Called to Lead

God's Call, Your Vocation

The Rev. Paul Baglyos

A DISCERNMENT GUIDE REGARDING MINISTRY IN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

GOD'S CALL, YOUR VOCATION: A DISCERNMENT GUIDE REGARDING MINISTRY IN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this resource intended to guide your discernment regarding candidacy for public ministry leadership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Most likely, you have opened this resource at the suggestion of someone with whom you have spoken about an interest, a wonder, a curiosity or a consideration pertaining to the possibility of becoming a pastor or a deacon in the ELCA. The four chapters that follow this introduction can help you to clarify your sense of God's prompting and the direction of your response.

Chapter One explores the meaning of the words "call" and "vocation," and explains their grounding in the sacrament of baptism. As Martin Luther taught, all baptized Christians are called by God to new life in Jesus Christ which is their sacred vocation in the world, however that might be carried out and fulfilled. In this way, all baptized Christians – not only those who become deacons or pastors – receive from God a call, a vocation to ministry. Perhaps this guide will help you to discern more clearly God's call and your vocation related to baptism and carried out in ministries other than those of pastors and deacons. If so, this resource will have fulfilled its intention for you in Chapter One alone.

Chapter Two begins to explore the particular ministries of Word and Sacrament (the vocation of pastors) and Word and Service (the vocation of deacons) as these are understood in the ELCA, which uses the word "candidacy" to refer to the formation of people preparing for rostered ministry leadership. Every synod in the ELCA is responsible for convening and equipping a candidacy committee, which accompanies people in the formational process of becoming deacons or pastors.

Chapter Three explores the character and scope of the formation undertaken by candidates and overseen by candidacy committees in the ELCA. The gifts and abilities, the competencies and capacities necessary for public ministry leadership as pastors and deacons must be cultivated through study and practice, learning and growth. Candidacy committees work in partnership with seminaries and congregations to ensure that such study and practice, such learning and growth are undertaken and evaluated throughout the candidacy process. Engaging in the candidacy process of formation for public ministry leadership is itself a particular call and sacred vocation, as is the work of

candidacy committees, seminaries, congregations and the larger community of the church walking alongside candidates in ongoing discernment.

Chapter Four describes the major stages and considerations of the candidacy process, providing an overview of that process and a glimpse into the further discernment that attends the vocation of pastors and deacons in the ELCA. The conclusion of Chapter Four encourages readers who want to pursue their inquiry about candidacy to contact their synod office for further direction.

Embedded within each of the four chapters are sets of questions and actions for readers' discernment. Those questions and actions are crucial to the intention of this discernment guide. In many cases, they will require readers to be in conversation with others, so that, over the course of all four chapters, readers will have connected with many people in a shared exercise of discernment. Additionally, readers of this discernment guide are encouraged to engage the questions and the actions embedded within the four chapters through *journaling* and with a *mentor*.

YOUR JOURNAL AND YOUR MENTOR

Have you ever engaged in a practice of journaling, or kept a journal for some purpose of recall, reflection or expression? If so, consider the particular habits and disciplines that made the practice helpful and satisfying to you, and plan to use those habits and disciplines throughout this discernment guide. If not, ask a relative, a friend or a colleague who journals to help you get started for the purpose of this discernment guide, or else inquire about journaling online or at your library.

Who might you ask to work with you as a mentor throughout this discernment guide? With whom might you be willing to share the content of your journal throughout this guide, who would be willing also to discuss with you all the embedded questions and your answers to those questions? Whose insight and perspective do your value enough to ask to do this with you and for you? If you are not sure, ask someone else whom you trust to recommend a suitable mentor for you.

This discernment guide is intended to be used at each reader's own pace. Careful attention to all the content in each of the four chapters, particularly to the embedded questions and actions, will yield a greater benefit than hasty or superficial skimming. Readers are encouraged to spend at least two weeks with each chapter, devoting sufficient time to the embedded questions and actions, and to conversations with a mentor.

With two exceptions, all works cited within this discernment guide are identified and acknowledged in footnotes. The two exceptions pertain to biblical quotes and liturgical quotes. All scriptural quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version*, the full citation for which is now provided here, along with that of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, referenced throughout this resource.

New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America,

Evangelical Lutheran Worship, copyright 2006, by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Augsburg Fortress, Publishers.

