

# Discern equips students to understand, follow call to ministry

*By Megan Young  
Associate Editor*

Calling out the called was the focus of the sixth annual Discern retreat which brought 49 ministry-minded high school and college students from across Mississippi to Garaywa Camp and Conference Center in Clinton January 5-6.

Since it's inception six years ago, Discern has given students an outlet to contemplate their call to ministry and explore how they can respond to that call.

"We want to help them understand what all that means, what all that entails," said Ken Hall, student ministry consultant in the Discipleship/Sunday School department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board. "How do they know if God is really calling them to full-time vocational ministry? What are different ways that God calls? What does He call us to? What does that look like down the road?"

For students like Makayla Sloan, a high school senior and member of Smithville Church, Smithville, Discern provided an opportunity to explore the answer to those questions.

"I feel this deep need to do something for the Lord," said Sloan. "I have this deep need to serve him, not this deep need to just want to be used by him. I'm not exactly sure what that means yet. So to come to a place that I've struggled with a question for so long – to come somewhere that is helping me slowly but surely understand what he's calling me to do – is a blessing in itself."

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Mandy Phillips, Mississippi College BSU director (left), connects with students during lunch at Discern on January 6 at Garaywa Camp and Conference Center in Clinton. (Photo credit: Bart Lambricht)

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“We bring in different practitioners from different areas of ministry to come in and let them spend time with them to find out how did they know God was calling them? How did they get led to the ministry that they’re doing now?” said Hall.

Discern not only teaches students how to understand their call to ministry, but it emphasizes helping their youth leaders guide them through that journey.

“We certainly have students who feel called to ministry. We

want to find ways to equip them, and equip the youth leaders who would be equipping them,” said Aaron Sibley, student minister at First Church, Brandon, and Discern planning team member.

L.D. Gillespie, youth pastor at Green Valley Church, Pontotoc, said that the two-day retreat was beneficial to him and the four students he brought because it exposed them to the experiences and expertise of ministry leaders in an expanded context outside of their church.

“You go to church camp or D-Now and they hear the things you might say yourself, but when you go somewhere else, it just kind of hits a little different as we hear from someone else that they’re not listening to all the time,” said Gillespie. “I think it’s important to go see people, other viewpoints of what ministry looks like or other aspects of ministry that I may not be as strong in.”



Students gather together for worship during the final session of Discern on January 6 at Garaywa Camp and Conference Center in Clinton. (Photo credit: Bart Lambricht)

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“Each one of my students, they’re all different, but they all have one common thing – they don’t know what they’re going to do,” said Gillespie. “The cool thing is that we all work together and we all come together as one in that it’s all ministry.”

Blaine Johnson, a high school senior and member of First Church, Amory, learned the importance of working together in ministry, especially as it applies to his interest in church planting. “Just learning how it takes a whole group, how it takes leadership. It takes people that are willing to go out,” said Blaine.

The future health of Mississippi churches and the need to invest in and prepare the next generation of ministers is the ultimate goal of Discern.

“We have churches that are looking for pastors, youth ministers. We can’t fill all the positions,” said Hall. “Our churches have gotten away from really cultivating folks to go into the ministry. And so not only has this retreat been a part of it, but trying to help our pastors get back to where it’s a part of their response and invitation time to invite



people to answer the call to ministry.

“So we’re just trying to also create awareness among churches to be on the lookout for these folks. And then let’s try to give them some tools that they can navigate this part of their life.”

Discern is made possible by your gifts to the Cooperative Program. For more information, please contact Hall at (601) 292-3286 or [khall@mbcb.org](mailto:khall@mbcb.org).