

Exploring Call



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Introduction

Vocation, or calling, are central facets of the life of the Church and, in our Reformed tradition we're clear that call is heard in the context of our various Councils. Local churches nurture and encourage leadership and stimulate discipleship. Our Elders' and Church Meetings discern calls to Eldership, Accredited Lay Preaching, Pioneer Ministry as well as Church Related Community Work and the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments – in their many forms. These reflections, most of which were first disseminated through the URC's Daily Devotions, help us think about a number of aspects of Call – I reflect on the fact that our Baptism is the basis of all our callings, Leo Roberts, the Children and Young People's Officer for the North Western Synod reminds us of God's universal call to serve in the world, Ruth Whitehead reminds us to ask who benefits from any particular sense of Call. Some are called to the specific task of leadership and John Proctor reflects on what this might mean whilst Gordon Woods reflects on the ministry of Eldership. I consider the way in which we discern in the URC – never a personal thing alone, always a discernment task done together. Susan Durber examines the fact that we are all called in multiple ways and John Ellis helps us consider the call to let go and move on. Finally I reflect on the different ways in which the URC offers a variety of recognised ministries. We hope that these studies will help you focus on your calling; maybe you are exploring a call to join the Church, to become an Elder, or to candidate for ordained or commissioned ministry. Maybe you already serve the Church in some way and wonder how that role may develop or if it's time to let go of that role. Whatever your situation we hope and pray that you will listen and discern more fully your own vocation.

*Andy Braunston,
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Session 1 O Jesus I Have Promised



O Jesus I Have Promised

John Earnest Bode (1869) 7676D

O Jesus, I have promised
To serve thee to the end;
Be thou forever near me,
My Master and my friend;
I shall not fear the battle
If thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If thou wilt be my guide.

2 O let me feel thee near me!
The world is ever near:
I see the sights that dazzle,
The tempting sounds I hear.
My foes are ever near me,
Around me and within;
But, Jesus, draw thou nearer,
And shield my soul from sin.

3 O let me hear thee speaking
In accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion,
The murmurs of self-will.
O speak to reassure me,
To hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen,
Thou guardian of my soul.

4 O Jesus, thou hast promised
To all who follow thee
That where thou art in glory
There shall thy servant be.
And, Jesus, I have promised
To serve thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
My Master and my friend.

All Called Through Baptism

Andy Braunston, URC Minister for Digital Worship



Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that

I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’

St Matthew 28: 16-20

In the West we have forgotten the power of Baptism. We see it as a lovely rite of passage for babies, or as a moving way of showing adult conversion and commitment to Christianity. Either way it’s seen as safe, maybe even quaint, in our culture. For converts to Christianity in some countries, however, Baptism is dangerous, subversive and life threatening.





I have given evidence in the asylum courts on behalf of people who have converted to Christianity. Most converts were reluctant to get baptised until they reached a safe country. Some, from Iran, would visit Turkey to seek Baptism as the Iranian regime understands its radical nature more than most Western Christians do.

To be baptised is to make a complete commitment to Jesus, to turn one’s back on “Satan, and all his works and empty promises” (to quote the 1970s Catholic rite.)


However, Baptism is more than just turning away from sin. In the reading from St Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus linked Baptism with discipleship. The Apostles were to preach, baptise and teach. Baptism is more than a rite of entry, it’s a sign of undeserved grace working within us.


Baptism is bound up with our calling to follow Jesus. When we were baptised, the Holy Spirit was given to us, providing various gifts which, through our Christian lives, we learn to unwrap and use. Through Baptism we are incorporated into the Church and made Christ’s own.