CHAPTER ONE:
THE VOCATION OF THE BAPTIZED

Baptism has been essential to Christian faith and practice from the beginning. The gospel narratives in the New Testament bear witness to Jesus' own baptism by John in the Jordan River (Mark 1:9-11 and parallels), refer to the performance of baptisms by Jesus' disciples while they travelled about with him (John 3:22 and 4:1-2), and include baptism as one of the tasks that Jesus commissioned his disciples to do after his resurrection (Matthew 28:19). Frequent reference to and instruction about baptism occur also in the other writings of the New Testament, making it clear that baptism has always been an identifying marker of Christian discipleship. Christians are baptized people and baptizing people.

REMEMBERING YOUR BAPTISM

Make a recollection of your own baptism, including as much information as you know or can recover, such as:

- The date and location of your baptism
- The name of the person who baptized you, and the names of the people who stood with you as presenters, sponsors or godparents
- The name or names of anyone else who was baptized with you at the same time
- The manner by which you were baptized, and the liturgical rite or ceremony that was used

If you can, talk with some of the people who participated in or were present at your baptism, asking them to tell you what they remember about it.

Look at any mementos you or others might have from your baptism, such as a baptismal certificate, candle, gown, photographs, cards and so forth.

Consider the anniversary of your baptism. Do you or others celebrate that occasion in some way? If so, how? If not, how might you do so?

Baptism connects us to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in particular and public ways, forever joining our story to his, and his story to ours. In baptism we are clothed in Christ so that we become representatives of his presence and ambassadors of his good news. To live one's baptism involves responding to Jesus' call both to follow him and to go forth in his name, engaging in his own ministry to the world. Jesus tells his disciples, "As you go, proclaim

the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons" (Matthew 10: 7-8). This ministry of proclaiming, curing, raising, cleansing and casting out is Jesus' own ministry and it becomes also the ministry of the baptized. His ministry is our vocation as baptized people.

The order for baptism in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* provides a welcome for newly baptized people whereby a representative of the congregation says to each as they receive a lighted candle, "Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (*ELW*, p. 231, quoting Matthew 5:16). The good works to which God calls the baptized are God's own good works in the world, the same good works done by Jesus to the glory of the Father. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has adopted the motto, "God's work. Our Hands," which expresses the relationship between the ministry of Jesus and the vocation of the baptized.

Following the presentation of a lighted candle to each newly baptized person (or to a baptismal sponsor), the order for baptism in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* suggests the following congregational address: "We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share: join us in giving thanks and praise to God and bearing God's creative and redeeming word to all the world" (*ELW*, p. 231). This address also expresses the understanding that the ministry of Jesus is the vocation of the baptized. Baptized people are both recipients and bearers of God's creative and redeeming word to all the world.

LIVING YOUR BAPTISMAL VOCATION

Recall a situation in which your identity as a baptized person determined a choice you made, an action you took, or the words you spoke. In what ways did you engage in the ministry of Jesus in that situation? How was his work carried out in yours?

How do you seek to live your baptismal vocation in the ordinary course of your life – including your family relationships, your community relationships, and your occupational responsibilities?

What aspect of your baptismal vocation do you find to be the most difficult or challenging?

In what ways do you seek to grow in your baptismal vocation? Make a list of all the ways you have intentionally done that within the past year. Include, for example, any learning opportunities in which you have engaged, any service projects in which you have participated, and any leadership roles you have accepted in your community, your congregation or your synod.

To what new growth do you think God is currently calling you as a baptized person? In what ways do you experience either hesitance or eagerness to respond to God's call? What might be holding you back or encouraging you forward?

Some congregations have adopted the habit of identifying their members as their ministers. Many congregational members are unaccustomed to think of themselves as ministers, regarding that term as appropriate only for people who serve in leadership roles as congregational staff. Consider, however, the following verses from the New Testament:

- "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." (Matthew 10:40; in other translations, the word "receives" appears in place of "welcomes")
- "You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name." (John 15:16)
- "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:5)
- "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12:1)

There is no reason to consider that these words apply only to a select few among the disciples of Jesus. Rather, these words apply to all disciples of Jesus; they are intended for all who have been claimed by Christ and for Christ in baptism. Ministry is the vocation of the entire church and all its members, not simply the specialized task of a select few.

