

Discovery!

IN March, 35 youth and young adults gathered at Camp Wesley Woods for “Discovery,” a Holston retreat for young people exploring ministry. Here, five of those participants reflect on their experiences and how God might be leading them. **By Annette Bender**



Isaac Collins

Age: 17 on June 20

Church: First Pearisburg UMC, Tazewell District

Pinnacle point: Last year at a lay witness mission in Floyd, Va., Isaac found himself asking, “What does God have for me?” “I was tired of waiting around for an answer,” he says. Then an adult counselor reassured him, “Isaac, God doesn’t make you a certain way for nothing. He gave you your personality traits so that you can use them.”

Next step: Isaac started to think that he might be called to ministry as a Christian rock star. “Music is an essential part of worship,” he explains. “Singing is something I enjoy doing, and I’m not half bad at it. I love traveling, and I find peace on the road. Is it going to happen? I don’t know. But it’s reassuring to know that God will use my character traits in his plan for me. I definitely come back to that thought a lot.”

The down side: As the son of a Holston clergy member (the Rev. Tony Collins), Isaac is aware of some of the sacrifices of a life in ministry – especially as his father is projected for a new appointment this month. “When you dedicate yourself to ministry, you’re not just making that decision for yourself. You’re making it for your family, too. I wouldn’t want my children to have to move all the time. It’s something I struggle with, especially now that I have to move before my senior year.”



Susanna Grove

Age: 15

Church: Cokesbury UMC, Knoxville District

Granddad’s star: Susanna’s grandfather was the Rev. Alton Johnson, a Holston clergy member who died in 2003. “Even before I felt a call to ministry, my Granddad noticed that inner light in me.” As Susanna watched her pastors serve Holy Communion or perform other leadership roles, her grandfather would say to her, “You know you could do that.”

Discerning the call: Two years ago at a Cokesbury summer youth event, Susanna was upset when an altar call went out and her friends started having “emotional responses. But I didn’t feel anything.” So she prayed, “God, give me something.” Immediately, she felt what she describes as “warm love running through me. I didn’t know what it was at the time.” Later, she felt the experience was a watershed event in her call to ministry.

Something to ponder: The biggest lesson that Susanna took from Discovery: “Don’t ignore your call,” which some people might do because of the fears and stresses associated with a career in ministry. “It’s kind of nerve-racking to know you have that responsibility,” Susanna explains. “Ultimately, you’re being called to take care of God’s children.” She is also aware that some of her peers don’t understand her calling: “I tell them what I want to do, and they look at me like I’m crazy.”

Ministry focus: Susanna is considering ordained ministry, but ultimately, “I trust God to put me in the right place at the right time.”

Pass it on

What can you do to encourage young people to consider a life in ministry? Holston leaders offer the following suggestions:

☞ “I’d encourage trying to plant some seeds during confirmation classes. That’s a time when many young people are beginning an intentional journey of faith and learning what it means to claim the name Christian. Of course, follow-up to those initial seeds is critical, by giving young people an opportunity to help lead worship and serve on various ministry teams during their youth years.”

Rev. Stella Roberts,
Knoxville District superintendent

☞ “As a person working with youth or as a friend in the congregation, you may be the instrument God is relying on to help a youth discern a call into ministry. By affirming youth, recognizing their gifts publicly, taking opportunities to talk about their faith journey (and yours), and making opportunities for them to participate in worship planning and leading, *you* may be the human connection that allows God’s thoughts and purposes to be made known to a young person.”

Rev. Caryl Griffin,
Wesley Institute director

☞ “I believe congregations and pastors should provide opportunities for young people to experience being in ministry. We could train them to be scripture readers and liturgists, to visit hospitals, to go with altar guild persons, and to assist the pastor in serving home communion. Experience is a good teacher and motivator.”

Bishop James Swanson Sr.

☞ “I ask every pastor/parish relations committee to look for young people who might be potential candidates. I also ask pastors to speak to the call, invite people to answer the call at church services, and pray for God to call our sons and daughters to ordained ministry.”

