

**UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS FOR ORDINATION  
IN THE CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

A Handbook for Presbyterial Committees on the Ministry  
or Preparation for the Ministry

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## PREFACE

You have been elected as a member of your presbytery's Committee on the Ministry or Committee on Preparation for the Ministry. Your presbytery has given you a high honor. Your participation in the committee's work and its recommendations will impact not only the presbytery but also the entire Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Moreover, it will impact the lives of people for decades to come. I am confident you will approach this ministry with patience, understanding, mature judgment and openness to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

This Handbook is intended to assist you in the committee's work. Please:

- Read through it to familiarize yourself with its contents
- Allow it to guide your supervision of probationers toward their ordinations

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The Pastoral Development Ministry Team serves the Cumberland Presbyterian Church by

- Keeping God's call before the church as a whole and providing and promoting a deeper biblical and theological understanding of ministry in the church
- Nurturing and caring for ordained ministers and probationers and providing resources and events to improve pastoral ministry

Please feel free to contact me.



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# UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS FOR ORDINATION IN THE CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## INTRODUCTION

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In the gospel story as told by Matthew, Jesus gives a command to the disciples just prior to his ascension. Jesus tells them to go into every nation proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, instructing them and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This command belongs to every person who follows Jesus and longs to see God's reign on earth.

Jesus' command, however, belongs to the church in an even more intimate way, particularly where the church is concerned with the education and oversight of those who have sensed God's call into ministry. The church is commanded to shepherd and care for those seeking ordination as well as those already involved in that work. The church's care is lived out with the same sense of responsibility that Jesus spoke of in the great command to the disciples. Oversight, education, preparation, and guidance for ministers and ministerial candidates fall to the church through the

various structures of the church's organization, but most notably through the work of Committees on Ministry/Preparation within the presbyteries.

Aware of that presbyterial responsibility and aware of the greater church's responsibility, The Pastoral Development Ministry Team of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church has developed this handbook for use by presbyterial Committees on the Ministry/Preparation. It is our hope that our collective work with ministers and candidates for ministry will be more fruitful, more consistent, and more sensitive to the unique demands that the call to ministry places upon an individual.

May God's grace and mercy be upon the work we are all called to accomplish. May our work bring light and life through the sharing of the good news of the gospel of Jesus the Christ.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

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**Approved graduate school of theology:** A seminary authorized by a presbytery to provide for the education of that presbytery's ministerial probationers. Courses and credit hours from non-approved seminaries may not be recognized by the presbytery.

**Bethel University:** The undergraduate/graduate educational institution affiliated with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and located in McKenzie, Tennessee.

**Candidate:** A person in the first stage of preparation for the ministry and under the care of a presbytery.

**Committee on Clergy Care:** A presbytery's agency for the oversight of and support for its clergy members and their families; names may vary with presbyteries.

**Committee on Preparation for the Ministry:** A presbytery's agency for the oversight of ministerial probationers; names may vary with presbyteries.

**Committee on the Ministry:** A presbytery's agency for the oversight of ministerial probationers and ordained clergy, unless these responsibilities are divided between two committees.

**Confession of Faith (1984):** The creedal statement and governmental standards for the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America. Major divisions are:

- Confession of Faith
- Constitution
- Rules of Discipline
- Directory for Worship
- Rules of Order

**Constitution:** The document, contained in the *Confession of Faith*, delineating the government of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America.

**Licentiate:** The status of a ministerial probationer between candidate and ordained; licentiates are authorized to preach under the supervision of the presbytery.

**Memphis Theological Seminary (MTS):** A graduate school of theology affiliated with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and located in Memphis, Tennessee.

**Minister of Word and Sacrament:** A person who has been ordained into the ministry of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church or

Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America.

**Ordinand:** A person who has been recommended for ordination as a Minister of Word and Sacrament but has not been ordained yet.

**Ordination:** The act of a presbytery to set a person a part for the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

**Particular church:** As used in the *Constitution*, a congregation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church or Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America.

**Pastor:** The title for an ordained minister who has been installed by the presbytery to provide spiritual leadership in a particular congregation. **ALSO Associate/Assistant Pastor:** The title for an ordained minister who has been installed by the presbytery to assist the pastor in providing spiritual leadership in a particular congregation.

**Presbytery:** The primary governing body within the Cumberland Presbyterian Church/ Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America and consisting of ordained ministers and elders elected to represent sessions within a defined area.

**Probationer:** A person preparing for the ministry under the care of a presbytery. Probationers may be candidates or licentiates.

**Program of Alternate Studies (PAS):** A Cumberland Presbyterian Church program for the education of ministerial probationers who, in the opinion of their presbyteries, cannot reasonably attend seminary.

**Provisional Status:** An ethnic ordained minister desiring to come into the Cumberland Presbyterian Church from another denomination, serving in a cross-culture ministry, and whose educational preparation does not yet meet CPC standards, may be received under

Provisional Status with all rights and privileges of ordination.

**Reformed/Presbyterian tradition:** Refers to those churches that trace their roots to John Calvin, a key player in the Protestant Reformation. Theologically, these churches emphasize the sovereignty of God, the authority of scripture and salvation by grace through faith. They follow a representative form of government led by elders or “presbyters”.

**Rules of Discipline:** The section of the *Confession of Faith* setting forth procedures for dealing with misconduct or unusual situations within the church.

**Session:** The governing body of a particular church (congregation), consisting of the pastor and members elected by the congregation.

**Stated Supply:** An ordained minister, a licentiate, or a candidate approved by the presbytery to serve as minister of a particular church (congregation). A stated supply is not an installed pastor and may perform only those pastoral functions set forth in the *Constitution*.

**“Under care”:** The description of the status of a ministerial probationer under the supervision of a presbytery.

## I. OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

### A. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COMMITTEE

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The following is intended to help the committee recall the range of their responsibilities. It would be helpful if, before each meeting, a member reviewed the committee's activities against the list and reported on responsibilities receiving little or no attention. These duties and responsibilities may need to be emphasized, and programs developed accordingly. Also, remember that some presbyteries may from time to time assign other responsibilities to the committee.<sup>1</sup>

To keep before the congregations the importance of the call to Christian ministry in the church.

- To provide appropriate materials and resources to guide those considering vocations in the church.
- To serve as the presbytery's standing committee for supervising and supporting probationers for the ministry (Constitution 6.10 - 6.30).
- To guide probationers in their exploration of Christian ministry and/or vocations in the church.
- To help those experiencing a call to Christian service, but not ordination, to affirm their calling as followers of Jesus Christ and members of the covenant community.
- To recommend to presbytery appropriate actions in the supervision of probationers.

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<sup>1</sup> Please feel free to contact Pastoral Development Ministry Team Leader for resources and/or assistance. (See the Preface to this Handbook for contact information)

- To examine members of congregations seeking to be received as candidates (Constitution 6.10).
- To examine candidates and licentiates as they move through the process toward ordination (Constitution 6.200).
- To stay in close contact with probationers throughout their journey – encouraging, uplifting and guiding them.
- To encourage and require probationers to complete educational requirements in approved colleges and graduate schools of theology.
- To recommend to presbytery that a student be enrolled in the Program of Alternate Studies if attendance in an approved graduate school of theology is not a reasonable option.
- To meet, when directed by presbytery, with ordained clergy of other ecclesiastical bodies and recommend actions concerning their status in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.
- To work with the Committee on Clergy Care to ensure that the newly ordained ministers have designated mentors for three years after ordination.

## **B. NURTURING THOSE GOD HAS CALLED: A guide for those serving on presbyterial committees**

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Every presbytery has a committee that oversees the growth of ministerial probationers (Constitution 6.11). The committee may go by various names, but the function is the same: to walk with probationers through the process of ordination, and to ensure that those called are mentally, emotionally and spiritually prepared to serve as ministers. Neither the presbytery nor the committee calls persons to ordained ministry. God does. But the committee and the presbytery are the vehicles by which God's call is confirmed.

Our tradition assumes that, once persons submit to an internal call, they also must submit to a larger body responsible for their care and they must prepare for ministry. Preparation includes education at accredited schools, growing in one's sense of call, gaining competence in ministerial skills, as well as taking up disciplines that lead to spiritual maturity. Your committee exists to help probationers in this process.

Inevitably, probationers face difficulties as they pursue ordination. Some won't receive support from family and friends. Others will struggle with education requirements. Many will have periods of doubt about their call. Still more will worry about their finances. Your committee cannot solve all the problems a probationer will face. But your presbytery will be able to help in some concrete ways (such as providing grants for education). And your committee can provide what those seeking ordination often need the most: caring, listening ears.

You also help probationers by upholding the educational standards for ordination. When persons face difficulties, we often desire to relieve them. But compromising the standards of ordination is only short-term relief. Probationers need as much education as they can get so that they are well rounded, knowledgeable people who can do what God asks of them.

Similarly, committee members must not assume that a person is ready for ordination

simply because they have completed their classes in college and seminary. Throughout the process, you should look for signs of spiritual maturity and help probationers see areas where they may need to grow in order to be faithful ministers of the gospel. It's not fair to probationers or the church to send them out poorly prepared for the demands of ordination.

The responsibilities of your committee are sobering. But when you do your job well, the church receives the well-equipped ministers it deserves, and you will discover that the burden of your labor is also a joy.

The *Constitution* of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church outlines the requirements for candidacy, licensure and ordination (sections 6.10 to 6.30). The steps below give detail to that process from the perspective of you, the committee member.

### **Step 1: The first meeting with the potential candidate**

Check for the letter from the session. No one can be accepted as a candidate unless his or her session has written a letter of recommendation (The *Constitution*, 6.41). Those closest to the candidate should be willing to vouch for his or her sincerity, character and faith.

Introduce yourself to the candidate, and at the appropriate time ask questions that allow the candidate to share his story. Meeting strangers who will be overseeing his life can be overwhelming to a person seeking candidacy. Knowing that committee members care about him and are interested in his well-being will bring great comfort.

Ask the candidate about her experience of the call. It may not be clear to the candidate yet exactly what her call is. Expect some ambiguity. But the potential candidate needs practice reflecting on her call and trying to articulate what God wants with her life. She will continue to do this throughout her

preparation. Explain what presbytery requires for ordination. Before he leaves the meeting, the person seeking candidacy should know what education is expected; how often the committee anticipates meeting with him; when psychological inventories will be administered and for what purpose; when the next presbytery meeting will be and what questions will be put to him in order to enter candidacy; and finally who will serve as the candidate's mentor, assuming presbytery accepts him.

The standard educational requirement for ordination in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church is a bachelor's degree and master of divinity degree from accredited schools. In some cases, persons request to enter the Program of Alternate Studies (PAS). PAS exists to educate candidates who might have great difficulty attending college and seminary. Those difficulties might include limited finances, family constraints or age. PAS requires 60 hours of college work (course list available from the director of PAS) and three full years of extension school (intense class time, followed by home assignments). PAS is not a replacement for seminary, but an alternate route for those in difficult circumstances.