One of the images used in the New Testament to describe the church is the "body of Christ." In his first letter to the Christian congregation in the city of Corinth, Paul reminds the people, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27). The crucified, risen and ascended Christ continues to carry out his ministry in the world through the church as his body. Just as the Holy Spirit descended upon the body of Jesus as he rose from the water of his own baptism, so the Holy Spirit also descended upon the extended body of Jesus – the church – at Pentecost. The entire church, including each of its members, shares the same vocation of ministry that was bestowed upon Jesus. To be a Christian, therefore, a follower of Christ, means also to be a minister of his good news in word and deed.

Paul continues his first letter to the Corinthians by explaining that while all Christians are called to ministry, they are not all called to the same ministry tasks or the same ministry roles. He names some of the various ministry tasks and ministry roles carried out by the church as the body of Christ, mentioning apostles, prophets, teachers, those who do "deeds of power," healers, helpers and so forth (1 Corinthians 12:28-30). To understand that all baptized people are ministers, therefore, does not mean they all do the same things or exercise

the same roles. Ministry includes a wide variety of forms, functions and expressions, as diverse as the membership of the entire church.

ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR MINISTRY

Have you ever thought of yourself as a minister by virtue of your baptism? If so, when and how did you learn that understanding? If not, how do you feel to think of yourself as a minister now as you read this?

What tasks or activities do you do, what roles or responsibilities do you fulfill that you are able to recognize as ministry? In what ways are you a minister in and to your congregation, your household and your family, your friends and your colleagues, your neighborhood and the larger world?

Talk with other people in your congregation, asking whether and how they understand themselves as ministers and seek to carry out their ministry in their daily lives. Together, make a list of the ways that your congregation helps its members to grow in their understanding of themselves as ministers and in their capacity to carry out their ministry in their daily lives.

What new steps might you undertake in your own growth in ministry, in terms of both your understanding and your capacity?

Our discussion so far has frequently – and interchangeably – used the words "vocation" and "call." "Vocation" is related by its Latin root to the words "vocal" and "voice," as well as to the Latin verb meaning "to call." The close association of these words is exemplified in the New Testament where Jesus, referring to himself as the good shepherd, says that his sheep "hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (John 10:3). Contemporary English usage often equates the word "vocation" with "occupation," referring to a person's employment, but "vocation" carries a larger meaning beyond a person's job. "Vocation" involves a relationship between one who acts and one on whose behalf or at whose behest the acting occurs. To have a vocation means to be in a relationship with someone whose voice summons our response and calls us to action.

Consider this story in the New Testament:

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea – for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets,

> and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-22)

The occupation in which these two pairs of brothers were engaged was that of fishermen. When Jesus called them to follow him, they embarked upon a vocation as his disciples. His call became their vocation; their vocation was to respond to his call.

Other stories of call/vocation are found in both the Old and New Testaments. Here is one example:

> Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then the LORD said, "The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:1-10, excerpted)

As in the story of the two pairs of brothers, Simon and Andrew, James and John, so here too we find a person engaged in an occupation; the brothers were fishermen, Moses was a shepherd. When God called Moses to go before Pharaoh (the ruler of Egypt), Moses received a vocation to act in response to God. God's call became Moses' vocation; Moses' vocation was to respond to God's call.

Baptism is a call from God to live in active relationship with God and in active response to God as people clothed in Christ. God's call is seldom a one-time event in the lives of God's people. After the initial call to Moses in the incident of the burning bush, God called Moses again and again to undertake particular tasks in particular situations. The call of Moses at the burning bush on Mount Horeb inaugurated a vocational relationship of ongoing call and responsive action between God and Moses. Similarly, the initial call of Jesus to Simon and Andrew and James and John while they were occupied with their nets and their boats began a lifelong vocational relationship in which those disciples would hear the voice of their good shepherd calling them again and again by name to come, and to go, and to undertake particular tasks in particular situations. So it is for us as well. Our vocation as baptized people clothed in Christ is to live in active response to God who calls us again and again to particular tasks in particular situations and to embark upon new ventures in ministry.

