

A Short Summer

by Tom Wilkinson, Vice President, Development
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Is it my imagination, or is the summer getting shorter? Here in Orange Park where we live, the last day of school was May 20, and the kids go back on August 9. When you do the math, it's not that much shorter than summer breaks I remember from my school days, stretching from Memorial Day to Labor Day, but the summer sure *seems* shorter.

For students entering college or graduate school, not only has the summer gotten shorter, but the educational price tag has increased dramatically, forcing many students to scramble for student loans. David Dodge, Executive Director of the Florida Conference Division of Ministry, reports that the average seminary graduate leaves school not only with a Master of Divinity degree but a whopping \$30,000 student loan debt, quite a load for a beginning pastor starting his or her ministerial career at the low end of the compensation curve. This creates a vexing problem and a delicate balancing act: how to answer God's call to ministry while at the same time balancing the checkbook, paying off the student loan debt, saving for children's educations and for retirement.

Much is at stake, including the future of our church. Well-educated, committed leaders – both clergy and lay – are absolutely essential for the 21st century church.

So what are we to do? One solution that can be implemented in the local church is an endowed scholarship fund. Donors can be encouraged to make outright gifts or deferred, planned gifts such as bequests or remainder interests in charitable trusts or annuities to an endowment fund at their local church. The principal or corpus of the fund remains untouched, and its earnings are made available for scholarships, thus ensuring that scholarships will be available in perpetuity. With the assistance of the Florida United Methodist Foundation, several churches in the Florida Conference already have scholarship programs like this in place, some for undergraduates, some for graduate or seminary students, still others for camp scholarships. What they have in common is an eye toward the future, and a commitment to assist the leaders of tomorrow's church in their educations.

If your church is interested in starting such a program, the Florida United Methodist Foundation is available to help. Call, click or write us at 1-800-282-8011, extension 106; www.fumf.org; or PO Box 3767, Lakeland, FL 33802.