Presbytery alone decides who may take this alternate route. For anyone to enter PAS, presbytery must approve by a two-thirds majority vote. The presbytery looks for the committee to make this recommendation, if applicable, in its report.

Your committee should weigh carefully whether to recommend a candidate for the PAS program. Remember that all persons will face difficulty in the pursuit of ordination. You must answer the question whether a potential candidate's circumstances make it highly impractical for him to take the standard route.

Pray for the potential candidate at the conclusion of the meeting. You may ask how the committee can best pray for her and encourage committee members to keep these

concerns alive in their prayers between meetings.

## **Step 2: The meeting of presbytery**

Not all committee members are required to attend presbytery. Most likely, the chair will attend to present the report. (A sample report can be found in the Appendix.) If you have been assigned as the candidate's mentor, your presence at presbytery can strengthen the relationship. A phone call following the meeting from any committee member would help the candidate feel supported.

While the committee has examined the candidate already, the presbytery is afforded that opportunity, also. After the candidate shares her sense of call, the floor will be open for questions from the presbytery. This doesn't mean your committee's work is inadequate, but shows that the presbytery has final authority for those preparing for ordination.

If your committee decided that a particular candidate is eligible for PAS, make the recommendation as part of your report to this meeting of presbytery. Remind the clerk of the presbytery that a request for PAS approval must be sent to the Pastoral Development Ministry Team. (See Appendix for the form.)

Also, if appropriate, report that psychological inventories have been administered and reviewed by a trained psychologist. *By no means should the results of the inventories be shared with the presbytery.* Those matters are confidential. The inventories are a means of helping candidates understand themselves, an essential part of being a faithful, effective minister.

Emphasize attendance at presbytery. All candidates are required to attend all meetings of presbytery - not just the one at which they are received - unless they are excused upon their request.

Inform the Pastoral Development Ministry Team when a new candidate comes under care of the presbytery. (See Appendix for form.) The team sends each new candidate *An Introduction to Ministry* by Dr. Morris Pepper.

## **Step 3: Subsequent meetings with the candidate**

Meet with candidates no less than once a year. In those meetings, give candidates a chance to share any concerns they might have. Most candidates will have something they need to discuss as they travel down the road to ordination. Your committee can serve as a sounding board, offer wise counsel and be like a pastor to the aspiring candidate.

Check for progress in the candidate's growth through very simple, open-ended questions: How is the candidate doing in school? How has the candidate's sense of call clarified or changed? Has the candidate had opportunity to preach, teach or otherwise lead in the church and what has that experience been like? What does the candidate understand about his or her responsibility to session and presbytery?

Committees are beginning to rediscover the importance of the candidate's spiritual formation. Some candidates won't have experience with daily prayer, self-examination or devotional reading. Encourage candidates to embrace a discipline, and be willing to ask about their experiences when you meet. The goal of such disciplines is the growth of the candidate, not the satisfaction of rules laid down by the committee. Candidates most need encouragement from the committee to develop and maintain spiritual disciplines. Of course, keeping your own spiritual disciplines will put you in a better position to speak about spiritual formation with the candidate.



#### **Step 4: Licensure**

In our system, candidates who show sufficient growth are licensed to preach. Candidates are eligible for licensure after completing their bachelor's degree or their required college work for PAS. However, licensure should be reserved for those whom the committee feels have not only met the education requirements, but also have demonstrated a level of competence that warrants additional responsibility and authority.

Licensure is a mile marker on the way to ordination. Licentiate currently cannot perform more ministerial duties than candidates, but the title communicates progress and a new level of respect due the person. You should use licensure as an opportunity to affirm the candidate's hard work, faithfulness to the task and growth.

Licensure takes place at a meeting of presbytery upon the recommendation of this committee. Again, this affirms presbytery's authority over and responsibility for those preparing for ordination. The committee will continue to meet with the licentiate on at least a yearly basis.

Inform the Pastoral Development Ministry Team when a candidate has been licensed by the presbytery. (See Appendix for form.) The team sends each new licentiate a Christian book as a way to congratulate him/her in his/her journey.

#### **Step 5: Ordination**

Upon successful completion of seminary or PAS course work and upon receipt of a call to a particular ministry, licentiate are eligible for ordination. The call to a particular ministry signifies that not only has the committee and the presbytery confirmed the licentiate's call, but the larger church has as well. Since ordination is for service instead of status, the

particular call is essential before presbytery ordains.

A particular call may include a call to serve as pastor, associate pastor or some other position in a local congregation. It may also include a call to serve as a teacher in a college or university, as a chaplain or in a denominational office. Your committee will have to decide if a call meets the requirements for ordination. Since ordination is reserved for those called to a ministry of word and sacrament, not all job offers will necessarily fit the criteria.

Examine the licentiate prior to presbytery. It's appropriate for a committee to require an ordination examination. Sample questions are included in the Appendix. Along with a written examination, the committee should question the candidate verbally, ascertaining her readiness for ministry.

Assuming the committee is satisfied with the particular call and the examinations, it will recommend to presbytery that the licentiate be ordained. Again, presbytery will have the opportunity to examine from the floor. Often licentiate wish to be ordained in their home church rather than at a meeting of presbytery. If so, include in your report a recommendation that a commission be elected for that purpose. Include names, as well as the date and time of the ordination, if known. The commission must include at least four members, at least two of which must be ordained ministers and at least one of which must be an elder active on the session and a member of presbytery (*Constitution* 6.35 and *Rules of Order* 6.2). As a committee member, you are not required to attend ordinations, but attendance would encourage the newly ordained.

Inform the Pastoral Development Ministry Team of the upcoming ordination. (See Appendix for form.) The team will send a portable communion set to the new minister to mark the occasion.

## C. HELPING POTENTIAL CANDIDATES TO UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES

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Before the committee recommends that a person be received as a candidate for ministry, the committee should make provision for the administration of personality/psychological testing and a clinical interview by the tester. The tester should be a member of the American Psychology Association or of an equivalent crediting organization of professional psychologist in other nations. Instruments used in testing should be chosen from among the following categories:

- Personality inventories
- Temperament evaluators
- Emotional intelligence indicators
- Career, aptitude and ability inventories

The choice of specific instruments should be the tester's. The report to the committee should include a description of the instruments and clinical interview with findings and recommendations.

A criminal background check should also be made of each potential candidate.

Members of the supervising committee should:

- Treat psychological reports with the strictest confidence
- Use the reports only to help guide probationers
- Relinquish copies of reports to the committee chair for disposal when probationers are no longer under care, EXCEPT
- One sealed copy should be given to the presbyterial clerk for safekeeping

In no way should this procedure be interpreted as a substitute for or compromise to the call of the Holy Spirit. Quite the contrary, testing of this nature can be a tool of the Holy Spirit for guiding those who supervise probationers and for the probationers' self-understanding.

## D. PROCESS FOR ORDINATION

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This section of the handbook is primarily for candidates to help them to understand the process for ordination in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Although all committee members should be familiar with it, it will help you to understand the process through the candidate's eyes. You may make copies of *So,*

*You're Sensing a Call* (pages 12-15) and distribute them to those who are just beginning the process. You may also let the pastors in your presbytery know this document exists so they can give it to anyone who comes to them sensing a call.

## SO YOU'RE SENSING A CALL: Mapping the Journey to Ordination in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church

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If you're reading this, you're probably thinking about becoming a candidate for ministry. Presbyterian Committees on the Ministry/Preparation will be familiar with this material, also. But this information is directed primarily toward you, the potential candidate. It aims to describe in some detail the process for responding to God's call in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church believes in an internal call. God moves on the hearts of persons, drawing them toward ordained ministry. Yet, this internal call needs the external confirmation of the church. As you move toward ordination, you will do so in the company of others who are charged with overseeing your growth. These people will help you discern if ordination is in fact your vocation in life. Just as God acts to call you personally, God acts through the corporate body of the church to support your work and confirm your call.

So, what do you do when you sense God may be calling you to ordained ministry?

### **First, talk with your pastor.**

Your pastor will help you navigate the initial steps in the process. He or she also can relate to the various questions you have and the emotions you are feeling. When the time comes for you to share your call with the local session, your conversations with the pastor will allow her or him to support you confidently before the body. If your church does not have a pastor, you should speak with the minister appointed by the presbytery to moderate your session. One of the elders can help you know who this person is.

**After informal conversations with the pastor, you will meet with the session. It's the first official step in becoming a candidate for ministry.**

The session has the responsibility to endorse you as a candidate. You must be a member in good standing of a Cumberland Presbyterian congregation, and you must have the session's endorsement before the presbytery accepts you as a candidate. Your family knows you best. A recommendation from the leadership of your church family speaks volumes. The local session clerk will write a letter to the presbytery's Committee on the Ministry/Preparation in your support, provided the session votes to recommend you. (*Constitution 6.14*)

**The presbyterial Committee on the Ministry/Preparation will want to meet with you after they receive the session's letter.**

Each committee handles its interviews in its own way. But certainly the members will want to hear your experience of the call. Your work with your pastor and session should prepare you well for this meeting. Be honest with the committee. Share with them your fears as well as your joys as you consider your call. The more they know you, the better they can help you. The more real you are, the more they will want to help you.

**The committee has the responsibility to recommend you as a CANDIDATE at the next meeting of presbytery.**

You will attend this meeting. Presbytery has the responsibility of examining you. So,

persons may ask questions of you from the floor. You may be asked to share your sense of call. Then, in keeping with the *Constitution* of the church, the following questions will be put to you.

- I. *As far as you know your heart, do you believe yourself to be called by God to the office of the Christian ministry?*
- II. *Do you promise, in reliance upon the grace of God, to maintain a Christian character and conduct, and to be diligent and faithful in making full preparation for the ministry?*
- III. *Do you promise to work with the presbytery through its committee on the ministry in matters that pertain to your preparation for the ministry?*
- IV. *Do you now desire to be received by this presbytery as a candidate for the ministry in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church/Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America?*

If you answer these questions affirmatively, and the presbytery so votes, you will be received as a candidate under care of the presbytery. You will attend all subsequent meetings of presbytery after your acceptance.

Presbytery will care for you through the Committee on the Ministry or its equivalent. You will meet with them at least once a year. The committee probably will appoint one member to serve as your liaison or mentor. This person will stay in close contact with you as you move through the requirements of ordination. But you should always feel free to contact the committee when you need help. These persons are charged to support you and to struggle with you. The committee also may provide financial support for your education. The amount and type of support vary from presbytery to presbytery.

Some seminaries provide excellent financial help to seminary students. For example, our

denominational seminary, Memphis Theological Seminary, provides service loans for probationers pursuing their divinity degree.