Our baptismal vocation might not require us to abandon our occupations, although sometimes God does call us to make dramatic changes in the course of

our lives. More often, God calls us to undertake a particular task of ministry within the familiar course of our lives. We might discern God's call in our recognition of a particular need or opportunity that summons our attention and our interest, our particular gifts of time, talent and treasure. Perhaps we will discern God's call in a request or invitation or encouragement that is extended to us, seeking our engagement with others and for others in a new commitment of our gifts. Perhaps we might discern God's call in the realization of a new way to engage our occupations, so that the work of our livelihood becomes more fully an aspect of God's work in the world. To live our baptismal vocation involves remaining open and expectant to God's call however and wherever and whenever we might discern it, day by day, and to remain ready to respond.

TELLING YOUR CALL STORY

Recall or reflect upon an occasion when you discerned God's call to you. When and where did it happen? To what was God calling you? How did God call you? How did you recognize, or how later did you come to recognize, that God was calling you?

How did you respond to God's call in the situation you are recalling or upon which you are now reflecting? Did you respond with an attitude and action of "yes"? If so, what helped you to do that? What motivated you to respond in the way that you did? Or, conversely, did you respond with an attitude and action of "no," declining to undertake the particular task or commitment to which God was calling you? If so, what stood in your way or inhibited you?

What have you learned from the situation you are recalling or upon which you are now reflecting? How has it affected your relationship with God?

Find an opportunity to share your call story with others in your congregation, and to hear their call stories as well. How does our life in community with other baptized people help us to grow in our baptismal vocation?

One of the most important teachings promoted by Martin Luther during the Reformation was that which is variously termed the priesthood of all believers, or the universal priesthood, or the priesthood of the baptized. In his voluminous writings, Luther often referred to 1 Peter 2:9, which says, regarding all Christians, "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." "It follows," wrote Luther, "that all of us who are Christian are also priests."[1] "The fact is that our baptism

[1] John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 345.

consecrates us all without exception, and makes us all priests."[2] Luther drew numerous conclusions from this understanding, including the affirmation that all Christians are called to bear the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed to one another, to their neighbors and to the world. Luther rejected as a dangerous and destructive misconception the idea that those who are specially set apart for public ministry leadership among the baptized people of God – for example, as pastors or deacons -- are thereby somehow closer to God and more fully clothed in Christ than other baptized people. "Here is the root," Luther insisted, "of the terrible domination of the clergy over the laity." He sought to replace that misconception with a clear understanding that "we, who have been baptized, are all uniformly priests in virtue of that very fact."[3]

Even where no "domination of the clergy over the laity" takes place, those terms are unhelpful because they inevitably support the idea that there are two classes of people among the baptized, two ranks of vocational importance. It is almost impossible to avoid an association of the concept "layperson" with the concept "amateur." Despite all good intentions and careful explanations, the concepts of "lay" and "laity" convey a suggestion of less importance, less significance, less authority and less value in relation to "clergy," who, by definition, are *not* laypeople, no longer to be counted among the laity.

Luther's affirmation of the priesthood of the baptized argues against the classification of Christians either as "laity" or "clergy." According to Luther, all Christians are called by God, all Christians have a vocation to ministry, and all Christians are of equal rank and importance within the body of Christ. "Therefore," wrote Luther, "every one who knows that [he or she] is a Christian should be fully assured that all of us alike are priests, and that we all have the same authority . . . ."[4]

EMBRACING YOUR PRIESTHOOD

In what contexts and at what occasions, if any, have you learned about Luther's understanding of the priesthood of the baptized? Is this understanding familiar to you or new to you?

---

[2] *Ibid.,* 408.

[3] *Ibid.,* 345.

[4] *Ibid.*, 349.

In what ways does your congregation promote Luther's understanding of the priesthood of the baptized? Is this understanding prominent in the life of your congregation? If not, what do you think inhibits the promotion of that understanding in the life of your congregation?

How does, or how might, Luther's understanding help you to grow in your baptismal vocation?

What thoughts and feelings stir within you as you reflect upon your identity as a priest? How do those compare to your thoughts and feelings when you regard yourself as a "layperson"?

How do you, or how might you, help your congregation to promote Luther's understanding of the priesthood of the baptized?