	<p>That incorporation, however, demands a response. We're not baptised into a club. We're not baptised into social status. We're not baptised so that we're saved in isolation. Instead, Baptism is the Sacrament that commissions us for service.</p> <p>Through Baptism, we are called to respond to God's gentle leading. That leading might mean we take our church membership more seriously. It might mean that we gently tell others of the love of God. It might mean we're called to test a call to Eldership, or some form of ministry. It might even mean that, like my Iranian friends, we're called to lay down our lives for the sake of the Gospel.</p> <p>When we turn our back on sinful works and empty promises we turn to Christ and his call to each of us to follow him. Through Baptism we're given the strength to follow and respond.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think of Andy's ideas about Baptism being dangerous and subversive? • Andy suggests that through Baptism we are given gifts used to build up the Church and serve the world. What gifts do you see at work in your congregation which helps with these tasks? • What might taking our church membership more seriously mean for us?
	<p>Lord Jesus, help me to recognise and respond to your call, to follow you, to discover, through you, my gifts so that I may serve you more faithfully.</p> <p>Lord, bring strength and courage to those you call in other lands, where following you is dangerous,</p>

	<p>and where Baptism is a death sentence.</p> <p>May we learn from their courage and offer a warm welcome to those who flee in order to be free. Amen.</p>
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In the World as we all are
Leo Roberts, Children and Young People's Officer for the North Western Synod

	<p>After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>St Luke 10.1</i></p>
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	<p>It's odd, isn't it? The Lord didn't appoint seventy rabbis and send them to synagogues. No, he sent 'others' and sent them to every town and place where he himself intended to go. It's almost as though he knew that there were people living their lives, getting on with day-to-day things, that needed ministering to. Of course, He didn't explicitly say DON'T go to the synagogues, and I'm sure that was often their first port of call, but also the workplaces, homes, shops, street corners. He didn't ask His disciples to limit their ministry to designated places of worship, He asked them to go to where people were.</p> <p>I wonder how those seventy felt as they got to their town or place? Nervous? Excited? Scared? They weren't lone operators, they had someone else on their team but, still...sent out into the world. What was their mission? Was it entirely practical - you know: arrange accommodation,</p>
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	<p>maybe put up a few posters? Or was it about beginning ministry, doing the groundwork, sharing the Gospel?</p> <p>Did He send out complementary teams? A great preacher with a healer? A fantastic teacher working alongside a miracle worker? A wise old head with an energetic young firebrand?</p> <p>Or did He just pair folk up randomly and ask them to use whatever skills they had to do the best they could in meeting the needs they found in the places they went to?</p> <p>It's almost as though Jesus trusted them. Just like He trusts us. To make a positive difference in whatever way they could, in whatever way we can, to people that were there. To people that are here. Wherever that may be. Not just in our churches.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leo suggests Jesus trusted the people He sent out to evangelise and, by implication trusts us! Why do you think we often find it difficult to talk about our faith? • What could you do to share your faith? • How could the church help you?
	<p>Lord, it sometimes feels as though we are the lone voice crying out in the wilderness. We know that you are with us yet sometimes the task, our mission, feels overwhelming. Help us to feel your presence. Help us to use our gifts. Help us to be strong in our faith. So that the work we do in Your name may help Your kingdom come, Your will be done. Amen.</p>

Call and Servanthood

The Rev'd Ruth Whitehead serves six congregations in rural West Wales



In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.’

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: ‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’ And he said, ‘Go and say to this people: “Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.”’

Isaiah 6: 1-9

The call of Isaiah is a favourite of many of those who recognise that they are called by God to service in any capacity. In the context of wonderful, pivot-shaking worship in the Temple, the Lord himself appears and asks ‘Who will go for us?’. Often we end our reading with Isaiah’s response “Here am I, send me”.

The word “I” appears, meaning Isaiah, eight times in this passage and it is easy to be blinded by this personal account into thinking that any call from God is all about ‘me’. “Here am I. Send me.” It could be all about ‘me’.



But in fact the really amazing parts of this account are all about God – his robe, his seraphs, his glory. Only once God has got the attention of Isaiah is he able to cleanse and commission him. And then the work of ministry begins – to go to the people and tell them the message God is giving them. It’s a rather odd message, that points to the destruction of the land and the punishment of the people. Only after all that will there be a time of hope. Yet however discouraging at first sight, this is God’s message to God’s people voiced by God’s prophet.

