

A JOURNEY TO MINISTRY: The Process in Narrative Curtis Lewis

Jane Dunbar had lived a Camelot life. She met her husband, Richard, at her church youth group and they dated all during high school. As soon as she and Richard graduated, they were married, much to the dismay of both sets of parents. After the wedding, Richard and Jane moved to a city where a Nazarene university was located. Richard enrolled in the university and found a part-time job while Jane worked full time.

Late in Richard's first semester Jane discovered she was pregnant. This necessitated Richard securing full-time employment. Jane's pregnancy was very difficult, and after the birth of a beautiful baby girl, whom she and Richard named Lisa, they were informed that Jane would not be able to have other children. This news devastated the Dunbars, but they rejoiced they were blessed with Lisa.

Richard worked 40 hours a week for a local meatpacking plant and carried a full academic load. Jane stayed at home and cared for their little girl. Richard was able to graduate on schedule with a 3.7 grade point average.

After graduation, Richard designed and developed specialty tools for hanging sheet rock. Eventually his tools were patented and marketed worldwide. The tools were in such demand that Richard made more money than he ever imagined. His business expanded until his company employed over 100 people.

Richard and Jane remained steadfast in their faith during their high school, college, and now, successful business years. They taught Sunday School, worked with youth and served on various committees. Jane was asked to speak at the annual mother-daughter banquet when Lisa was twelve. The response of those in attendance was overwhelming and gratifying. She was a gifted speaker and in high school speech competitions had won several awards.

In her early teen years Jane had felt that God might be calling her into ministry. However, she put the impression of God's call on the shelf and went on with her life. After Richard's graduation she was able to enroll at a nearby community college where she completed two years of basic college work. When Richard was 39, he suffered a massive heart attack at work and died immediately. Jane's world was in turmoil. At times the grief was overwhelming, but Jane found God's grace to be sustaining. Jane threw herself into the church and began to speak for various organizations on the subject of "Life's Unexpected Changes."

CLARIFYING GOD'S CALL

Two years after Richard's death, Jane began to feel a renewal of the tug to ministry that she had felt in her early teen years. At first she shrugged off this tug as part of the grief process. As time passed, the call to ministry became a passion burning within her. Even though there were doubts and fears, she confirmed through prayer and fasting God's call was to full-time pastoral ministry.

During an appointment with her pastor, Jane confided her call, her struggles and fears, her crisis of faith and her confirmation of God's call. Pastor Jones was elated. He felt that God was indeed calling Jane. To help her further understand her call, Pastor Jones asked Jane to complete a Ministry and Gifts Survey. This non-scientific survey measures ten ministry themes identified through a Gallup, Inc. research project for the Church of the Nazarene. Pastor Jones and Jane reviewed the survey results that showed her gifts for pastoral ministry.

Pastor Jones suggested Jane call the District Superintendent, Dr. Peter Jacobs, and schedule a meeting.

When Jane and Pastor Jones met with Dr. Jacobs, he asked Jane questions pertinent to her call and her future hopes and dreams. District Superintendent Jacobs also outlined the next steps, which included:

1. Registering her call with Clergy Development and the District Ministerial Studies Board.
2. Establishing a mentoring plan, with Pastor Jones serving as mentor. He gave Jane and her pastor copies of the *Sourcebook for Ministerial Development*, which would outline the responsibilities of the mentor and the intern.
3. Applying to her local church board for a local minister's license. Dr. Jacobs asked Pastor Jones to order the Local Minister's Packet (U-190) from Nazarene Publishing House. This packet contains the application and renewal forms for a local license, as well as interview guidelines.
4. Issuing the local minister's license after a successful interview with the local church board. Pastor Jones should conduct a public covenant service in the church where Jane would receive her local license. The congregation would be invited to covenant with Jane to support her with their encouragement, love, and prayers as she sought to fulfill God's call upon her life.