Ordained ministry (what we often call the ministry of Word and Sacrament or the Gospel ministry, and what we most typically associate with the pastorate) requires a four-year degree from a college or university. Exceptions are sometimes made for those whose circumstances make such an education highly impractical. In these cases, only with presbytery approval, candidates may enter the Program of Alternate Studies. The candidate enrolled in PAS is required to complete a list of college courses totaling 60 hours. With the plethora of community colleges now available, those courses are very much within reach.

Preparation for ministry includes more than formal education. Committees oversee the development of the whole person toward ministry. So it is within their purview to explore a candidate's spiritual life, emotional health and giftedness. Candidates may be asked to submit to psychological examination from a trained professional. They may also be asked to complete spiritual gifts inventories. Such instruments shall not be used to decide if a person is called or not, but will serve to increase a candidate's knowledge of self (strengths as well as weaknesses) and to help identify goals for growth.

As you are moving through candidacy, the committee will continue to help you clarify your call. They will ask regularly if you feel led toward ordained ministry.

**Once you have completed the college-level education requirements, and the committee is satisfied with your growth and development, you will be recommended for LICENSURE by the committee.**

The presbytery will examine you on the floor prior to licensure.

Does being licensed mean you are given responsibilities you did not have as a candidate? No, but licensure is a sign that you are making progress and that the church recognizes your growth. It's a significant mile marker toward the full embrace of your calling. The questions asked to licentiates are listed below:

- I. *Do you believe the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired word of God, the authority for faith and practice?*
- II. *Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church/Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America as containing the essential doctrines taught in the Holy Scriptures?*
- III. *Do you promise to promote the peace, unity, and purity of the church?*
- IV. *Do you promise continued cooperation with the presbytery through its committee on the ministry as you continue preparation for ordination, and as you perform those functions of ministry which pertain to a licentiate, as set forth in the Constitution?*

Those licensed are required to complete a Master of Divinity degree from an accredited seminary before ordination. If you have been accepted in the PAS program, you must complete a three-year course of study for ordination. The PAS program administers these courses through its director.

**Once educational requirements are complete and the committee is satisfied with your progress, you will be eligible for ORDINATION.**

To be ordained, you must receive a formal call to ministry from a congregation, hospital, hospice program, university, etc., and must sustain examination by presbytery.

If you answer affirmatively and presbytery so votes, a time and date will be set for your ordination. At the service for ordination, you will be asked the following questions:

- I. *Do you believe the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired word of God, the authority for faith and practice?*
- II. *Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church/Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America as containing the essential doctrines taught in the Holy Scriptures?*
- III. *Do you approve of and promise to uphold the government of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church/Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America?*
- IV. *In participating as a minister in the judicatories of the church, do you promise to share in a responsible way in the decisions that are made, to abide by those decisions, and to promote the welfare of the church?*
- V. *As far as you know your heart, have you been induced by the Holy Spirit to answer the call to the ministry from love of God and neighbor and a sincere desire to glorify God and advance his Kingdom in the world?*
- VI. *As God may enable you, do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel and the purity and peace of the church, irrespective of any opposition that may arise to you on that account?*
- VII. *Do you promise to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties as a Christian and a minister of the gospel, and endeavor to so conduct yourself both privately and publicly as not to give offense to Christ and his church?*

Once you have answered the questions affirmatively, you will kneel. Ministers of the presbytery will lay hands on you as a prayer is offered. When you rise and the declaration is made, you will be an ordained minister with all

the responsibility and respect that accompany that title.

Sometimes, a person becomes a candidate, even a licentiate, only to discover that he or she is not called to ordained ministry. If you are faced with this difficult situation, you should keep these things in mind. Most ministers struggle to understand their calling. In this you are not alone. Neither is there any shame in removing yourself from the committee's care. It would be much worse to save embarrassment by

continuing in a vocation to which God has not called you. Being honest and open with the committee as you work through the process will lay a good foundation should you need to change courses before ordination.

Consult the *Constitution* of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, section 6.00, for a more formal description of the above process. The *Constitution* can be found online at [www.cumberland.org](http://www.cumberland.org).

## MINISTERS OF THE WORD AND SACRAMENT

**The office of Minister of Word and Sacrament** is unique in the life of the church as to responsibility and usefulness. God calls persons and sets them apart for this ministry.

The persons who fill this office should be sound in the faith, exemplary in conduct, and competent to perform the duties of the ministry. Persons who become ministers of word and sacrament are due such respect as belongs to their office, but are not by virtue of their office more holy or righteous than other Christians.

They share in the same vocation that belongs to all Christians to be witnesses to the gospel in word and deed. They differ from other Christians only with regard to the office to which they are called, which is their station in life.

*(Constitution 2.61)*

While the type of ministry most basic to the life of the church is that of a pastor, God has given different gifts to ministers of the word and sacrament and the church recognizes various types of ministry.

Presbytery may authorize ministers to exercise their gifts not only as pastors of particular churches but as teachers of religion in various kinds of schools, editors of religious publications, chaplains to the military forces and to various types of institutions, missionaries, evangelists, counselors, administrators of church programs and institutions, directors of Christian education in particular churches, and as leaders in other fields of service directly related to the church.

Presbytery shall authorize persons to perform such types of ministry through a service of worship in which the minister is commissioned to practice his or her ministry in one of these ways.

In every type of ministry, the minister should seek appropriate ways to perform the duties as pastor, minister, presbyter, evangelist, prophet, priest, preacher, and teacher.

*(Constitution 2.64)*

## E. THE MINISTRY OF MENTORING

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**MENTOR:** a trusted counselor  
teacher  
guide  
coach  
shepherd

Almost everyone can remember a time or times when someone, with more experience or greater knowledge than we had, came to our assistance. As a result, we learned something we needed to know, avoided making a mistake, gained new insights or became more proficient in what we were doing. In such instances we were mentored.

You now have the opportunity, or have been asked, to become a mentor to a new candidate or to an ordained minister new to your presbytery. Mentoring is not difficult, but it can be, at times, intense. Most of the knowledge required of a mentor comes from experience rather than from academic disciplines.

**The most important fact in mentoring is that it isn't about the mentor; it is about the learner.** Therefore:

- An effective mentor's goal is to help another person to learn, grow, become. He/she has an unselfish interest in the good of others. Egocentric and controlling personalities do not make good mentors.
- The effective mentor does not seek to duplicate his/her "successes" in the learner's experience. Mentoring is

about helping another discover his/her method or response.

- The ultimate goal is to equip the learner and give him/her the freedom to act. Good mentors do not cultivate co-dependent relationships.

There is no prescribed formula for mentoring. There is, rather, a process;

- **KNOW** Know the other person's story and thinking patterns; take the time to learn him/her. Know your own strengths, weaknesses and limits of expertise. And know community resources if referrals are appropriate.
- **ASK** Ask questions to understand the other person's situation or concern.
- **LISTEN** Listen carefully to the other person's thoughts and plans for a successful solution.
- **SHARE** Share out of your life experiences if pertinent.
- **ALLOW** Allow the other person to craft his/her own method or response.
- **FOLLOW UP** Follow up with a conversation or de-briefing about the learner's experiences.

**MENTORING IN THE CHURCH IS,  
INDEED, A HOLY CALLING -  
A MINISTRY**

## F. RECOGNITION OF ORDINATION OF MINISTERS OF OTHER DENOMINATIONS

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In the Cumberland Presbyterian Church ordination is for life. Thus, clergy ordained in another denomination who wish to become ministers in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church are not re-ordained. Rather, the presbytery recognizes their ordination by the process outlined below.

The presbytery and its Committee on the Ministry or Committee on Preparation for the Ministry (hereinafter called "the committee") are bound by the procedures set forth in the *Constitution*, "Recognition of Ordination" (6.40-6.43) and "Ordination of Ministers" (6.30-6.36). The presbytery and committee are also to follow related constitutional interpretations by the General Assembly. They stipulate that a minister holding ordination in another denomination:

- does not have to become a member of a Cumberland Presbyterian congregation before being considered for admission as an ordained minister in the church (*Minutes*, 1956, p. 128)
- has the status of a probationer while in the process of having his/her ordination recognized and is permitted only the duties approved for probationers (*Minutes*, 2007, p. 430) and
- must have an approved call before his/her ordination can be recognized by the presbytery. (*Minutes*, 2007, 430)

### IN PREPARATION FOR THE RECOGNITION OF ORDINATION

- The committee interviews the minister.
- Per the *Constitution* 6.41 the committee investigates to determine:

- a. Whether the minister has proper credentials from his or her ecclesiastical body;
  - b. Whether the minister has a degree from a college and a graduate school of theology;
  - c. Whether the minister has a knowledge of the history, theology and government of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church;
  - d. Whether the minister seems fit for service as a minister in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. NOTE: The following documents may be helpful in making this determination:
    - Dossier or personal information form
    - Education transcripts
    - Character and professional references
    - Verification of past denominational affiliation(s)
    - Ministerial and lay positions/responsibilities
    - Assessment of personality and psychological inventories
    - Criminal background check
- If the committee is not satisfied with its investigation of the four areas above, except item "c," it does not have to report to the presbytery or recommend action to grant the status of a probationer to the minister. (The completion of item "c" requires more time than can be allocated in initial inquiry steps.)
  - The committee should expect that a person seeking to have his/her ordination recognized will meet the educational requirements for ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament



in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church:

- A person who does not have a college degree from an approved institution of higher education or has not completed the Program of Alternate Studies (or comparable program) shall have the status of a candidate (*Constitution 6.43*)
- A person who has degrees from an approved institution of higher education and from (1) an approved graduate school of theology or (2) a certificate from the Program of Alternate Studies (or comparable program) shall have the status of a licentiate. (*Constitution 6.43*)
- The committee should require the minister to complete prescribed studies in Cumberland Presbyterian Church history, doctrine and government in Memphis Theological Seminary (or another accredited seminary offering such courses) or the Program of Alternate Studies.
- Before the committee concludes the interview, the minister should be informed of the church's expectations in preparation for having the ordination recognized. The minister should also be told of committee's and presbytery's procedures and how he/she is expected to relate to the committee, the presbytery and the church.

- A member of the presbytery, preferably also a member of the committee, should be assigned as a liaison/mentor.
- The committee makes a report to presbytery noting the minister's desire, the initial findings and recommendations to grant the status of probationer (candidate or licentiate) during the probationary period and to authorize his/her enrollment in the Program of Alternate Studies if appropriate.
- After adoption of the recommendations, the minister addresses the presbytery.
- The committee continues to monitor and assist the minister in his/her assimilation into the church.

## RECOGNITION OF ORDINATION

When the committee verifies that the minister has successfully completed the constitutional requirements for the recognition of ordination (*Constitution, 6.41*), has received a call and can be of service to the church, the committee reports with appropriate recommendations to the presbytery.

