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I was brought up at La Trinidad United Methodist Church, which is part of the Rio Grande Conference. I have a huge passion for ministry in The United Methodist Church. I have been so involved in the church that I began to understand the traditions, heritage, and politics of the church. I currently serve on the National Leadership Development Advisory Team of The United Methodist Church, whose focus is to talk about young clergy and how the church can support and encourage them.

At the young age of 21, I have already been educated and informed on the state of the church. I've had the opportunity to hear various opinions about where we are headed and why it is this way.

I will first say that I have a sense of loyalty to this denomination because it has given me a spiritual foundation. By the time I was a pre-teen, I was taught that Scripture was of utmost importance and then I was taught that the teachings of John Wesley were based on Scripture and to be used in our lives.

My first thought about the current state of the church is: What changed?

It seems that from the time I was a young teen till now, the focus on Scripture and theology is not stressed enough to young people or even to families interested in joining the church. Many leaders that I had when I was young have left. They have either been burned out by working with young people or have found other places to go to church where they do not have to serve.

I can honestly say after working with my own youth group while I was a youth and even now as I am a young adult that much has changed in the makeup of our young people. Many of the young people come from single-parent or divorced homes. A good portion of them are dealing with issues that the church will not address. Scriptural and theological teachings and discipleship helped me to stay strong in my faith, but how can our present generation of young people have a foundation when people are not willing to disciple and teach them? My prayer and the prayer of many others is that we can raise a generation of young people that are not scripturally and theologically illiterate and that there will be adults and young adults ready and willing to help them.

This generation is moving toward non-denominationalism. Instead of accepting that trend, we should focus on the teachings of John Wesley to gain back the passion for ministry that helped the early church to thrive.

If we were truly working like Christ showed us through his servant, John Wesley, we might actually flourish rather than accept that we are a "dying" church. Young people are searching for truth and they want a true relationship. We are relational people so if we are not taking the time to form relationships, there is no hope for the future of our church.

The church is engaged in technological efforts, but the focus should be on discipleship, not using PowerPoint for a sermon. The church needs to seek out people and encourage them in

their uniqueness and be able to recognize the callings that people have on their lives that are so often brushed aside. When this occurs new leadership will arise and help the congregation to cultivate what it has rather than focusing on what it doesn't have.

I have the same opinion when it comes to "contemporary" or "traditional" worship. I truly believe that a church is set up to be a community of faith, not a drive-thru where we can tell our pastors and leadership what we want and how we want it and if we don't get it we leave. Despite different styles of worship, if you have a support system for the congregation, people will not complain about technicalities.

When it comes to the politics of the church, I will simply say that I am tired of seeing this church become so stuck on issues that it completely misses the opportunity to even be in ministry.

The church is connectional and because of this connectionalism, I have been able to form life-long spiritual friendships with other United Methodists all over the world. This is the strength of The United Methodist Church, but I believe the focus should always be on the workings in the local church. This is where true ministry takes place and when I say the "church," I mean the people, the communities, and surroundings in which our churches are placed.

With my involvement in the National Leadership Development Advisory Team, I was encouraged to see that there are other young people and adults who support them that are ready to make changes in the church to begin truly supporting young clergy. This team gives me hope for The United Methodist Church. I believe there is hope for our church if we remain focused on ministry within our local churches and if we truly work to stop being complacent about where we are and start to truly minister to people.