When Jane left the district superintendent's office she was encouraged. She felt a support system was in place for her as she endeavored to be faithful to the call of God.

Several weeks later the church board interviewed Jane and issued her a Local Minister's License. Pastor Jones conducted a meaningful Covenant Service, which involved hymns, readings, a charge, and a response from the congregation. Pastor Jones presented Jane her Local Minister's License and her personal copy of the *Sourcebook for Ministerial Development*. Jane was deeply moved by the presence of God, the assurance of His Spirit that this was His will for her, and the uplifting and meaningful service. Jane had taken the first step of her journey. Although a long process was ahead of her, Jane had now begun her journey of ministerial preparation.

EDUCATIONAL PREPARATION

Jane was confronted with the issue of the best way to begin her ministerial educational preparation. She could choose to continue her preparation for ministry at a nearby Nazarene university; and, upon graduation, she could further her education by attending Nazarene Theological Seminary. If this option was not feasible, she might consider Nazarene Bible College to fulfill the basic ministerial educational requirements. Another option might be an online program of study, offered either through NBC or Northwest Nazarene University. If none of these plans were appropriate, the Modular Course of Study administered by the District Ministerial Studies Board, under the supervision of Clergy Development, might be a viable option.

After much prayer and wise counsel, Jane chose to attend the Nazarene university where Lisa was a junior. She enrolled in the university and started on the approved pastoral ministry track. The pastoral ministry track enables a student to fulfill the basic educational requirements for ordination. Jane completed her first year of religion studies and applied to the District Ministerial Studies Board for a District Minister's License. The local congregation of which she was still a member heartily recommended her.

The secretary of the District Ministerial Studies Board informed Jane via letter that she would need to meet the District Ministerial Studies Board and the District Ministerial Credentials Board. Times for both meetings were suggested. Jane responded promptly and the interviews were scheduled.

When Jane met with the District Ministerial Studies Board, she was asked questions such as:

1. Please describe for us your faith journey. Be specific about your conversion and your encounter with the Holy Spirit in His fullness.
2. What were the circumstances surrounding your call to ministry?
3. Would you describe for us how you see yourself in ministry? Also, please share with us what you feel are your graces and gifts for ministry.
4. What are your feelings about the sixteen Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene? Please talk to us about them.
5. Do you have any problems with the guidelines for Christian conduct as outlined in the *Manual*?
6. How do you see yourself relating to the local church, the district, and the general church?

When Jane had finished her interview she was affirmed by the District Ministerial Studies Board and they prayed for her.

Her next meeting was with the District Ministerial Credentials Board who asked about her call and her relationship with Jesus Christ. The purpose of this first meeting was to introduce themselves to Jane and to encourage her in her studies. The District Ministerial Credentials Board affirmed her and prayed God's blessings upon her as she continued her education.

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

Jane received her first District Minister's License at the District Assembly. This was another confirmation of her call by God and the Church.

When Jane returned to the university for the fall semester she was informed of a nearby church seeking a part-time associate pastor. The duties were calling, teaching, discipling, and some preaching. She interviewed for the position and was hired. For the next few years Jane studied at the university and served as a staff member at Grace Church of the Nazarene. Since Grace Church of the Nazarene was on the same district where Jane was licensed, she did not have to transfer district membership. Jane continued to meet yearly with the District Ministerial Studies Board and Grace Church of the Nazarene recommended her for renewal of her District Minister's License. She also met with the District Ministerial Credentials Board each year.

Time went by quickly. Soon Jane was in the last semester of college. She definitely felt called to full-time pastoral work. Under the direction of her college counselor and pastoral mentor she carefully worked on a resume. She sent her resume to several districts where she felt she might be interested in serving. Her own District Superintendent, Peter Jacobs, contacted Jane about a church fifty miles from the university. Jane carefully prayed and sought God's direction. Feeling very positive, she gave Dr. Jacobs permission to present her name to the church board for consideration. A few days later, Dr. Jacobs informed her that the church board of Covington Church of the Nazarene would like to interview her. The interview went well and the church board voted unanimously to present her name to the congregation as a candidate for pastor. Jane received an excellent vote from the congregation. After a week of prayer and fasting, she felt led to accept the call to become the pastor of the Covington Church of the Nazarene.