Upon adoption of the recommendations and examination by the presbytery, the minister's previous ordination is recognized by his/her answering affirmatively the questions put to licentiates at their ordination (*Constitution, 6.36*). The minister's name is then inscribed upon the presbytery's role of ordained ministers and the proceeding is certified to the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly.

## G. WORKING WITH PROVISIONAL PASTORS IN CROSS-CULTURE MINISTRY

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The 169<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1999, p. 367) approved an innovative opportunity to widen the Church's ministry by allowing ordained ministers from other cultural communions desiring to join our Church that may not have had the same opportunity to acquire the typical educational credentials called for in our *Constitution*. Some may come from nations where economic or political conditions greatly limited their capacity for formal training. Yet they have both expertise and experience in developing and serving congregations of their own ethnic background.

The provisional status for such ministers enables the individual to become part of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and to exercise the full privileges and responsibilities of their ordination while engaging in a course of study and mentoring over a period of two years. This provisional period assists both the minister and the presbytery to become acquainted and grow in their relationship, to share mutual concerns, to exchange ideas and plans for ministry. It allows the ministers to become conversant with the "culture" of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, including doctrine, polity, history, and the range of congregational and judicatory life and style. At the same time, it grants members of presbytery and the Church at-large firsthand contact with the minister's ethnicity and/or culture, and thus enriches, broadens and extends the Church's witness.

Evaluations of the minister's progress in what is termed the "assimilation process" are an important part of the provisional period. When the goals of the provisional period have been reached, and both the minister and presbytery desire to finalize the covenant between them, the minister's ordination is fully recognized by

presbytery and the provisional status concluded.

In receiving ordained ministers under Provisional Status for Cross-Culture Ministry, the presbytery may appoint the Committee on the Ministry to work with the pastor during the provisional period, or may assign that responsibility to the presbytery's Board of Missions, or new church development task force. The General Assembly Missions Ministry Team is available as a consulting resource for the Provisional Status process.

### **Can a non-ordained ethnic pastor be received under the provisional period?**

No. A non-ordained ethnic pastor is received as a candidate for the ministry, and the Committee on the Ministry/Preparation will work with the candidate as it would any other probationer. The same process applies for an ethnic person who is sensing God's call to ordained ministry. The Program of Alternate Studies now has a Multi-Culture Ministry track to help train cross-culture pastors.

### **Should the presbytery receive a cross-culture pastor under provisional period if he/she does not pastor a church or fellowship and is not involved in a recognized ministry?**

No. The provisional period is designed to allow ethnic pastors the freedom to continue ministry in which they are already involved. However, if the presbytery plans to develop a ministry to a particular ethnic group, and use the ordained ethnic pastor in this ministry, then the pastor could be accepted into the presbytery under provisional status.

**Can an ethnic pastor who is under provisional status do the sacraments?**

Yes, with the presbyterial approval. In most cases the ethnic pastor has been doing the sacraments in his ethnic community before coming into the CP church.

**Can a presbytery remove an ethnic pastor from provisional status if the ministry the ethnic pastor is working in is terminated or fails?**

Yes. The thing that validates a provisional pastor is his/her ministry. With no ministry, it is hard to justify keeping a pastor under provisional status. However, it is possible that the ethnic pastor could be switched to a new or different ministry to his/her ethnicity and thus continue in the provisional status.

**Can cross-culture pastors and lay leadership under provisional status serve on presbytery boards?**

Yes. Presbyteries should involve ethnic pastors and lay leaders who are under provisional status in the boards and committees of the presbytery. Not only does this provide a fast way to learn about the church, it also brings new perspectives, idea and ethnic sensitivity to the presbytery.

**Can a cross-culture pastor continue in the provisional period for an indefinite amount of time?**

No. At some point the presbytery and/or ethnic pastor have to make a decision. After a fair amount of time getting to know each other (the purpose of the provisional status), both parties must commit one way or the other.

**When an ethnic pastor has been received under provisional status, should he/she be asked to receive further training and instruction?**

Yes. In some cases this may only involve CP history, doctrine and polity. In other cases there may be a need for other training and instruction. The point is to prepare the pastor, as best we can, with the resources we have, to reach his/her ethnicity.

**After the two-year provisional period, does the presbytery have to receive the ethnic pastor and/or congregation?**

No. The two-year term is a minimum amount of time. Provisional status may need to be extended because specific goals in the assimilation process have not been accomplished. To do assimilation well, the process should take no less than two years of intentional activities that are planned and executed by the presbytery.

## II. GOVERNMENT & THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

### A. HOW THE CHURCH IS GOVERNED

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“The purpose of church government is to aid the church in performing its mission.”<sup>2</sup>

The easiest way to understand Presbyterian church government is to think back to what you learned in high school civics. (In fact, our judicial system is patterned after Presbyterian church law, also called polity.) In our national judicial system:

- A federal magistrate acts at the directives of higher courts in handling less serious matters, thus allowing the superior courts to focus upon the more serious
- More serious civil or criminal matters are heard in district court, which renders verdicts in these cases
- The court of appeals rules on the regularity of procedure and/or conformity to law in the decisions of district courts
- The Supreme Court rules on the adherence to the Constitution in the decisions of the lower courts.

In a general way, the courts – commonly called “judicatories” – in the Presbyterian system of government parallel our federal court system. Those judicatories are

- The **session** of a congregation (called a particular church in the *Constitution*). It consists of the pastor and members elected by the congregation. (For a list of sessional responsibilities, see the *Constitution* 4.5.)
- The **presbytery** consisting of the ordained ministers and elders elected by sessions to

represent congregations within a specific area. Presbyteries have oversight of congregations, ministers and probationers within its bounds and hear appeals brought from sessions. (For a list of presbyterial responsibilities, see the *Constitution* 5.6.)

- The **synod** consists of at least three presbyteries within a prescribed area. Synods have oversight of presbyteries and hear appeals brought from them. Some also have program responsibilities. (For a list of synodic responsibilities, see the *Constitution* 8.5.)
- The **General Assembly**, the highest judicatory in the church, has oversight of the entire church, including doctrine, polity, discipline, property and judicatories. It also hears appeals. (For a list of General Assembly responsibilities, see the *Constitution* 9.4.)

A set of checks and balances comes into play at each level of church government:

- Sessions elect delegates to presbytery
- Presbyteries have oversight of ministers, probationers and sessions within their bounds; they also hear appeals from sessions
- Synods have oversight of presbyteries and hear appeals from presbyteries
- Delegates to synods are elected by presbyteries
- The General Assembly has oversight responsibilities for the entire church
- Presbyteries elect commissioners to General Assembly and must approve changes in the

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<sup>2</sup> Preamble to the Constitution, *Confession of Faith*, 1984

*Confession of Faith, Constitution and Catechism* referred to them by the General Assembly.

Each judicatory serves a unique function and has a specific oversight responsibility. However, the presbytery is the pivotal church court. In its oversight of congregations and ordained ministers, it functions as a bishop. Presbyteries also hold another important balance of power or responsibility. They elect minister and elder commissioners to meetings of the General Assembly.

Because presbyteries, meeting at stated intervals, do not have the time or expertise to conduct programs and exercise oversight, they assign these responsibilities to *ad hoc* or standing committees and/or commissions (See the *Constitution* 3.10.) These agencies focus upon their assigned spheres of ministry and make recommendations to their presbyteries.

Oversight of ministerial probationers (candidates, licentiates, ordinands) and ordained clergy may be given by a presbytery to its Committee on the Ministry. Or these

responsibilities may be divided between a Committee on Preparation for the Ministry (or similar function/name) and a Committee on Clergy Care (or similar function/name). Regardless of where a presbytery lodges these responsibilities, "oversight" involves both supervision and support.

Stresses upon the ordained clergy and their families can be both sharp and acute. It is, therefore, important that members of presbyteries' committees charged with oversight of ordained clergy be aware of these stressors. They should also convey a spirit of understanding and support where needed and impartial discipline where appropriate.

Oversight of clergy probationers also requires sensitive, mature judgment and approachability. Probation is a time of exploring the nature of God's call as well as preparing for ministry. Committee members must always remember that their presbyteries ordain not just for their presbytery but also for the entire church. It is important, therefore, that the ordination standards contained in the *Constitution* (6.34) be honored.

## B. MINISTRY IN A LITIGIOUS SOCIETY

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Churches and religious organizations can no longer consider themselves immune from civil suit. We are as vulnerable as any other organization. Nor are all suits brought against churches groundless and frivolous. Some are brought to correct wrongs or to seek legitimate compensation for real damage inflicted.

Moreover, our primary emphasis should not be upon avoiding suit but upon not fostering practice harmful to people. In accomplishing that goal, we also minimize our risk of suit.

Presbyteries and their agencies should be aware of areas of potential liability. Most have to do with failure or neglect:

- Failure to investigate a known violent or antisocial inclination or history before approving a person for ministry
- Negligence in supervision (failure to act after becoming aware of an illegal or harmful activity)
- Failure to investigate accusations of misconduct or malfeasance, particularly of

sexual, child or elderly misconduct or abuse

NOTE: most states/countries require citizens to report allegations of or knowledge of child and elderly abuse to proper civil authorities

- Complicity (cover up)
- Disclosure of confidential information
- Defamation of character (libel and slander)

#### WHAT TO DO IF THREATENED WITH SUIT

- Take it seriously; a threatened suit may change the dynamics of the committee's procedure. Note: presbyteries should consult an attorney for appropriate action in the event of allegations of or suspicion of misconduct and/or malfeasance
- If a suit is filed, it must be answered and defended

- Tell the presbyterial clerk immediately; he/she should inform the insurance agent/carrier if applicable and Office of the General Assembly
- Follow **meticulously** the *Constitution, Rules of Discipline* and other written standards, including pertinent presbyterial standing rules
- Cooperate with the insurance carrier if applicable
- **Do not** discuss proceedings or the suit publicly
- **Do not** talk with the media. Understand that your presbytery is at risk of being tried in the court of public opinion.

Each presbytery should have a media response team, including one person who understands the media and who, alone, serves as spokesperson for the presbytery. Any number of books and online resources provide information about the church and media.

### C. "THE CALL" IN HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

A study paper prepared for the Permanent Committee on  
Theology and Social Concerns by Jay Earheart-Brown

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#### The Call of God

The 1984 *Confession of Faith of the Cumberland Presbyterian Churches* begins with the affirmation that "God speaks to the human family."<sup>3</sup> In various ways, through many different means, we confess that "by word and action God invites persons into a covenant

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<sup>3</sup> Heading for section 1.00, *Confession of Faith*, in the *Confession of Faith and Government of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Second Cumberland Presbyterian Church* (Memphis: Frontier Press, 1984), p. 1. Hereafter COF.

relationship."<sup>4</sup> This invitation of God, is the foundation of any Christian understanding of the call. The Christian life is a life lived in response to the call of God. Thus Paul refers to Christians as those who are "called to be saints" (Rom. 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:2). The Greek word for church, while commonly used in the Greek world for any assembly, is literally, "those who are called out" (*ekklesia*). God takes the initiative to call together, to assemble a people and fashion them for God's purpose in the world.

