

Christian Vocation, Commissioned Service, and Ordination

God has given each of us gifts and calls us to use them in a way that pleases and glorifies God. Our vocation is the way in which we respond to the many gifts God has given us; how we live our life. Vocation is not limited to those who serve the church, but each person has a calling to service. As we participate in the community of faith, Christian Vocation is about living into our baptismal identity, answering the call to demonstrate the gospel in all that we do and say.

Christian Vocation—God’s call to daily service in the world through our jobs, talents and interests—is a cornerstone of our lives as Christians.

A sense of Christian Vocation is what gives meaning to our daily routine. Without a true sense of God’s call in our daily lives, we will pass through life without direction to our work, and most of life will have no meaning.

Whether you are a butcher, a baker or a homemaker, your labors and talents are God’s gift through you to the world.

The resulting joy of accepting your labors as God’s work allows you to take life one step at a time—as it has been delivered to you, and to find meaning and worth in every moment of the day and in every encounter along the way.

God’s “Call” is more than a job—it is discovering the possibilities of oneself; it is insight into who one is, what one should do. Call is a powerful resource for confronting the uncertainty of life. It is a symbol of divine direction and divine acceptance, connecting one with the community in which one serves. Call makes sense of one’s Life.

From This Call’s For You – a Christian Vocation Workbook

Questions for consideration:

1. How do we help individuals understand and live their baptismal call?
2. Discern their gifts?
3. Find ways to “honor and serve God in every aspect of human life”?

G-1.0304 The Ministry of Members

Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is a joy and a privilege. It is also a commitment to participate in Christ’s mission. A faithful member bears witness to God’s love and grace and promises to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ’s Church. Such involvement includes:

- *proclaiming the good news in word and deed,*
- *taking part in the common life and worship of a congregation,*
- *lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support,*
- *studying Scripture and the issues of Christian faith and life,*
- *supporting the ministry of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents,*
- *demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church,*
- *responding to God’s activity in the world through service to others,*
- *living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,*
- *working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment,*
- *participating in the governing responsibilities of the church, and*
- *reviewing and evaluating regularly the integrity of one’s membership, and considering ways in which one’s participation in the worship and service of the church may be increased and made more meaningful.*

W-5.6001 God calls a people

- a) *to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;*
- b) *to follow Jesus Christ in obedient discipleship;*
- c) *to use the gifts and abilities God has given, honoring and serving God*
 1. *in personal life,*
 2. *in household and families,*
 3. *in daily occupations,*
 4. *in community, nation, and the world.*

W-5.6002

A person responds to God’s call to faith in Jesus Christ through Baptism and through life and worship in the community of faith.

Persons respond to God’s call to discipleship through the ministries of God’s people in and for the world.

Persons respond to God’s call to honor and serve God in every aspect of human life

- a) *in their work and in their play,*
- b) *in their thought and in their action,*
- c) *in their private and in their public relationships.*

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Resources:

- See [Christian Vocation](#) website
- [“Called by our Baptism”](#) - Through images and superb narration, this 7 minute video clip explores the baptismal call. Created especially for presbytery ministry committees and congregations who help individuals discern their call, this media piece could also be used for church officers, membership classes, and Christian education classes.

Recognition and commissioning provides the church with a way to honor the many gifts and ministries being shared with the church and world by its members as they live out their call to discipleship. Commissioning of church school teachers, mission service personnel, community ministry volunteers, mission trip participants, and commissioners to presbytery, synod, or General Assembly are just a few opportunities for church to commission its members .

Questions for consideration:

1. How might Christ’s mission be strengthened by more emphasis on forms of service other than the ordered ministries?
2. What ministries might be recognized through commissioning?
3. What council of the church would appropriately initiate the commissioning?

Resources:

Book of Occasional Services, copyright 1999 by Geneva Press for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

W-4.3000 Commissioning for Specific Acts of Discipleship

W-4.3001

In the life of the Christian community God calls people to particular acts of discipleship to use their personal gifts for service in the Church and in the world. These specific acts may be strengthened and confirmed by formal recognition in worship.

W-4.3002

Discipleship may be expressed

- a) *in the local church through service such as teacher in the church school, trustee, member of the choir, officer in a church organization, or adviser or helper with various church groups;*
- b) *on behalf of the local church through its ministry in and to the community;*
- c) *in the larger church as people serve in the ministries of presbytery, synod, and the General Assembly, and of ecumenical agencies and councils;*
- d) *beyond the church cooperating with all who work for compassion and reconciliation. (W-7.3000-.4000)*

W-4.3003

Recognition and commissioning of people called to such acts of discipleship may occur in the Service for the Lord’s Day as a response to the proclamation of the Word (W-3.3500) or as a bearing and following of the Word into the world. (W-3.3700)

Recognizing and commissioning for specific acts of discipleship may also occur in services of worship provided for this purpose or in other appropriate services. (W-3.5100; W-3.5300; W- 3.5600)

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What is Ordination? - by Joseph D. Small

The church's ministry and mission are the calling of the whole people of God. In the Reformed tradition, ministry is not the domain of a particular group of people called "clergy," who lead a larger group called "laity." This un-Reformed clergy/lay distinction obscures the reality that all specific ministries of the church are particular expressions of the ministry of the whole body of Christ. All Christians are gifted for ministry, and there is a real sense in which all are ordained to ministry in their baptisms.

Within the ministry of the whole people of God, persons may be called to perform specific functions that are important to the life of particular communities of faith. However, some functions are considered to be necessary to the spiritual health and faithful life of every Christian community. The church gives order to these necessary functions by regularizing their shape, their duties, their qualifications, and their approval. These "ordered ministries," and the persons who are called to them, are established in ordination – the whole church's act of setting apart for particular service.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), following the development of Reformed ecclesiology, ordains persons to three ordered ministries: ministers, elders, and deacons. These three ministries represent two ecclesial functions: ministries of the Word performed by presbyters (pastors and elders) and ministries of service performed by deacons

Ministers, traditionally called "teaching elders," and elders, traditionally called "ruling elders" are both "presbyters." Identifying ministers by their teaching role emphasizes the primacy of the Word and the centrality of the "teaching church." The designation ruling elder is easily misunderstood, however. The historic understanding of the "ruling" exercised by elders has less to do with managerial governance than with ruling out or measuring the work of ministry, the fidelity of communal and personal lives, and the progress of the gospel in the church. The service of deacons is to lead the church in its ministries of compassion (distributing aid, caring directly for the poor, the sick, refugees, and prisoners), and justice (working for equity in society).

Ordination to one of the church's ordered ministries is not the simple recognition that a person possesses "gifts for ministry," or that an office suits a person's abilities. It does not follow naturally from a person's "sense of call." Ordination is certainly not about access to position, influence, and power in the church. Ordination is the church's act of recognizing the movement of the Holy Spirit in the interactions among the whole church's ordering of ministries, its standards for these ministries, and its current needs, together with prayerful discernment by persons, congregations, and presbyteries.

Ordination is a gift, not a right. The "spiritual welfare of the church" depends, in large measure, upon its recovery of an understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God, the ordered ministries of the church, and the gift of ordination.

Questions for consideration:

1. How do the practices of your presbytery ministry committees/commissions support the Reformed understanding of ordination? Of the relationship among the ordered ministries?
2. How do you assess an individual's motives for seeking ordained service?
3. What constitutes a ministry requiring ordination?

From 2011-2013 Advisory Handbook for Ministry Committees/Commissions