CANDIDACY

Jane would now enter another phase of ministry known as Candidacy. This is the time of ministry experience that may lead to ordination. She was now accountable to the local church, the District Ministerial Studies Board, and the District Ministerial Credentials Board. Jane immensely enjoyed her ministry at Covington. She graduated from the Course of Study via her university work. As she neared the completion of her second year as pastor Jane received a letter from the secretary of the District Ministerial Credentials Board requesting that she meet with them as a candidate for ordination.

When the day of Jane's appointment arrived she found herself a bit anxious about the meeting. At her appointment Jane was greeted warmly and one of the members opened the interview with prayer. The chairperson of the District Ministerial Credentials Board (DMCB) spoke briefly and reminded Jane that ordination was a privilege, not a right. She also explained that ordination was an *Authorizing Act* in which the church approves one whom God has called. The chairperson stressed the fact that ordination is also a *Confirming Act* in which all requirements for ordination have been met and one has been judged worthy of ordination by the entire church. She reminded Jane that if she were recommended for ordination, such an act would have to be approved by the District Assembly and the presiding General Superintendent.

When the chairperson had finished, the formal oral examination began. One by one the members of the DMCB asked questions in critical areas such as:

1. Her personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
2. Her personal experience of entire sanctification (Scripture references).
3. Articles of Faith
4. Church
5. General/Special Rules
6. Graces/Gifts
7. Spiritual Discipline and Devotional Life
8. Family Life (Her relationship with her daughter)
9. Finances
10. Future Goals
11. Books she was reading
12. Lifelong learning
13. Her personal testimony and call to ministry.

When the question and answer session ended, Jane was excused. After some discussion among the board, the DMCB Secretary informed Jane that the District Ministerial Credentials Board had voted unanimously to recommend her to the District Assembly for ordination. She was deeply moved and again felt the witness of the Holy Spirit upon her life and call.

Six weeks later, as Jane knelt at the altar of the church, the General Superintendent ordained her as an elder in the Church of the Nazarene. As Dr. Smith presented her with her ordination credentials, he asked her to promise that if a time came when she could not support the doctrinal position of the Church, or if there was a moral lapse, she would voluntarily give her credentials back to the Church. Jane agreed.

Ordination was the highlight of Jane's life and ministry. She would never forget the affirmation of fellow clergy and spouses, her family, and her church. She wished Richard could have been there for this time of grace. God's presence was overwhelming and she felt so unworthy.

LIFELONG LEARNING

Ordination for Jane was not the end, but the beginning of a commitment to Lifelong Learning. Jane realized that she was called to excellence and her church offered various opportunities to learn, to stretch, and to grow. She firmly believed *Manual 426*, which states that the Church of the Nazarene understands ministry to include “a process of lifelong learning.” *Manual 426.6* “calls for a pattern of lifelong learning to enhance one’s ministry. A minimum expectation is 20 contact hours each year.”

Jane came to understand that the Church of the Nazarene deeply believes that Lifelong Learning is a part of the spiritual and professional stewardship of its ordained ministry. Opportunities were available to Jane from various sources to earn two (2) Continuing Education Units (20 contact hours) each year. Jane would need to report her continuing education to the Clergy Development through her district as well on her annual report to the District Assembly. Yes, she was ordained, but she would never stop learning.

It was six years from the time she received her Local Minister’s License until her ordination. Her pilgrimage had been long and hard; but Jane Dunbar would tell you it was worth it. She would also want you to know that she is still learning. IT IS A LIFELONG JOURNEY!

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