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<sup>4</sup> COF, sec. 1.03, p. 1.

The history of Israel as God's chosen people was grounded in God's call to Abraham and Sarah to leave their homeland to follow God's directing. God's intent for the people was further intensified in God's calling of the descendants of Abraham and Sarah out of Egypt in the Exodus. Israel is chosen, called, elected by God not because of the people's righteousness, our power, or any other intrinsic quality. The nation is called not to special privilege, but to be a "light to the nations." God's call to Israel, then, is a part of God's larger intention to reclaim all God's wayward children.

Jesus' public ministry began with his calling of the twelve. They followed Jesus, according to the Gospel accounts, not from their own initiative, but in response to Jesus' call to leave their nets (and other occupations) and follow him. In Jesus' death and resurrection, those disciples became convinced that God was calling all people, the Jews and gentiles alike, into covenant relationship. The preaching and teaching of the earliest Christians was the means by which the call of God went out from Jerusalem into the Greco-Roman world and beyond.

God's call to all people to salvation and life, what the *Confession* refers to, as "the call to covenant relationship," is the foundation of any adequate theology of the call. This primary call of God is what the early Puritan theologians referred to as the "general calling." It is a calling that all who respond to God in faith hear. It is common to all Christians. The *Confession* also refers to it as "the call and work of the Holy Spirit:"

The call and work of the Holy Spirit is solely of God's grace and is not a response to human merit. The call precedes all desire, purpose, and intention of the sinner to come to Christ. While it is possible for all to be saved with it, none can be saved without it. Whoever will, therefore, may be saved, but not apart from the

illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit. (1984 COF, section 4.03)

All Christians are called to salvation; all Christians are called to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

The general call of God is also a call to the church, the people of God, the community of faith. It is more than an individual call; it is fully corporate as well. The church's task is to ask not only what God is calling each of us to do, but also what God is calling the church to be and do. As the *Confession* says, "The church is called into being and exists to reach out to those who have not experienced God's grace in Christ, and to nourish them with all the means of grace" (1984 COF, section 5.29).

### **The Call and Christian Ethics**

This invitation, this call, while fundamentally a call to covenant relationship with God, is at the same time all call to a particular way of life. Like God's call to Israel, it is not a call to special favor. It is a call to righteousness, love and service. The ethical dimensions of God's call are raised through considering the question, "What does it mean, in practical terms, to live in covenant relationship with God?" Paul's ethical instructions to the early churches can be summarized in the counsel to "lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Eph. 4:1). God's call is a call to a specific way of life patterned after the life and ministry of Jesus. The ethical dimensions of God's call flow from God's grace in Jesus Christ, and are incumbent on all who would live as God's people in the world.

The task of Christian ethics is to specify what it means to live in response to God's call. This task is often difficult. While the general contours of a life lived in covenant relationship with God are clear from reading the Scriptures, Christians often disagree on how those

contours inform specific decisions in specific circumstances. How should Christians respond to situations the Biblical writers could not have foreseen? Christians in good conscience may disagree on how God's general calling to the life of faith may best be demonstrated in specific situations. But they cannot escape the imperative to live out the call to discipleship in every sphere of their lives.

A second type of difficulty arises through competing claims on one's attention and energy. How does one manage the competing callings to be a faithful and loving husband or wife, son or daughter, father or mother, with the calling to be a responsible employee or employer, and the calling to responsible membership in the community of faith? Sometimes the deepest ethical conflicts arise over how we are to relate the overlapping callings and commitments that make up our lives.

The call to covenant relationship with God, then, is at the same time a call to covenant relationship with the people of God, in service to the world. It is not a call to privilege or status; it is not a call to individual salvation apart from the community of faith and the life of sacrificial service. The one call of God in Jesus Christ is a call to love God with our heart and soul and strength and our neighbors as ourselves.

### **Particular Callings and the Idea of Vocation**

Historically, the people of God have also interpreted the call of God to encompass callings to particular ministries both within and outside the covenant community, and to specific tasks in specific circumstances. Such particular calls are given to individuals within the community of faith, but are at the same time intended to serve the one call of God to faith and service. One aspect of the particular calling

of God for individuals relates to how one earns a living.

Before the toleration of Christianity in the Roman Empire, those who responded to God's calling to the life of faith in Jesus Christ and participation in the covenant community were liable to suffer serious consequences. Those consequences included disruption of family relationships, alienation from the Roman government (including imprisonment and even death), and, for some at least, a change in occupation. *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, written around 215 A.D., gives instruction to the churches about those who seek membership:

Inquiry shall be made about the crafts and professions of those who are brought for instruction. If a man is a brothel-keeper, let him cease or be rejected. If anyone is a sculptor or a painter, let them be instructed not to make idols; let them cease or be rejected. If anyone is an actor or gives theatrical performances, let him cease or be rejected. He who teaches children had best cease, but if he has no craft, let him have permission. Similarly, a charioteer who competes in the games, or goes to them, let him cease or be rejected. One who is a gladiator or teaches gladiators to fight, or one who fights with beasts in the games, or a public official employed on gladiatorial business, let him cease or be rejected. If anyone is a priest, or keeper of idols, let him cease or be rejected. A soldier under authority shall not kill a man. If he is ordered to, he shall not carry out the order; nor shall he take the oath. If he is unwilling, let him be rejected. He who has the power of the sword, or is a magistrate of a city who wears the purple, let him cease or be rejected. Catechumen or believers who want to become soldiers should be



rejected, because they have despised God.<sup>5</sup>

For the early church, the general call had specific consequences for the ways converts earned a living. Some "crafts and professions" were considered appropriate for Christians; others were not.

With the toleration of Christianity under Constantine, and later the recognition of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, the list of approved professions changed decisively. For instance, service as a magistrate or soldier was no longer prohibited when the Empire was considered Christian. Still, all Christians were considered called to the life of faith and service. The specifics of what forms of earning one's living could and could not be allowed as consistent with the call of God changed depending on the social context.

Another consequence of Christianity's adoption as the official religion of the empire was the rise of monasticism. With the end of persecution, many Christians felt called by God to demonstrate their faith in a manner that would set them apart from the "ordinary" Christian. One of the more popular ways of doing so in the fourth and fifth centuries was for devout men and women to renounce family and goods for a life of perpetual prayer. This monastic movement in the church led to a limiting of the idea of vocation (calling) to those who entered these intentional communities of men and women devoted to the life of prayer. By the time of the sixteenth century Reformation, Christians were commonly divided into "the religious" (those who followed the monastic way, who had a call to a religious vocation) and "secular" Christians. Secular Christians could participate in and benefit from the devotion of the religious by endowing monasteries. But

secular Christians (and even "secular" priests) were often considered inferior to the "religious" Christians who truly lived out their faith.

### Vocation in Luther and Calvin

At the time of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, Martin Luther rejected the restriction of the idea of vocation or calling to monastic life. Such division of Christians into "secular" and "religious" Luther found flawed on several counts. First, he had found from personal experience that the life of monastic rigor could not bring him to peace with God. The attempt to earn God's favor through renunciation of the world Luther found to be seriously at odds with the doctrine of God's free grace in Jesus Christ.

Instead, Luther committed himself to a recovery of the idea of the "priesthood of believers." The general call to discipleship was elevated to a place of priority over the specific calling of God. What distinguishes ordained ministers from other disciples, according to Luther, is not that they are called, and lay Christians are not. Ordained ministers, as a part of their calling, are set apart for a specific function within the life of the community. The distinction is not hierarchical. Nor is it a distinction of piety, as if clergy are more religious than lay Christians. The distinction is one of function. God's gift of leadership in the church is "to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:11-13). All Christians are ministers of the gospel. Within that one ministry, we have a variety of gifts for many different types of service.

While calling into question the two-tiered piety of medieval Catholicism and the clericalism of the church, Luther did not completely do away with the distinction between clergy and laity, as some of the more radical reformers did. In this, Calvin and the Reformed tradition followed Luther. Ordination to a specialized ministry of

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<sup>5</sup> Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, trans. Geoffrey J. Cuming, as quoted in James F. White, *Documents of Christian Worship* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 151-52.

preaching and administering sacraments was retained by Lutherans and the Reformed. But that ordination was seen as a functional distinction given by God for the purpose of serving the general calling to ministry of all disciples of Jesus Christ.

In developing his idea of vocation, Luther urged all Christians to see themselves as called, not only to be disciples of Jesus Christ, but to their particular station in life. Farmers, merchants, and nurses were encouraged to see their work as a part of their calling to serve God. The "lowest" domestic servant had a God-given purpose every bit as important as that of the pastor or teacher or magistrate. A Christian's calling includes doing his or her duty, in family, society, and church, as a sacred calling.<sup>6</sup>

Luther's concept of vocation was revolutionary in its day. It gave new value to work, challenging the medieval division of the world into sacred and secular. All work could be done as religious work, if done in God's service and for the sake of loving one's neighbor. But Luther's idea of vocation was also deeply conservative in many senses. One should not question one's given place in society, but see it as a part of God's purpose. There was no sense that a person should seek God's purpose apart from one's given station in life. The cobbler's son should be content in the knowledge that by his birth, God had called him to continue his father's work, even if that work was infused with new religious vitality.

At this point, Calvin's doctrine of vocation presented an advance beyond Luther. Calvin did not believe that one should simply accept one's given station in life. A Christian must actively seek his or her calling. Calvin agreed with Luther that God calls persons to many different occupations, but he refused to limit the concept of vocation to the occupation

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<sup>6</sup> See Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957).

dictated by one's birth. God's calling may lead some Christians to change occupations or professions. "It would be asking far too much," Calvin wrote, "if a tailor were not permitted to learn another trade, or a merchant to change to farming."<sup>7</sup> A person may feel called by God to different occupations at different times in her life. Thus the Reformed tradition, while agreeing with Luther's emphasis on the vocation of all Christians, developed a more dynamic approach to discerning the call of God on one's life.<sup>8</sup>

### Recovering Vocation

The Puritans who settled New England carried the Reformed tradition's emphasis on vocation with them across the Atlantic. The Puritan work ethic has been the subject of much debate, but whatever its limitations or corruptions, it certainly led Puritan Christians to understand their work, in whatever form, as a part of their religious calling. John Wesley, who had been deeply influenced by English Puritanism, counseled his followers to "Earn all you can; save all you can; give all you can." Thus every form of earning a living could be turned to the service of God's purpose in the world.