If this chapter has helped you to reaffirm your commitment to your baptismal vocation, and helped you more clearly to discern your call to ministry, then it has fulfilled its intended purpose. If this chapter has also increased your sense that God is calling you to the particular ministry of Word and Sacraments or Word and Service, then it has, hopefully, helped to prepare you for further discernment in the chapters that now follow.

CHAPTER TWO:
THE VOCATION OF ROSTERED MINISTERS

This chapter turns attention to the particular ministry task of *proclamation*, which concerns the use of speech and words. The previous chapter explained that all ministry undertaken in the name and by the call of Jesus is an extension of Jesus' own ministry. Once, when he was questioned about his ministry, Jesus described it this way: "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them" (Matthew 11:5). On another occasion, Jesus quoted Isaiah to describe his ministry: "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 favor" (Luke 4:18, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2). Passages such as these make it clear that proclamation was an essential aspect of Jesus' ministry.

The first witnesses to Jesus' ministry were often astounded by the acts he performed, exclaiming on one occasion, "What deeds of power are being done by his hands!" (Mark 6:2). But the same witnesses were also astounded by the words that Jesus spoke, marveling, "What is this wisdom that has been given to him?" "They were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority" (Luke 4:32). Consider these examples of Jesus conducting his ministry by means of speech and words:

> They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching – with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." (Mark 1:21,23-27)

> On that day, when evening had come, he said to [the disciples], "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. (Mark 4:35-39)

> Now in Nazareth by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids – blind, lame and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. (John 5:2-9)

> Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." (John 11:38-44)

Jesus' proclamation – his use of speech and words – was not only one of the primary *means* by which he conducted his ministry; his proclamation was also essential to the *content* of his ministry. His words were God's gift and blessing to those who received them, the life-giving good news of God's love for the world. The long section of Jesus' teaching that extends across chapters five through seven in Matthew's gospel narrative begins this way: "When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying . . ." (Matthew 5:1-2). Near the end of that long section, Jesus says, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock" (Matthew 7:24). Elsewhere Jesus says, "Heaven and earth will pass away; but my words will not pass away" (Mathew 24:35 and parallels). Jesus intended that his words would be remembered and repeated, cherished and revered, living fruitfully within his disciples who would thereby fruitfully live out their vocation as representatives of Jesus' presence and ambassadors of his good news. "If you abide in me," Jesus told his disciples, "and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples" (John 15: 7-8). Simon Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, once declared to Jesus, "You have the words of

eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68).

JESUS' WORDS IN YOUR LIFE

What is your favorite story of Jesus in the New Testament gospel narratives? How does Jesus' use of speech and words figure into that story?

What is your favorite teaching or saying of Jesus recorded in the New Testament? What do those words of Jesus mean to you? How do you understand them? How have those words of Jesus influenced your life and your living?

Recall an occasion in your life when the words of Jesus have guided your decision and your action. Did you, at that time, share with anyone how Jesus' words were guiding you? If so, how did the person or the people respond to what you shared? Consider whether there is someone now with whom you can share how Jesus' words have guided you. What makes it easier or more difficult for you to share that with other people?

Because the ministry of Jesus included proclamation as well as action, the vocation of the baptized therefore also includes a call to speak as well as to act, a call to preach and teach, to bear the good news of God's love for the world in words as well as deeds. Writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul affirms that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13, quoting Joel 2:32). Paul goes on to ask a series of questions: "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?" (Romans 10:14). With these questions, Paul addresses the particular ministry task of proclaiming the good news so that people have an opportunity to hear it and believe it. A little later in his letter to the Romans, Paul concludes that "faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

Paul's teaching here corresponds closely to Jesus' own teaching about the relationship between hearing and believing, the relationship between proclaiming the good news in speech and words and embracing the good news in faith. On one occasion when a large crowd had gathered around him, Jesus "was told, 'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.' But he said to them, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it'" (Luke 8:20-21). Of such people Jesus had also affirmed, "these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and

good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance" (Luke 8:15). On another occasion, after he had been raised from the dead, Jesus had this memorable encounter with one of his disciples:

> But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with [the other disciples] when Jesus came. So [they] told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (John 20:24-29)

YOUR STORY OF HEARING AND BELIEVING

Who have been the most important proclaimers of the good news in your life, the people whose words have helped you to hear and believe the words and the word of Christ? In what times and places, in what settings and on what occasions, did those people share the good news with you?

