

## CANDIDACY SUMMIT: Pre-Course Work

The Candidacy Summit is designed to allow participants ways to reflect on God's call on their lives for ministry, be it as a lay person, a certified lay minister, a licensed local pastor, or an ordained clergy person.



Toward this effort, it is important to consider one's life and the moments where God's call has been experienced.

**As you prepare to participate in the Candidacy Summit, you will need to complete the following:**

- **Write a Call Statement** which captures the pivotal moments in which you have experienced God's call upon your life.
  - The Statement should be no less than a page, and no more than two pages.
- **Complete the River of Life exercise** which is designed to help you review your life in a variety of aspects. The instructions for this exercise are below.
  - The River is intended as a semi-artistic assignment. You are encouraged to draw/color your river as well as using words and symbols.
- **Put It All Together** by mapping the major points of your Call Statement in the midst of your River of Life. After your River of Life Exercise, you will be directed to return to your Call Statement and put the two together.

### RIVER OF LIFE: A Life Review Activity

Taken and Adapted from Joyce Ann Mercer, *Girl Talk, God Talk Why Faith Matters to Teenage Girls - and Their Parents* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 135-136. Used with permission of the author.

Begin with a blank sheet of paper. Before you put anything on the paper, think briefly about the course of your whole life. If you were able to compare your life with a river, what would the river look like?

- When and where are the smooth, flowing waters -those times when events and relationships seem generally positive with a sense of ease about your life?
- When does the river take a sudden turn (and what caused the turn), or change from smooth waters to rough, tumbling rapids or to an excited rush of water?
- Are there rocks or boulders falling into your river - unexpectedly landed there, changing its direction forever?
- Are there points at which it flows powerfully and purposefully or seems to slow to a trickle?

#### Instructions

**A.** Draw your river of life with its bends and turns, its smooth waters and rough spots, its strength/vitality, and its direction.

- Write in your approximate age, and/or dates, along the flow of your river. Identify on your drawing the various key "marker events" in your life - the boulders in the river, or places where the river changes course -that shape your story.
- If you were able to divide your life journey into sections, where would the section divisions occur?
- Give names to each of the sections of your life river.

**B.** Now think about the various people who have accompanied you along this river's journey.

What relationships have been the most significant at different point in your life?

- Who has most shaped you?
- Have there been significant losses of relationship along the way? What groups or communities of people were most important?
- Record these key relationships and losses in the appropriate places on your river of life.

*If you wish, you might also want to jot down some of the thoughts and feelings that go along with these relationships.*

C. As you look over the diagram of your life river, think about the different ways you have experienced and understood God across your life.

- Who or what was God to you at the different times depicted in your diagram? What caused you to feel closer to, or more distant from, God at these different times?
- What places or situations were encounters with the Sacred for you?
- Have you faced situations or experiences devoid of any sense of God/the Sacred?

*Decide on a way to note these matters, with words and/or symbols, and place them into your river.*

D. In relation to your life's journey,

- Are there times of significant pain or suffering - yours or others' - that shape the flow of your life river?
- What has happened along the journey of your life that you associate with evil?

*Add these elements to your river.*

E. Rivers do not exist in isolation but are always part of a larger ecology. So, too, is human life situated in a larger world.

- What was going on in the world - local, regional, and world events - that shaped the flow of your river?

*Using words and/or symbols, place these events in the appropriate locations on your river.*

F. As you reflect on your river of life,

- What values, commitments, causes, or principles were most important to you at a given point in your life?
- Toward what goals, if any, were your primary energies directed - or, metaphorically speaking, what purposes and ends helped to shape the flow of life waters at a given time in your experience?

*Note these on your river.*

### **Taking a Step Back**

As you finish depicting your river of life, take a look over the whole diagram.

- Do its symbols and words seem to portray how you think and feel about the whole of your life?
- Is there some important element left out?

*Make adjustments as needed.*

## **PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: Your Call Story in the River of Life**

Prior to charting the River of your life, you were invited to write your Call Story.

Now, hold your River of Life and your Call Story side by side.

- Take a moment to map the points of your Call Story on your River of Life.
- In Methodism, John Wesley taught there are three kinds of grace:

**Prevenient grace** literally means "the grace that comes before." Prevenient grace us for the dawning awareness that God loves us so much that God seeks us out first.

**Justifying grace** happens when Christians abandon all attempts to justify themselves before God through religious and moral practices. When God's "justifying grace" is experienced, it's a time of pardon and forgiveness, of new peace, joy and love.

**Sanctifying grace** enables us to grow into the image of Christ and leads to inward and outward holiness.<sup>1</sup>

Are there moments in your call story you can identify one, two, or all three of the graces?

*Decide on a way to note these points with words, symbols, or colors and add them to your River.*

Remember that no drawing can possibly capture all that shapes a person's life journey or call story. This is intended to be a beginning point for reflection with yourself and others.

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<sup>1</sup> Methodist definitions of grace taken from United Methodist Board of Discipleship Ministries: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-grace-is-it-different-from-peace#:~:text=Bishop%20Will%20Willimo n%20describes%20grace,%E2%80%94%20prevenient%2C%20justifying%20and%20sanctifying.>