In our time, when the concept of vocation has been divorced from its Christian roots and secularized, many Reformed Christians are arguing for a renewal of the concept of vocation. The word "vocation" has come in popular usage to be a synonym for "profession" or "job." There is little sense among many Christians of any connection

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<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, ed. David W. and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), p. 153. Quoted in Donald K. McKim, "The 'Call' in the Reformed Tradition," in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, ed. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 340.

<sup>8</sup> See also John H. Leith, *John Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1989); and Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1959).

between the work they do to make a living and their calling to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Work and faith are too often compartmentalized into different and unrelated arenas of life. Ironically, among Protestants today the idea is prevalent that ordained clergy are the ones who have been called; other Christians work "secular jobs" to support the "religious" work of clergy and missionaries. The medieval division of work into secular and sacred has reappeared as strong as ever.

As Wendell Berry notes, preachers are the ones we speak of as being in "full-time Christian service." In his experience, Berry notes that this term is used

exclusively to refer to the ministry, thereby at once making of the devoted life a religious specialty or career and removing the possibility of devotion from other callings. Thus the \$50,000-a-year preacher is a "full-time Christian servant," whereas a \$20,000- or a \$10,000-a-year farmer, or a farmer going broke, so far as the religious specialists are concerned must serve "the economy" in his work or in his failure and serve God in his spare time. The professional class is likewise free to serve itself in its work and to serve God by giving the church its ten percent.<sup>9</sup>

For Berry, the consequence of our modern clericalism is not only the separation it creates between clergy and laity, but more importantly the loss of a sense of calling about our work, whether we farm or engage in professional work or any other type of employment. The economy, business, and professional work are seen as realms outside our Christian faith and commitment, rather than areas in which we are

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<sup>9</sup> Wendell Berry, from *What Are People For?* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), as quoted in *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics*, ed. Wayne G. Boulton, Thomas D. Kennedy, and Allen Verhey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 525.

to live out our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Not all Christians have a deep internal sense of call about their employment. But some do have as strong a sense of God's having called them to teach children or practice medicine or farm or any number of different means of working as any ordained minister. Though it may sometimes be the case that what distinguishes the call to service experienced by clergy and laity is the intensity of the sense of call, this is certainly not always true. Those Christians who feel deeply a call to some other ministry besides that of ordination to pastoral ministry should know that their call is honored by the church, not discounted as in any way less important than a call to ordained ministry of word and sacrament. Those whose employment is not undertaken out of a strong sense of God's call, should be encouraged to find creative ways to live out their general calling as Christians within the context of their work.

### **Particular Callings within the life of the Covenant Community**

In the epistles of the New Testament, there is a clear understanding that God calls members of the community of faith to particular tasks within the church. These particular callings are closely related to what Paul identifies as spiritual gifts. Within the household of faith there is a great diversity of gifts given so that together, the church may grow in grace and faith. "The gifts Christ gave are that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ . . ." (Eph. 4:11-12; see also 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Romans 12:3-8). Every gift is given for the sake of building up the church for its ministry in the world.

In recent years, many churches have conducted workshops and conferences on spiritual gifts, in

which members are encouraged to identify their own gifts for the work of ministry. Once the gifts are identified, members are encouraged to find ways to exercise those gifts within the life of their particular congregation and its ministry. Such spiritual gifts workshops are one example of an attempt to recover a focus on the particular call of God to every Christian within the general call to faith and service. Theologically, this is an emphasis that lies at the heart of our own tradition as Reformed Christians.

Those who are gifted by the Spirit for teaching should be encouraged to put their gift to work for the church and its ministry. Those who have the gift of hospitality need to be identified and enlisted in the church's work of welcoming strangers into the life of the church. Some members have the ability to oversee the property of the church, and others have gifts for planning, or generosity, or ministries with the poor or homeless, or caring for the sick and dying. The list could go on and on. Within the one call of God to faith and service, there are also particular callings to specific tasks within the household of faith. It is the church's task to assist all its people to discern their particular calling and how it can serve God's larger purpose in the world.

Within the Reformed tradition there has been special emphasis on God's call to three particular offices within the church: that of deacon, elder, and minister of word and sacrament. Those who enter one of these offices are called by God, through the voice of the church, to exercise leadership within the community of faith for the sake of the ministry of the whole church. While there is much greater attention given to the call to the ministry of word and sacrament, the church should emphasize that every call to one of these offices should be seen as a call from God. The first question to prospective elders and deacons should be, "You have been called by the church to lead us in our ministry. Do you feel yourself called by God to this office in the church?"

Some particular churches have found that the most effective way to recruit members for various tasks within the life of the church is to do so by issuing a "call." Instead of asking for volunteers, committees responsible for securing teachers for the church school, for instance, consider who in the church has the gifts necessary to do the work. Then those persons are issued a "call" to serve. Those issuing the call are prepared to say why they think the person's gifts and talents are suited to the particular task. The person is free to accept or reject the call, of course, but such a call often prompts persons to serious reflection about whether or not God is truly calling them to this ministry within the church. Such a "call system" is fully consistent with our theological commitment as Cumberland Presbyterians to the idea that all Christians have particular gifts and callings within the community of faith.

### **The Particular Call to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament**

Over forty years ago, H. Richard Niebuhr proposed that the call to ordained ministry of word and sacrament includes in addition to the general call to discipleship at least three elements:

[1] *the secret call*, namely, that inner persuasion or experience whereby a person feels himself [or herself] directly summoned or invited by God to take up the work of the [ordained] ministry; [2] *the providential call*, which is that invitation and command to assume the work of the [ordained] ministry which comes through the equipment of a person with the talents necessary for the exercise of the office and through the divine guidance of his [or her] life by all its circumstances; [3] *the ecclesiastical call*, that is, the summons and invitation extended to a [person] by some community or institution of the Church to

engage in the work of the ministry [of word and sacrament].<sup>10</sup>

What Niebuhr said about the call to ordained ministry of word and sacrament could easily be said of the call for all Christians. In other words, all Christians should work to discern their secret call. Each should be challenged to assess their gifts and the circumstances of life for what they may contribute to their understanding of God's call. Finally, every Christian should listen to the voice of the church and its invitation to specific ministries of service. Thus, all of what will be said about call in this section can be applied to the particular call of all Christians. But for now, we turn our attention to the call to ordained ministry of word and sacrament.

At various times in history, more or less emphasis has been given to one or another of Niebuhr's three elements of the call to ordained ministry of word and sacrament. In the early church, there was relatively little emphasis on the internal call. For instance, Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, intended after his conversion to Christianity to spend his life in a lay monastic community, in a life of study and writing. However, while he was attending a service in the nearby city of Hippo, on the North African coast, the local bishop and people recognized him. He had already made something of a name for himself through his writings in defense of the Christian faith. On the spot, the people of Hippo called Augustine to be a priest in their city, refusing his protests, unwilling to take "no" for an answer. As Augustine later recounted, "I came to this city to see a friend, whom I thought I might gain for God, that he might live with us in the monastery. I felt secure, for the place already had a bishop. I was grabbed. I was made a priest . . . and from there, I became your

bishop."<sup>11</sup> Against his own wishes, Augustine agreed to accept the people's call as the call of God on his life, and he settled in Hippo for the duration of his long and distinguished career, devoting himself to the task of serving as priest, then assistant bishop, and finally as bishop. Had he followed his own desires, Augustine would have preferred the secluded life of a scholar, but the ecclesiastical call overpowered his own sense of God's call in his life.

Similarly, John Calvin, the great sixteenth century Reformer of Geneva, did not set out to be a public leader of the Reform movement in Switzerland. He detoured through Geneva on his way to Strasbourg because the more direct route from his native city was blocked by war. In Strasbourg, he intended to take up a life similar to what Augustine had envisioned for himself. Calvin thought his gifts could best be used as a scholar and writer for the Reformed cause. But upon hearing that Calvin was in Geneva, the fiery leader of the Reform in Geneva, William Farel, went to the inn where Calvin was staying and urged him to settle in the city. When Calvin refused, Farel threatened him with the wrath of God. "You are simply following your own desires. And I tell you in the name of Almighty God, that if you refuse to take part in the Lord's work in this church, God will curse the quiet life that you want for your studies."<sup>12</sup> Calvin, unable to convince himself that it was *not* God's will that he stay, agreed to help Farel with the reform of the Genevan Church. With the exception of a three-year exile in Strasbourg, Calvin would spend the rest of his life as a pastor and leader of the Genevan Church. For Calvin, as for Augustine, the

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<sup>10</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), p. 64.

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<sup>11</sup> Augustine, Sermon 355, 2, as quoted in Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 138. The full account of Augustine's call to be priest and bishop in Hippo is recounted in Brown, pp. 138-145.

<sup>12</sup> This incident is recounted in Dawn DeVries, "The Meaning of Call and Ordination' A Theological Perspective," [http://www.utsva.edu/copy/newspubs/Publications/fo-cus-devries\\_themaining.html](http://www.utsva.edu/copy/newspubs/Publications/fo-cus-devries_themaining.html).

ecclesiastical call preceded any sense of internal call to ordained ministry.

By contrast, most Protestant churches in the United States, at least since the Great Awakening of the 1740s, have placed a much larger emphasis on what Niebuhr calls the "secret call," or, as it is more commonly designated in the Cumberland Presbyterian tradition, the "internal call." Gilbert Tennent's 1741 sermon, "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry," was one of the more incendiary tracts of the Awakening period. In it, Tennent accused the majority of Presbyterian ministers not only of *not* having an internal call to ordained ministry, but of being bereft any true piety. For leaders of the Awakening, it was essential that one be able to narrate one's experience of conversion and call. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church, as a product of what has been called the second Great Awakening, clearly stands in this tradition of elevating the importance of the internal call.

As Joe Ben Irby notes, the *Westminster Confession* makes no reference to the internal call. But the *Constitution* of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church has since 1814 instructed its presbyteries to test the "real piety" of candidates for ordained ministry and "to examine them respecting their experimental acquaintance with religion, and the motives which influence them to desire the sacred office. *And their internal call to this important work.*"<sup>13</sup> Irby concludes that "Cumberland Presbyterians have from the beginning emphasized the necessity and importance of an 'internal call' to the ministry. Such a call takes precedence over an 'ecclesiastical call' . . ."<sup>14</sup>

Both the *Confession of 1883* and the *Confession of 1984* continue the emphasis on the internal

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<sup>13</sup> *Confession of 1814*, Form of Government XII, 2; as quoted in Irby, *This They Believed: A Brief History of Doctrine in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church* (Chelsea, MI: Joe Ben Irby, 1997), p. 546. Italics added by Irby.