A Methodist colleague of mine is very fond of asking the question, ‘For whose benefit is this ministry?’ If when we are considering the purpose of our lives we cannot truly answer ‘For the service of God and the benefit of God’s people’ then perhaps we need to read the sixth chapter of Isaiah again – and get past the part which is all about ‘me’.



- Ruth's colleague's wry question "to whose benefit is this ministry?" is interesting and is why in the URC we test calls to formal ministry through the various Councils of the Church. Why do you think people confuse a call to serve with something which makes them feel important?
- How might local churches discern better about the motivations and aptitudes that people show who offer themselves for ministries?



Dearest Lord,
teach me to be generous;
teach me to serve You as You deserve;
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and not to ask for reward
save that of knowing I am doing Your Will. Amen.

St Ignatius Loyola

Session 2 The Voice of God is Calling



The Voice of God Is Calling

John Haynes Holmes (1913) 7676D

The voice of God is calling
A summons unto all;
As once they heard in Zion,
So now we hear the call.
"Whom shall I send to succor
My people in their need?
Whom shall I send to loosen
The bonds of shame and greed?"

2 "I hear my people crying
In cot and mine and slum;
No field or mart is silent,
No city street is dumb.
I see my people falling
In darkness and despair.
Whom shall I send to shatter
The fetters which they bear?"

3 We heed, O God, thy summons,
And answer: "Here are we!
Send us upon thine errand,
Let us thy servants be.
Our strength is dust and ashes,
Our years a passing hour;
But thou canst use our weakness
To magnify thy power.

4 "From ease and plenty save us;
From pride of place absolve;
Purge us of low desire;
Lift us to high resolve;
Take us, and make us holy;
Teach us thy will and way.
Speak, and, behold! we answer;
Command, and we obey!"

Called to Leadership

*The Revd John Proctor is a retired minister
and member of Downing Place URC, Cambridge*



I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

Romans 16:1-2

Supporting the local church

‘Some are called to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments’ and some to ‘the ministry of church related community work’. So says the URC’s Basis of Union (paras 21 and 22). The first of those roles helps the local church to shape its worship, its pastoral life and its outreach. The second role enables congregation and local community to work together for justice and the common good.

Phoebe might have done well in either of those roles. She had a key position in the local church as a ‘deacon’. That word suggests both humble service – someone who’s not afraid to roll their sleeves up – and also a position of trust and respect.

She appears to have been the carrier of the Letter to the Romans. So she might have been asked to talk about its message with Christians who received it. ‘What’s Paul getting at? Does he tell other churches about these things? What difference have these ideas made to your life?’ I



wonder if Phoebe was an off-the-cuff theologian, who could talk with others about God in unrehearsed yet serious and searching ways. That's quite a gift, but we continue to need people who can do it well.

She was generous too, as a 'benefactor'. Phoebe found ways of supporting others, and providing for them, whether with her goods or with her deeds. She may have been one of those early Christians who opened their home for the church to meet, who shared food with those who had too little, who noticed the sick and struggling.

Phoebe could navigate the complex waters of human relationships and leave other people feeling encouraged and helped. She had the confidence of church members at Cenchreae (a port in Greece). She had the nerve to travel and connect with a different set of people in a new place. As she went, she carried a message, to make people think deeply and help them to trust in Jesus. I thank God for Phoebe – and for you, if you do any of these things today.



- Who, in your congregation is able to explain things like an “off the cuff theologian”? Who in your congregation is good at helping those who are struggling? Who in your congregation enjoys the confidence of your church?
- How does your congregation encourage others to minister in these ways?



Generous God, help me to be like Phoebe:
open and kind, when others are in need;
practical, when there's a task to be done;
confident, in finding my feet somewhere new;
respectful and helpful, among people of all kinds.

And help me to notice the Phoebes around me,
to honour them, help them and learn from them.

In the name of Jesus Christ the servant King. Amen.

Called to Eldership

Gordon Woods is an Elder of St. Columba's URC, Oxford



The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way— for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil. Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons. Women likewise must be serious, not

slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well; for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.



