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## *A New Program Helps Young Presbyterians Catch the Beat of Christian Service*

BY MARTHA MILLER

**K**im Phelps felt a pull in a certain direction much of her life. It wasn't until recently that she recognized that pull as a call by God.

The call for Kim came in the form of a literal call on the telephone asking her to help with a church outreach project. The person on the other end of the line was aware of Kim's gifts of organization and invited her to assist in the process of sponsoring four refugees from the Sudan. It was through this experience and that one telephone call that she discovered gifts she had not yet realized she possessed: a capacity for compassion and openness toward others, combined with persistence.

Many of us have had a similar experience. We feel a small pull or nudge in some particular direction, but it is through the words or actions of another that we can confirm that this is, indeed, a call from God, one that is important to recognize.

For many young people and young adults, this experience is especially critical as they seek to answer the questions, "What is God calling me to be?" and "How can I use the gifts God has given me?"

### **Listening to the Beat**

Through the vision of a Presbyterian elder in partnership with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Fund for Theological Education, and with financial support from The Lilly Endowment, Inc., a program was created to encourage young adults to explore their call to ministry in all walks of life. Now a part of the

PC(USA) Office of Vocation and known as the Presbyterian Leadership Search Effort, or PLSE (pronounced "pulse"), the program is a ministry that helps young people clarify their call and explore their vocation.

The mission of PLSE is to identify and nurture young people for leadership in the church and the world, in partnership with PC(USA) congregations, presbyteries, colleges and universities, collegiate ministries, seminaries and conference centers. It is built on words from the PC(USA) *Book of Order*, in response to scripture: "God calls a people to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; to follow Jesus Christ in obedient discipleship; to use the gifts and abilities God has given, honoring and serving God in personal life, in household and families, in daily occupations, in community, nation, and the world" (W-5.6001).

Young people, 15–25 years old, who enroll in PLSE, are called PLSE Leaders. As such, they connect to service and leadership opportunities throughout the church and beyond. They gain access to an online group, for conversation with others in the program, and receive invitations for participation in discernment and exploration events offered across the country. Thus, they expand sources for relationship building and growth in faith.

For example, a young man or woman who feels a pull toward justice ministries may decide to participate in the PC(USA) Peacemaking Young Adult Network. A young woman may find her gifts used through Racial Ethnic Young Women Together (REYWT).



Presbyterian young adults attend a vocation discernment event at the San Francisco Theological Seminary.

Still others may find a connection to a Presbyterian-related college, or feel a call to pastoral ministry and enter one of our theological seminaries.

PLSE does not focus on occupations; that may come as a surprise to some. Instead, PLSE provides young people an opportunity to “sample” ways they can answer the big question of what God’s call to them might be. In a culture that focuses on what someone does rather than who someone is, this instrument for vocational discernment can help the focus swing to the importance of being a child of God—an identity to claim and state proudly.

Since that initial phone call, Kim has become a leader in her congregation in Anchorage, Kentucky, helping to organize several outreach ministry projects. She says, “Through this work, I have come to know people from very different walks of life and cultures, in a way that has opened my eyes and forever changed my life.”

## Responding to the Rhythm

How can you help? Through the PLSE program, adults who recognize a gift in a young person have the opportunity to serve God by acknowledging and encouraging that young person’s potential call to ministry. This can happen in several ways. For example:

- Adults can recommend a young person as a PLSE Leader. Each prospective PLSE Leader must fill out an enrollment form, demonstrating their activity in a particular congregation. This form must also include a recommendation from someone like you!
- Adults who are in ministry with young people may choose to become a PLSE Partner. PLSE Partners receive many of the same notifications and opportunities as PLSE Leaders, so that they can disseminate this information to those who might best benefit from it.

One such partner is Charlene Preston, a Presbyterian elder in Florida. She has obeyed her lifelong call to serve God through exercising her gift of love for children and all they bring to life. She has been in ministry with young people in a variety of ways and has, many

times, helped them identify their own God-given gifts. As she reflects on her ministry, Charlene finds great joy in following these young people through the years and hearing, after they have “grown up,” how significant was her walk with them along their faith journey.

As PLSE grows and more lives are touched through its vision, mission and, of course, relationships, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will benefit from members who live their lives with the intention of their calling. Katherine Trentham, another example of a woman who has identified her God-given gifts and is living her call, has offered advice to young people who are discerning their own call. “I think one of the most important things to remember is that there are many different calls . . . We can all serve God and each other by being our best selves, no matter where we end up—whether student, parent, co-worker, church member . . . you name it!”

Presbyterian Leadership Search Effort is an invitation to you to touch the lives of young Presbyterians today and help them feel the beat of God’s call . . . PLSE! 🍷

Martha Miller is the associate for certification and Christian vocation in the Office of Vocation for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly in Louisville, Kentucky.

Learn more about PLSE, and download enrollment forms, PLSE interpretative brochures and resources for exploring vocation with young people, from [www.pcusa.org/plse](http://www.pcusa.org/plse). If you have additional questions, contact Martha Miller, [Martha.Miller@pcusa.org](mailto:Martha.Miller@pcusa.org), 888/728-7228, ext. 5751; or Ameer Marks, [Ameer.Marks@pcusa.org](mailto:Ameer.Marks@pcusa.org), 888/728-7228, ext. 5708.