<sup>14</sup> Irby, p. 546.

call.<sup>15</sup> However, the *Confession of 1984* seems to move away from Irby's contention that the internal call takes precedence over the ecclesiastical in the provision that a "licentiate shall be ordained only if he or she has a call to a church or to a ministry approved by the presbytery."<sup>16</sup> While this constitutional provision has long been a part of the practice of other Presbyterian bodies, it was new to Cumberland Presbyterian practice with the *Confession of 1984*. It represents a renewed insistence that the ecclesiastical call be taken into consideration before a licentiate is ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament.<sup>17</sup>

Still, Irby's contention that the internal call takes priority over all other aspects of the call probably continues to reflect the practice of many Cumberland Presbyterians and the presbyteries' committees on ministry. Where that is the case, committees find it difficult to question a candidate's call, and to help the candidate examine his or her call, to test whether he or she has heard God's call rightly. A common attitude seems to be, "If a person claims to be called to the ministry of word and sacrament, who are we to question that call?" Ultimately, such an attitude on the part of committees does no service to those who, sincerely believing themselves to be called, do not exhibit the gifts and graces necessary to the fulfilling of the office of ordained minister of word and sacrament in the church. Such persons, sometimes after years of preparation for ordained ministry, may find themselves unable to secure a call to exercise their ministry.

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<sup>15</sup> References to the internal call can also be found in the *1883 Constitution*, paragraphs 51 and 56; and in the *1984 Constitution*, sections 6.14, 6.15, 6.32, and 6.36.

<sup>16</sup> *Constitution 1984*, 6.31, p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> Recent Cumberland Presbyterian authors who have emphasized the ecclesiastical call include Morris Pepper, *An Introduction to Christian Ministry for Lay and Clergy Persons in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church*, ed. Mark Brown and James Knight (1992), pp. 21-22; and John Ed Gardner, "The Biblical Basis of Call," unpublished paper presented at the Cumberland Presbyterian Christian Education Conference (date unavailable).

They may rightly wonder why no church will call them as pastor. They have, after all, satisfied their committee on ministry. When a committee finds itself unable to question seriously a person's providential call, that is, a person's abilities to do the work of ordained ministry, it can unwittingly set up a candidate for a lifetime of frustration. The providential call and the ecclesiastical call need to be considered as important to the long term viability of church leaders as the internal call.

That does not mean that the internal call is unimportant. It is essential if a person is to have the spiritual resources for the demanding work of pastoral leadership. But the Cumberland Presbyterian Church has always affirmed that zeal alone, without education, and without gifts for leadership, will not serve effectively the larger ministry of the people of God. The ideal call is one in which the internal sense of call, the gifts for ministry given by the Spirit, and the church's confirmation of the call come together to empower ordained ministers for the work of leading the covenant community in its response to God's call to discipleship.

Our near exclusive focus on the internal call can also lead the church to take a passive approach to identifying potential leaders for the church. Unlike the church of Augustine's and Calvin's time, we often wait patiently for persons to hear the internal voice of God, rather than identifying those with gifts for leadership in the church and challenging them to discern whether or not they should interpret those gifts and graces, and the church's need of their leadership, as a part of God's providential and ecclesiastical call on their life. Again, this is not to say that the internal call is unimportant; only that a person's serious consideration of the internal call may at times be prompted by the external call and challenge of the church.

The variety of experience among those who hear and respond to God's particular call to ordained leadership in the church is such that no one pattern can cover all cases. Morris

Pepper has identified nine different means through which God may call persons.

The call may come through:

1. *The life and fellowship of the church and the influence of the gospel in our lives.* In other words, it arises out of our own Christian experience which kindles an interest and a desire to do more.
2. *The suggestions of well meaning people.* They may ask at some time and place, "Have you ever considered the ministry?" Thus the idea is dropped into our minds. They may have observed something about us which indicated that we had the ability to become a minister.
3. *The spiritual atmosphere of the congregation, a conference, a church camp, or some other group may have moved us and brought the call into focus.*
4. *God may speak to us through a time of worship and/or a sermon in which the idea was born in our minds or the impression made upon us.*
5. *The influence of ministers.* We may see something in them which appeals to us and makes us want to be like them. They become good models. They may be pastors or parents whose children follow in their footsteps.
6. *A direct confrontation by some person:* "Have you ever considered the ministry? Can you say you have not been called?" In the early years of our denomination such recruitment was done more than it is today.
7. *A recognition on our part of having some ability for ministry.*
8. *A challenge of need and opportunity.* Upon hearing about or observing the need for ministers, we may be challenged to consider it.
9. *Or, through other means, such as a growing conviction over a period of time that the*

ministry is God's will for us. Interviews with a number of people in recent years indicate that this is the kind of experience many have had.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever the internal experience, God is the one who calls, and the church must test and validate that call.

### Discerning the Call of God

It is seldom an easy task to discern God's particular call on our lives. One recent writer has noted that God's call comes to us in the place where our deep joys and longings meet the world's great need. For some, finding that place is like stumbling across a pearl of great value, with little or no effort. For others, a clear call from God is more elusive. There is always something of a mystery to the call of God. Still, there are guideposts to help us in the work of discernment.

First, discovering God's call is a task of spiritual discernment. It requires prayer, study, and deep self awareness. We must constantly ask whether we are hearing God's call or our own desires. This task of discernment is not one to be undertaken alone. It requires the support and counsel of our brothers and sisters in the community of faith. Selfish motives can cloud our judgment. Trusted guides are needed to help us listen attentively for God's direction. The work of Committees on Ministry is best seen as one of spiritual direction for those who are testing their sense of call to the ordained ministry of word and sacrament.

Second, it must always be remembered that the particular call to such a ministry is God's call for the sake of the church. Ordained ministry exists for the church; the church does not exist for its ordained ministers. The particular call, if

it is authentic, always serves the general call of God to the life of faith and service. Some speak of the call to ordained ministry of word and sacrament as the "highest calling in the church." However, it is easy for such an idea to lead to the kind of hierarchy of callings the Reformed tradition at its best has always resisted. There may be no higher calling in the church, but this is not the same as calling ordained ministry the highest calling. Among Christians, there is no place for speaking of "higher" or "lower;" all are in Christ Jesus. The *1984 Constitution* rejects "grades of office" in the church in its description of this ministry:

The office of minister of word and sacrament is unique in the life of the church as to responsibility and usefulness. God calls persons and sets them apart for this ministry. The persons who fill this office should be sound in the faith, exemplary in conduct, and competent to perform the duties of the ministry. Persons who become ministers of the word and sacrament are due such respect as belongs to their office, but are not by virtue of their office more holy or righteous than other Christians. They share in the same vocation that belongs to all Christians to be witnesses to the gospel in word and deed. They differ from other Christians only with regard to the office to which they are called, which is their station in life. (*1984 Constitution*, section 2.61)

The distinction is one of responsibility, not of status. Those who seek leadership in the church out of a desire for status or prestige have not heard the call of God rightly. The call to ordained ministry is a call to live as a servant of the servants of God.

Often, those who present themselves to the church as candidates for ordained ministry have different levels of certainty about their call. This is to be expected. The probationary period is a time for testing the call. As educational and spiritual preparation for ordained ministry progresses, persons will often have their sense of call confirmed. Of

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<sup>18</sup> Morris Pepper, *An Introduction to Christian Ministry for Lay and Clergy Persons in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church*, ed. Mark Brown and James Knight (1992), p. 21.



course, others may decide that their original sense of call was mistaken.

The experience of Louisa Woosley, the first woman ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church provides an interesting study of how one person's call was confirmed through her study and practice of ministry. Woosley recounts an internal call to ministry that she experienced soon after her conversion. But she knew of no women ministers in her time, so over time she decided that she must be mistaken about her sense of call. As a young woman, she resolved to get her husband to respond on her behalf, but he resisted. She resolved to study the Bible from beginning to end, hoping to find there an answer to her questions. At the end of almost a year of study, she became convinced that the scriptures did not prohibit women preachers. Still, she hesitated, knowing she would encounter opposition in the church. She literally became sick with her struggle, and finally resolved to respond to God's call. Again, something held her back, but when her daughter was stricken with an illness and expected to die, she promised God that she would preach if God would spare her daughter. The daughter recovered, and Woosley knew what she had to do. Still, she did not tell anyone of her sense of call, resolving to wait for an opportunity to speak in public.

Soon the session of her church called on her to lead the evening service when the pastor was absent. In the experience of standing before the church, she felt the first confirmation of her call, despite the opposition of many of her friends and family members. Later that year she presented herself for candidacy in Nolin Presbytery, and was ordained in November 1889. At first, she rarely was called to preach, but soon her services as an evangelist and preacher were in great demand. In that, again, she found confirmation of God's call, despite the fact that the General Assembly refused to

seat her and instructed her presbytery to drop her name from the roll of ordained ministers.<sup>19</sup>

Louisa Woosley's call had all three of Niebuhr's elements. She had a strong and persistent internal call. By God's providence, she was called upon to speak at her home church, and she obviously demonstrated gifts for leadership such that her own presbytery was willing to break the unwritten tradition that women could not be ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament. Finally, the churches of her home area called her to serve them as an evangelist, providing the ecclesiastical call without which she could not have served.

The church should be willing to help those who do not find their sense of call confirmed to find their call in some other ministry of the church. Jesus' saying about "those who, having put their hand to the plow, turn back" is not directed to ministers of the word and sacrament. It is directed to those who turn back from the call to discipleship.

It is to them that Jesus directs the warning about not being fit for God's kingdom. A minister of the word and sacrament who feels called to give up his or her office in the church should not be shamed. On the other hand, the church must always take care to see that those who have responded to this particular call are encouraged and supported in their ministry as long as that ministry promises useful for the life of the church.

### **The Call to Particular Persons as Pastors**

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<sup>19</sup> Louisa Woosley's eloquent account of her call is recounted in the last chapter of her book, *Shall Woman Preach, Or the Question Answered* (Canneyvill, KY, 1891); reprinted by the Cumberland Presbyterian Board of Christian Education (Memphis: Frontier Press, 1989), pp. 96-101.

Any discussion of the call would be incomplete without a brief discussion of our call system for matching ordained ministers with particular churches. Churches with Presbyterian government have long cherished the call system. Churches, through their sessions, call whom they will to serve as their pastor. Pastors are free to accept or decline calls from particular churches. At its best, our system values the desires and needs of both pastors and people, rather than depending on a system of appointment for assigning pastoral leadership to churches.

One of the liabilities of the call system, however, is that it often fails to serve the needs of both pastors and churches. Rural churches often find it difficult to attract candidates for pastor. Many pastors, especially women and older men, find it difficult to get churches to consider them for a call. What many have spoken of recently as a “crisis in pastoral leadership” in our church is not due to a lack of ordained pastors. We have many pastors who are under-employed because they do not fit the profile of what churches are looking for in their “ideal” pastor. While there are no easy answers to the difficulty we are experiencing in this matter, churches and pastors should be challenged to examine whether their idea of call

is grounded in God’s will. The task of spiritual discernment in this area of the call is as critical as in any other.