1 Timothy 3:1-13

In preparing this devotion I refreshed my memory around some of the descriptions in the New Testament about how the early Church was organised. There is plenty about relationships within the community, and about how the early Christians were expected to behave, but relatively little about how it might be led. Peter clearly has a leading role in the opening chapter of Acts, but as the Church grew it must have developed new models of leadership with some being called to lead, not just follow. These verses from 1 Timothy (which probably wasn't written by Paul) set out some of the qualities that such people should have - though, depressingly, the prominent role of women in the Gospels and other parts of the New Testament seems to have been airbrushed out.



These verses refer to Bishops (or 'overseers' in some translations) and Deacons (or 'servants'). Frustratingly, there are no job descriptions attached for us to check whether the duties the URC Manual assigns to Elders are aligned to either role! But most of the characteristics seem to work well for us.

Having been a serving Elder for the last 18 years, I am struck by the contrasts with leadership roles in my life as a civil servant; there is more listening in being an Elder, for example - listening for God, listening to each other, listening to the wider congregation. Unlike a leadership

	<p>position at work, being an Elder isn't a promotion, it is simply another form of service. And unlike any promotion exercise I've ever run, potential candidates tend to reflect long and hard before allowing their names to go forward!</p> <p>Let us pray for those we call to be Elders that they may feel able to accept this call to serve God and their local churches in this ministry.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways is Eldership a ministry rather than being, for example, a Committee member or buildings specialist? • How do the criteria for leadership outlined in I Timothy sound to you? Are they realistic for contemporary leadership? •
	<p>We give thanks for our Elders; faithful women and men who answer the call to serve. May they be kind and constructive in challenge; concerned and supportive in care; bold and inventive in mission.</p> <p>We pray that they may know the value of their service, feel able to lay their responsibilities down at the right time, and unlock the gifts and service of others, so that together we may build the Kingdom of God. Amen.</p>

Vocation is tested and discerned

The Rev'd Andy Braunston is the URC's minister for Digital Worship



Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders. So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.' The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter.

Acts 15: 1 - 6



As a youngster I explored a vocation to be a Catholic priest. My bishop said men in his diocese didn't have a vocation until he said they did! Even though my sense of call has been somewhat refined over the years, I felt the bishop understood something - one's sense of call is tested and discerned by the Church. Each denomination does this in various ways - most often through assessment conferences where teams of people look at candidates' written and verbal submissions, psychological profiles, and the way they work with others. This enables a decision to be formed about whether candidates have the potential to be trained for lifelong ministry.

In the URC we test and discern through the Councils of the Church for any type of ordered ministry - the Elders' and Church Meeting will test and discern a sense of Call to be an Elder and those who wish to explore training for ordained or commissioned ministry find their call is further tested through the Synod and through the selection process of General Assembly - the final sense of discernment coming with an initial call to serve a pastorate or project. Sometimes we can criticise ourselves for the length of time our discernment processes take but we have something valuable which is very much embedded in the practice of the early Church.

Paul's successful missionary work amongst gentiles meant they were becoming Christian without first becoming Jewish - challenging the Church's self-definition; was it a Jewish sect or something more? Paul, being something of a loose cannon, pushed ahead with his Gentile mission whilst others were more cautious. There was no established decision making process and so it was decided to hold a Council in Jerusalem to iron out the issues - with the result that the Gentile mission continued.

Conciliar government may be a time consuming and cumbersome process but is a rather better way of discerning together than my old bishop doing it by himself.



- Andy implies that vocation isn't about an inner feeling as much as an exterior recognition of Call by the Church. What do you think of that?
- Our discernment processes are slow – is that frustrating or joyful for us? (why?)



O God,
you call all people to yourself,
and are heard in myriad ways,
help us to trust in you as we discern together,
to have confidence that you speak to us through our
Councils,
that we discern and test so that your mission to our world
is strengthened. Amen.

Session 3 How Clear Is Our Vocation Lord

How Clear Is Our Vocation Lord



Fred Pratt Green 1981 © Hope Publishing Company CCLI 1064776

Tune: Repton (Dear Lord and Father of Mankind)

How clear is our vocation, Lord,
when once we heed your call:
to live according to your Word,
and daily learn, refreshed, restored,
that you are Lord of all
and will not let us fall.

