Center's Certificate in Theology Program in Louisiana, the issue of training clergy is now a passion for me. Accordingly, here are some strategies to encourage more clergy to graduate from college and pursue educational training beyond college.

1. Clergy who are college graduates can promote education and offer sermons that make clear that they are well-trained. These types of sermons are well-crafted. They are interesting, concern important issues, and make good and constant use of all disciplines with which competent clergy should be in dialogue. These include theology, sociology, psychology, ecology, history, finance, culture, etc.; the list is endless.
2. Create a ministry incubator as a partnership between a local congregation or group of congregations with a local university or college. Perhaps students can obtain credit for courses they attend. This idea is surely to interest colleges that need more students, churches that need more trained clergy, and clergy who need additional training.
3. College Sundays and college career fairs can be conducted in local congregations on an annual basis in conjunction with back-to-school month during the fall or during African American History month. A ministry component should be included with a multi-media presentation of seminary-trained black clergy who are difference-makers in their local community. Invite local college enrollment departments and seminaries to offer a presentation during a luncheon after the worship service. Request that recruiters share the names and other information regarding African American clergy alums from their institutions.
4. Youth ministries should include an education component that promotes college enrollment, provides college trips and debriefings after each trip, and provides information on obtaining financial aide without going into major debt. The message that college is cheaper if one receives good grades in high school should be firmly implanted in the minds of youths and adults. Relative to clergy interested in obtaining additional education, the pastor and others should regularly raise awareness of the benefits of achieving a college degree and should strongly support education.
5. Invite pastors and local clergy to share the benefits and importance of a college education for their ministry. The following inquires could be posed:

- How has a college education blessed you to reach more souls for Christ?
- Please share ideas that you gained from college for the church and missions/community outreach.
- What college subjects are utilized in your ministry on a regular basis?
- Should I enroll in college if I am past 40, or should I seek different training?

Students often ask me, “What does a local church pastor have to deal with in terms of the lives of persons in the 21st century?” My response is that you encounter every item that you read or hear about in the media. They all have legs and walk into the life of the congregation. Accordingly, clergy need to be as trained as possible to lead today’s congregations.

6. Offer young adult internships in local congregations. In an article entitled “Recruiters Explore Ways to Develop Young Clergy,” Vicki Brown, United Methodist News Service, January 6, 2009, stated, “Local churches that create internships are escalating more college-age youth to enter the ministry after graduation from college.” I would venture to guess that churches that offered internships as ways of getting preachers to go to college and seminary would get many takers, especially in the present economy.

7. Sponsor a tour of a local college library. Periodically, I sponsor a resource seminar/library tour for my ITC Certificate in Theology students, in Louisiana. The students are usually amazed at the volumes and online databases that can bless their Vacation Bible Schools, preaching, and pastoral care ministries. One student mentioned, after a visit, that he wanted to increase his education.