Some churches need to be educated to understand the difference between calling a pastor and hiring a chief executive officer. The call to a person to be pastor of a particular congregation must be undertaken in the spirit of God’s general call to the church to be a faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. At the same time, pastors should have a clear sense of the difference between entertaining a call and climbing a career ladder.

God’s call to us as Cumberland Presbyterians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands that we look and pray for the leaders God is calling us to recognize. Sometimes those leaders will not be the ones we had previously envisioned. Like David’s father Jesse, we should be prepared that we may often be surprised at who God calls. May God help us to look beyond the appearances, to the heart, both our own, and that of the leaders God graciously continues to send us, and calls us to recognize, equip, and support in our service of the one call of God in Jesus Christ.

### III. APPENDIX

#### A. QUESTIONS FOR ORDINATION EXAMINATION

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##### PERSONAL FAITH AND GROWTH

1. Describe your faith pilgrimage in terms of your relationship to Christ and the church.
2. What is your understanding of the place of prayer in one's relationship with God?
3. Have you grown in your faith since you have been under the care of presbytery? In what ways?

##### CALL TO MINISTRY

4. Describe your sense of call. Has it changed since you responded to it? In what ways?
5. How do you interpret your calling in light of what Cumberland Presbyterians believe that all Christians are a "called" people? How is your calling different? How is it the same?

##### HOLY SCRIPTURES

6. What do you understand by the phrase: "...the inspiration of the scriptures?"
7. What do you understand by the phrase: "...the infallible rule of faith and practice?"
8. Why is it important to know the time frame and authorship of the books of the Bible?
9. What do you understand by the term "biblical criticism?"
10. In what ways do the synoptic gospels differ from each other? From the fourth gospel?
11. What is meant by the phrase "comparing scripture with scripture?" Why is it

important? Or, what's wrong with proof texting, anyway?

12. Briefly describe the picture of Jesus presented in the Gospel of Mark.
13. Briefly describe the unity and diversity of the Bible.
14. Briefly comment on Christianity's indebtedness to Judaism in the following areas: understanding the nature of God, the covenant, law and grace.
15. What do Cumberland Presbyterians mean by the "authority of scripture?"

##### THEOLOGY

16. Describe your thoughts about Cumberland Presbyterian theology. Describe your feelings.
17. What are some of the principal elements of Cumberland Presbyterian theology?
18. Discuss some of the different "theories" of the atonement.
19. What is your definition of the following: sin, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, covenant, grace, faith, and works?
20. What does Cumberland Presbyterian theology say about the preservation of believers?
21. What does Cumberland Presbyterian theology say about the Holy Spirit?
22. Discuss the Cumberland Presbyterian theology of both sacraments: the Lord's Supper and baptism.

23. What is the importance of the resurrection for the Christian's life and the Christian faith?
24. Why are the following important to the development of Christian theology (selectively chosen): Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Huldrych Zwingli and John Wesley.

### **CHURCH HISTORY**

25. Discuss the growth of the early church as related in scripture.
26. What issues led to the Protestant Reformation?
27. Discuss the development of the Presbyterian/Reformed churches and the place of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church within the Reformed family of churches.
28. Briefly describe the social, political and religious conditions just prior to (1) the Great Awakening and (2) the Second Great Awakening.
29. Name some of the contributions of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church to Christianity, both nationally and internationally.
30. Briefly discuss the development of major theological movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

### **PASTORAL CARE**

31. Describe the pastor's role as "shepherd" to the congregation.
32. Why is confidentiality important in the pastoral role?
33. Discuss the pastor's role in counseling as related to advantages, limitations, referrals and balance with other pastoral responsibilities.
34. What are your personal guidelines for conduct when visiting in a hospital?

### **PREACHING AND WORSHIP**

35. Is the sermon important? Why or why not?
36. What goes into making a sermon? What are its goals? What is the place of the Bible in preaching? What makes a sermon prophetic?
37. Describe your method of preparation and approach to sermon planning, preparation and preaching.
38. Name of the most commonly used lectionary. Do you use a lectionary? Why or why not?
39. What is your opinion of traditional worship, blended worship and contemporary worship?
40. How do you plan for worship? What resources do you use, if any?

### **NURTURE AND ADMINISTRATION**

41. Among other roles, a minister is a teacher. Briefly describe your feelings about this role.
42. What are the attitudes and aptitudes needed to be an effective administrator of church programs and ministries?

### **THE CHURCH IN MISSION**

43. What does the *Confession of Faith* say about the church in mission?
44. What is a "healthy" congregation? Describe some characteristics.
45. Describe the unity and diversity of the church.
46. What have your experiences been with connectional and independent congregations? Why have you chosen to do ministry in a connectional church?

### **THE CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

47. What are the responsibilities of the session, as outlined in the *Constitution*?

48. What are the responsibilities of the presbytery, as outlined in the *Constitution*?
49. What are the responsibilities of the General Assembly, as outlined in the *Constitution*?
50. Discuss the accountability of ministers and probationers to the presbytery.
51. Discuss the accountability of sessions to the presbytery.
52. Discuss the *Constitution's* statements relating to congregational property.
53. What is the purpose of discipline, as defined in the *Rules of Discipline*?

The office of minister of word and sacrament is unique in the life of the church as to responsibility and usefulness. God calls persons and sets them apart for this ministry. The persons who fill this office should be sound in the faith, exemplary in conduct, and competent to perform the duties of the ministry. Persons who become ministers of the word and sacrament are due such respect as belongs to their office, but are not by virtue of their office more holy or righteous than other Christians. They share in the same vocation that belongs to all Christians to be witnesses to the gospel in word and deed. They differ from other Christians only with regard to the office to which they are called, which is their station in life.

The person who fills the office of the ministry has in the scriptures different titles, expressive of various duties:

*pastor*--who has oversight of the people and feeds them with spiritual food and administers the sacraments as signs of God's grace;

*minister*--who serves Christ in all those ministries to people which belong to the church;

*elder* or *presbyter*--who shares in the leadership and government of the church;

*evangelist*--who bears the glad tidings of salvation through Jesus Christ, appealing to sinners to be reconciled to God;

*prophet*--who urges people and nations to heed the word of God, warning of the consequences of disobedience;

*priest*--who intercedes with God through prayer on behalf of others;

*preacher*--who publicly proclaims the gospel of Christ;

*teacher*--who explains the scriptures emphasizing the lessons essential to Christian growth.

These titles do not confer privilege in the church nor designate different grades of office but indicate the scope of responsibilities that belong to the office of ministry.

(*Constitution* 2.62)

## B. SAMPLE REPORT TO THE PRESBYTERY

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### COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR THE MINISTRY

To the Presbytery of Catawba

Date)

Presbyters:

The committee has met twice since the last stated meeting of presbytery. A quorum was present at both meetings.

PROBATIONERS: The committee interviews probationers annually in person or by conference call. In addition, committee members serve as liaisons to assigned probationers and are in contact with them at least once more annually. All probationers have been interviewed in the last six months, except one.

The following is a list of probationers (candidates and licentiates), with notations of their current status and pertinent personal information:

INCOMING CANDIDATE MARY MARGARET MATURE, a member of the Sacred Harp congregation, has been endorsed by her session. She has been interviewed by the committee. Psychological testing and an interview and a criminal background check have been conducted.

Ms Faithfull holds the MBA degree and has her own market consulting firm. She plans to enroll in Memphis Theological Seminary in the fall and to continue a limited consulting schedule.

**Recommendation 1:** that she be received as a candidate for licensure and ordination after she has shared her faith journey, received testimonials upon her behalf and successfully sustained the presbytery's examination.

LICENTIATE CARL ZUCK has graduated from Memphis Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity degree. He has been called as Associate Pastor of the Sinking Springs congregation, Seminole Presbytery. The committee recommends:

**Recommendation 2:** that, upon his successfully sustaining the presbytery's examination, Mr. Zuck be approved for ordination, to take place at the Sinking Springs congregation; and

**Recommendation 3:** that a commission be appointed for the purpose of ordaining Mr. Zuck.

Respectfully submitted,  
Wesley Leatherhead, Chair

Pastoral Development Ministry Team  
CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

NEW CANDIDATE INFORMATION FORM

Presbytery: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of New Candidate: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Day of candidacy: \_\_\_\_\_

Send completed form to:

Cumberland Presbyterian Center  
Pastoral Development Ministry Team  
8207 Traditional Place  
Cordova, TN 38016

Or email this information to [pdmt@cumberland.org](mailto:pdmt@cumberland.org)

Upon receiving this form or an email, the PDMT will send the new Candidate for the Ministry a copy of Dr. Morris Pepper's book, *An Introduction to Christian Ministry* and Dr. Tom Campbell's book, *The Bible and the Calendar*.

Pastoral Development Ministry Team  
CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

REQUEST FOR PAS APPROVAL FORM

Presbytery: \_\_\_\_\_

Day of presbyterial meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Candidate: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Circumstances that make it highly impractical for this candidate to take the standard route:

Send completed form to:

Cumberland Presbyterian Center  
Pastoral Development Ministry Team  
8207 Traditional Place  
Cordova, TN 38016

Or email this information to [pdmt@cumberland.org](mailto:pdmt@cumberland.org)

Upon receiving this request, the PDMT will send a letter of approval to the presbytery, the candidate and to PAS.



Pastoral Development Ministry Team  
CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

NEW LICENTIATE INFORMATION FORM

Presbytery: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of New Licentiate: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Day of Licensure: \_\_\_\_\_

Send completed form to:

Cumberland Presbyterian Center  
Pastoral Development Ministry Team  
8207 Traditional Place  
Cordova, TN 38016

Or email this information to [pdmt@cumberland.org](mailto:pdmt@cumberland.org)

Upon receiving this form or an email, the PDMT will send the new Licentiate for the Ministry a Christian book as a way to congratulate him/her in his/her journey.

Pastoral Development Ministry Team  
CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

ORDINAND INFORMATION FORM

Presbytery: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person to be Ordained: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Day of Ordination: \_\_\_\_\_

Ordination Service to be Held at:

Name of Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

If a member of the PDMT cannot be present for the ordination service to present the portable communion set, we will send it to a person in the presbytery who we will ask to be responsible for making the presentation on behalf of the PDMT. Please list the name of a designated person below.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Send completed form to:

Cumberland Presbyterian Center  
Pastoral Development Ministry Team  
8207 Traditional Place  
Cordova, TN 38016

Or email this information to [pdmt@cumberland.org](mailto:pdmt@cumberland.org)

Understanding the Process for Ordination  
in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church:  
Handbook for Presbyterial Committees on the Ministry  
or Preparation for the Ministry

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of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church



OUR UNITED OUTREACH  
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