2 But if, forgetful, we should find
your yoke is hard to bear;
if worldly pressures fray the mind,
and love itself cannot unwind
its tangled skein of care:
our inward life repair.

3 We marvel how your
saints become
in hindrances more sure,
whose joyful virtues put to shame
the casual way we wear your name
and by our faults obscure
your pow'r to cleanse and cure.

4 In what you give us,
Lord, to do,
together or alone,
in old routines and ventures new,
may we not cease to look to you,
the cross you hung upon—
all you endeavoured done.

Being called by many voices

The Rev'd Dr Susan Durber is the President for Europe
of the World Council of Churches



Now when Jesus saw great crowds around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. A scribe then approached and said, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' Another of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.'

St Matthew 8: 18 - 22



Jesus doesn't make it easy to follow him. One over enthusiastic scribe offers to go anywhere, any time, but instead of saying 'Great!' Jesus says that it's not that simple, that there is a restlessness about his journey that will stretch the most committed follower. And then when someone else wants to wait before actually setting out, he is told to get on with it and leave everything else behind.

It's not entirely clear what the second of these would-be disciples is saying. Has his father just died? Or is it that he has ageing parents and wants to look after them before committing himself to Jesus? Is Jesus really saying that following him means turning our backs on the responsibilities, even the vocations, that we already have – as those who are in relationships or in jobs that matter to us? Have we really to 'leave everything behind' for the sake of our calling to be disciples?

Many wrestle hard with competing calls on their time and energy. And many of these competing voices can readily

be thought of as vocations. Being in a covenant relationship (like marriage), having a job, volunteering in the community, being an artist – are all things that might be understood as vocations. One person might have several such vocations. The model of the celibate priest is one simple model of vocation, but for most people, vocations are multiple.

In this same Gospel, Joseph of Arimathaea is celebrated as one who ‘buries the dead’, so perhaps this hard saying in chapter 8 is not urging us to set aside all other vocations in favour of following Jesus, but inviting us to see them all as part of that following. We will have decisions to make about how we follow the restless Jesus. But the decision to live all our roles in the light of his calling to us can’t and needn’t be put off.



- Susan discerns that we all have multiple vocations/callings. What are yours?
- Some Christianities suggest that in following Jesus all will be well yet Susan suggests that Jesus implies a restlessness that comes from following him – has (and is) your Christian journey been safe and secure or rather more restless?
- How do we balance the competing demands on our time from our various vocations?



O God, who has honoured me with many calls on my life, and has given me gifts and graces with which to bless the world,
 may I fulfil every task and love every person as you give me means.
 May my work and my ministry, my loving and my being, be shaped and blessed by my following of Jesus, and be strengthened by your Holy Spirit, today and always, Amen.

Vocation often means letting things go

John Ellis is a past Moderator of the General Assembly and Secretary of Capel United Church in Kent.



Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Acts 13:1-3



Knowing your vocation sounds very positive; and it is. That confidence enhances the times of celebration and carries you through the barren times. You feel in the right place. However, we hear rather less about what happens when it ends.

We are not told whether Saul and Barnabas wanted to give up whatever they were doing and be sent off to Cyprus. Evidently the Spirit spoke clearly and they left. If it is our project, it is hard to leave it for someone else to lead and change. If at least some people appreciate our contribution, even more so. Fewer women nowadays have to abandon completely a stimulating career if a baby comes along, but plenty of our ministers had to leave a deeply valued job in order to train for the uncertain, low paid vulnerabilities of stipendiary ministry. When a minister or lay leader feels compelled to move on from a congregation, it does not always feel the perfect time.

Feeling instructed to leave a life I love is even more difficult

if what is coming next is unknown. Those around us greet the idea with anxious incomprehension: why are you leaving us? Only later do we see that if we had not been willing to let go and wait, we could never have taken on the next calling that God had in mind. Once experience has taught us that, trusting the Spirit may even become a little easier.

