



It was 9:45 Sunday morning and I was on my way to the pastor's office. As a high school senior, this felt somewhat akin to heading to the principal's office. Questions abounded—What would this conversation be about? Had I done anything recently that merited this meeting?

I later learned that Pastor Melvin Sylvester made it an annual practice to have a serious conversation with each of his church's high school seniors to talk about their future. His intended take-away from that session was that each senior would have Christian vocation on his or her mind, along with all the other career options they had in front of them.

That session with the pastor, the shepherd of souls, served to make space for the questions—Might God want me in full-time Christian ministry? And if he does, how should I best prepare?

So there I was—17 years old, in the pastor's office, having him look me in the eye and ask me serious and pointed questions. My answers would determine how I would spend the rest of my life.

Various events had led up to that meeting in Mel Sylvester's office. Sylvester, himself, had been shaped for the ministry by significant input from influential people in his life. His mother, who was raised in The Salvation

Army in Calgary, had birthed two daughters. She then prayed to her heavenly Father in the words of Hannah, "If you give me a son, I'll covenant to raise him as best I can, to be your servant."

Sylvester had not known that story and we can only imagine his great surprise when, many years later, he heard his mother, visiting him in the very first church he pastored, tell this story to a Sunday school class.

Some years after his mother's prayer, one of the early church planters of the Alliance in Western Canada, a woman named Mavis Anderson, had noticed young Sylvester in the church at Beaverlodge, Alberta. One day when Anderson ran into him at a youth rally, she said, "Melvin, you need to go to our Alliance School in Regina (Western Canadian Bible Institute). I believe God has great plans for you and it needs to start with Bible school." Two years later he enrolled. (*Forgotten Voices: Women in Ministry in The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada*, by Barbara Howe.)

Mel Sylvester had also been impacted by Gerald McGarvey, a young missionary candidate doing home service in Beaverlodge, who would encourage him and friend, Neill Foster, to always speak to students. McGarvey said, "Covet students for the Lord and for the ministry."



## WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE THE GIFTING OF GOD IN THE NEXT GENERATION

number of elders and Pastor Gordon Fowler spoke with her in the lobby of Foothills saying, “What are you going to do with your life? We’ve been watching you and want to affirm your giftedness. If you want to go to seminary, we’ll help with the finances.”

Charter recalls, “I remember going out to my car that morning and thinking I’d explode—these men thought I had gifts for ministry! I began, immediately, to look into CTC (as it was then) in Regina.” Dr. Charter has gone on to hold a variety of ministry positions in Eastern Europe and North America.

In Myra Brown’s baby book, her mother wrote, “We gave Myra to God before she was born and we pray she will be a missionary.” Brown grew up with this sense of destiny; she never considered anything else. Her time in Africa with Global Ministries spanned nearly 30 years.

While we are hard-pressed to find a ‘missionary’ call defined in Scripture, there is sufficient narrative in both Testaments to show a pattern of God leading women and men into a life of Kingdom service—part-time for some, full-time for others. Mission history, including that of our Alliance family, is also replete with examples of God’s leading individuals, young and old, into Christian vocation.

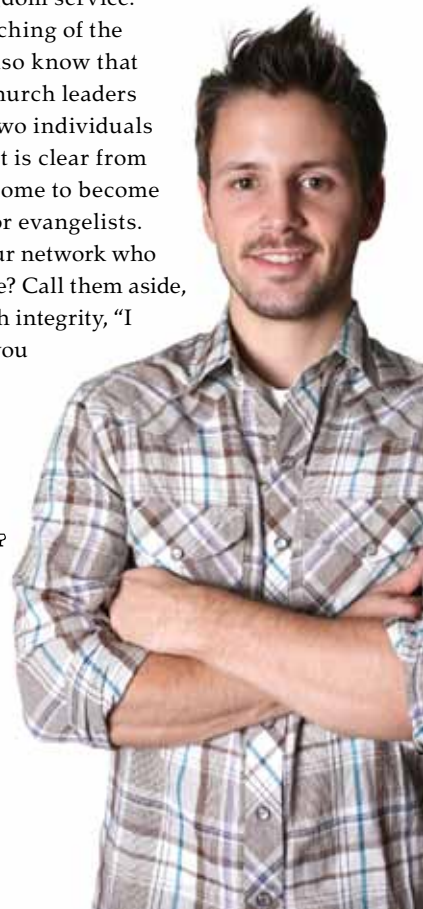
As we move beyond Antalya, this is clearly the time to move with renewed intention, to nurture the call of God in our family of churches and in the networks where God has placed us. We need to recognize the gifting of God in the next generation and be much more alert to the nudging of God’s Spirit to speak to those in our church who should be considering Christian vocation, those who should begin preparing for Kingdom service.

While we understand the teaching of the priesthood of all believers, we also know that it seemed good to the Antioch church leaders and the Holy Spirit to set aside two individuals for special vocational ministry. It is clear from Scripture that God’s plan is for some to become pastors, International Workers or evangelists.

Are there young people in your network who could benefit from your influence? Call them aside, look them in the eye, and say with integrity, “I see great potential in you. Have you considered training to become a pastor or International Worker?”

I’m so grateful that 43 years ago my pastor, Mel Sylvester, was nudged by God to set the missional trajectory for my life. ☪

*Dr. Ron Brown, who worked for three decades in Africa with Global Ministries, is a missions coach with The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada, based in Calgary*



The influence of his mother, the encouragement of Anderson and the challenge by McGarvey shaped Mel Sylvester, but there were other notable influences in his life who mentored him along these same lines.

There was Rev. Lowell Young who came one time for a week of meetings when Sylvester was pastoring in Swift Current, Saskatchewan. Young’s philosophy was to begin recruiting full-time workers in churches and to meet with Grade 12 students and

challenge them to Christian vocations.

He saw great value in being able to say, with integrity, “I see potential in you,” and then challenge them to prepare for ministry. Lowell Young felt that affirming youth was huge. It was the pastor who should be proactive in this way.

Sylvester remembers an old quote from the *Alliance Witness* (now *alife*): “Missionaries are made at home.” This truth motivated him and his wife Marion to encourage each of their children to know God’s will for their lives. There was never pressure to enter the ministry but there was always encouragement to know and follow God’s will for each of them.

Not surprisingly, Sylvester made the affirmation of students a part of his ministry. One day, this decision

to affirm caused him to have a coffee with Ben Elliott, a college freshman. He said to Ben, “I feel prompted

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to tell you that you seriously need to consider vocational ministry.” (Elliott and his wife are currently International Workers in Indonesia.)

Others besides Mel Sylvester have had this ministry of affirmation to young people in their worlds. In 1977, Miriam Charter, a French teacher in the Calgary public system, was deeply involved in the ministries of Foothills Alliance. One Sunday morning, after the service, a