Rev. Charles Lippse,
Cleveland District superintendent

☞ “God is calling a new generation of young men and women to devote their lives to ministry. Where their passions, talents and gifts meet the needs of the world, there is where God is calling them to serve!”

Rev. Ken Henderlight,
Oak Ridge District superintendent



Lyndsey Bell

Age: 16

Church: Asbury UMC, Morristown District

Faith background: “I’ve been through a lot of family trouble, and I’m grateful to God for all that he has done. I’m glad to have someone to hold on to.” Lyndsey became aware of a possible call to ministry at Resurrection 2005, Holston’s winter youth event. She signed a card indicating her interest and was later invited to attend Discovery.

Role model: Lyndsey credits her youth pastor, the Rev. Brad Hyde, for planting seeds that led her to consider a career in ministry. “I always make mistakes, and I get resentful, sometimes. Sometimes I don’t know if I could help someone else if I’m hurting, myself. But Brad pulls me aside and tells me that God still wants to use me. He’s influenced my life a lot.”

The right path: With all the challenges and temptations of being a teen-ager, Lyndsey has learned (from Brad) that she needs to “surround myself with people who will help me stay accountable. I try to keep friends who will keep me on the right path.”

No robe, please: “I’m not good at public speaking,” Lyndsey says, so she doesn’t see herself as a preacher. She’s also apprehensive about how “serious” preachers seem to be. “I don’t have to be behind the pulpit – with the whole robe thing – to be in ministry. Being a missionary appeals to me more.”

Tiffany Burchette

Age: 20

Church: Chestnut Grove Missionary Baptist in Norton, Va.

Methodist connection: Tiffany learned about Discovery through her involvement at the Wesley Foundation at University of Virginia College at Wise (Big Stone Gap District). Director Beth Gibson saw something in Tiffany and said, “God might be calling you into ministry,” before recommending the Holston event at Wesley Woods.

Kid spirit: Last month, Tiffany graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in education. “I’m waiting to see where God wants me to go, but I’ve noticed that I get so excited whenever I work with children at school or church. I have a love for children, and I’m praying to see if that’s the area of ministry where God wants me.”

Thanks, Mom: Originally from Virginia Beach, Va., Tiffany says her parents are strong influences in her life. It was her mother who first noticed her gifts in children’s ministry while Tiffany was still in high school. “She told my pastor that I would be glad to help any time, and so I started doing Christmas plays and Sunday school,” Tiffany explains. “It was truly a blessing that my mother got me involved in that.”

Positive thinking: While some young people feel an uneasiness when realizing a call to ministry, Tiffany doesn’t. “I’ve always felt comfortable and never felt any pressure to follow God’s path.”



Alex Lawson

Age: 18

Church: Jacksboro UMC, Oak Ridge District

Discovery moment: After Resurrection 2005, Alex told his youth minister that he wanted to “get more involved” in ministry. His minister signed him up for Discovery. “I felt God’s presence stronger there than at any other time of my life. I am sure that he was there with us in those rooms,” Alex says of the weekend at Wesley Woods. Since then, he has thought about his particular gifts and aspirations and how he hopes to use them in youth ministry, his area of interest.

The gift: “Everybody says God’s got a gift for you. I know what mine is,” says Alex. “I can talk to anyone for a length of time, look into their eyes, see their problems and understand what kind of person they are. I know what to say to make them feel better.”

The goal: After his May 25 graduation, Alex plans to study acting at the University of Tennessee. Acting appeals to him for many reasons (“I think it would teach me a lot about life, to take on other people’s roles”), but he also thinks it would give him an advantage in ministering to youth. “I know what it’s like to be a teen-ager and not having someone to talk to. Imagine being a famous actor and also being a youth pastor,” Alex explains. “Kids would really want to talk to you and share their problems with you. That might be what God wants me to do.” ■