The task in Cyprus proved immensely tough. The next calling is not often an easy reward for good behaviour in the last one. We may wistfully look back on what we agreed to leave behind. Yet in God's Providence we were being equipped. As a hymn that we have forgotten used to say:

Father, I know that all my life
is portioned out for me....
In service which Thy will appoints
there are no bonds for me.



- Moving on always leaves loose ends – ministers never finish everything before they move or retire, lay leaders may move in the midst of exciting busy times – how does it feel when a much loved minister or lay leader moves on?
- For ministers Calls have push and pull factors; St Jude's wonderful programmes for children and young people, its sea side setting, the evident care that it has for a minister can all be pull factors, push factors can be positive – a feeling that one's work is done, or negative – sniping criticism, unwillingness to try new things, incessant unpleasantness can also all be push factors. How might your congregation maximise its pull and minimise its push factors for both lay and ordained ministry?



God of mystery and surprises
help me to serve gladly where you have called me.
In achievement and in despair,
assure me that you have a purpose.
And when the time is right to leave current tasks behind:
speak to me clearly,
give me peace to help me find courage
and teach me that the sun will rise again. Amen

The Spirit of the Lord is Upon us

Andy Braunston is the URC's Minister for Digital Worship



When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

St Luke 4: 16 - 21



Jesus' first sermon didn't end well. Rather than "nice sermon rabbi" he was seized and the congregation threatened to kill him. That's not how we normally want our services to end. Jesus' teaching continued to enrage people as much as it delighted them. His ministry unsettled people – after all good news for the poor isn't always good news for the rich, freedom for the oppressed makes the powers that oppressed them rather edgy, letting people see things how they really are always means the world will change. Christian ministry, in its various forms, must always follow these precepts from Jesus' first sermon where he laid out his priorities – the priorities of the coming Kingdom. There's a tendency in Christianity to emphasis the spiritual without grounding that spirituality in the hard concrete facts of our world. Jesus doesn't fall into that trap and nor should we.

Throughout these three sessions we've focused on vocation and calling in various different ways. We believe that, through our Baptism we've been called to serve in various ways. We've mentioned Eldership in these sessions but there are many other ways in which God is calling us:

First, we're all called to deepen our discipleship. The URC's Stepwise programme is one way of doing that in a structured way. Stepwise can be run as a local or Synod group. The Daily Devotions is a less structured way of ensuring that you have the opportunity to read some Scripture, reflect and pray about it each day along with thousands of others across and beyond the URC. You can find details of both on the URC's website.

Some people feel called to train to lead worship – sometimes because they've been asked to lead worship and panic, other times because that process of being asked leads

to a growing sense of Call. Each Synod trains people to become local leaders of worship or Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers – might this be something you are called to? If you do lead worship and aren't trained it's always good to explore training so the worship we offer is as good as it can be and always honouring the God whom we serve.

Some people feel called to plant new expressions of Church – often supported by their local congregations. Messy Church is one such expression of Church but there are many others. Pioneering ministry is about releasing ordinary people to do the extraordinary things they dream about – enabling crazy, and not so crazy, ideas to take shape as part of the mission of the Church.

We train people now to undertake this powerful voluntary ministry. Then, of course, some are called to be Church Related Community Workers – either as volunteers or as paid ministers. CRCWs work in the community on behalf of the Church to show practical love and care. Ministers of Word and Sacrament are the types of minister we're most familiar with. Now we train people for stipendiary or voluntary service with different forms of voluntary service meaning that some can be trained locally for particular local ministries.

Our various ministries are used to sustain and give growth to the Church. All the ministries we exercise are designed to give contemporary expression to Jesus' priorities outlined in that first sermon in Nazareth – good news to the poor, release to the captives, liberation for the oppressed and the ability to see the world as it really is. It's quite a challenge.



- Who might you describe the mission and purpose of your congregation?
- What types of ministry does your church already have and what does it need (and why does it need it?)
- Who in your church might you perceive as having a call to some form of ministry – either local or wider?



Not a prayer as much as a reflection:

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons.

He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments.

Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.”

John Henry Newman