What is the earliest occasion that you remember hearing the good news? Do you remember what was said on that occasion? How did it affect you?

What has been your most memorable occasion of hearing the good news? How would you describe the way your faith was influenced on that occasion? What helped you to believe what you heard on that occasion?

What makes it easier or more difficult for you to believe the proclamation of others? Are there certain factors or circumstances that help you to believe the speech and words of others regarding the good news? Are there certain factors or circumstances that hinder you or make you less likely to believe the speech and words of others regarding the good news?

Because of the close connection between hearing and believing, between proclamation and faith, the ministry of proclamation holds a necessary priority in the life of the church. If Jesus is never proclaimed, neither can he be known, trusted or followed. Again, Paul's questions to the Christians in Rome: "How are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?" Lutherans teach the necessary priority of proclamation in the *Augsburg Confession* of 1530, a key document in the history of the Reformation and in the history of Lutheran Christians ever since. Already in Article IV of the *Augsburg Confession* the Lutheran reformers address the chief

issue in contention: "[We] teach that human beings cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works. But they are justified as a gift on account of Christ through faith when they believe that they are received into grace and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ."[5] This is the central Lutheran affirmation traditionally termed justification by grace through faith. In the very next article of the *Augsburg Confession* the Lutheran reformers explain: "So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel . . .."[6]

Like all ministry undertaken in the name and by the call of Jesus, the ministry of proclamation belongs to the vocation of the baptized. The previous chapter noted that the order for baptism in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* provides the following congregational address to all newly baptized people: "We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share: join us in giving thanks and praise to God and bearing God's creative and redeeming word to all the world" (*ELW*, p. 231). All baptized Christians share a vocation to engage in Jesus' own ministry, which includes proclamation, the use of speech and words. The longer ending of Mark's gospel narrative records the risen Jesus telling his disciples to "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). This directive applies not just to some but to all Christians, who are called to bear the good news in both word and deed, speech and action.

YOUR STORY OF PROCLAIMING

Recall an occasion when you have had an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ with another person or other people. Was that occasion a unique circumstance or part of a recurring responsibility (such as teaching a Sunday School class or leading a Bible study)? Did you have time to prepare, or was the occasion spontaneous? Did you feel ready to speak about Jesus or inhibited from doing so?

Who are some of the people who might identify you as an important proclaimer of the good news in their lives, who might identify you as someone whose witness has been important to their faith? Are those people part of your family? Your congregation? Are they your friends? Your neighbors? Your co-workers? What are the circumstances in which you have shared the good news with them?

[5] Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 39, 41.

[6] *Ibid*., 41.

What experiences and learning have best prepared you and equipped you to share the good news with others in speech and words? Are there opportunities for you to become better prepared and equipped for that ministry? If so, who provides those opportunities? Does your congregation and its ministry leaders do that? Does your synod do that? Are there ways you can find out about opportunities to become better prepared and equipped for your ministry of proclamation?

The necessary priority of proclamation in the life of the church, as affirmed by the Lutheran reformers, is the reason why the church sets apart some people to exercise this ministry in particular ways. Traditionally, this setting apart occurs in the rite of ordination, whereby selected members of the baptized community are entrusted with public responsibility and accountability for the ministry of proclamation. This does not mean that the rest of the community is excluded from that ministry, but that those who are set apart for it bear a particular vocation to engage that ministry in ways that ensure the integrity and wellbeing of the larger community. The Lutheran reformers make clear that this practice of setting apart involves not only the discernment of the church but also and simultaneously the work of the Holy Spirit. In an alternate version of the passage quoted above from Article V of the *Augsburg Confession*, the reformers emphasize that "God instituted the office of preaching."[7] The reformers' use of the term "office" in reference to the ministry of proclamation points to the particular vocation of engaging that ministry as a public trust and responsibility within the life of the church, with a particular expectation of public accountability.

The previous chapter explained that all Christians have, by virtue of their baptism, a vocation to ministry but that not all are called to the same ministry tasks or the same ministry roles. While all Christians share a vocation to bear the good news in both word and deed, in both speech and action, not all share the same vocation to do so in the public "office" of proclamation for which some are set apart. "Now there are varieties of gifts," writes Paul to the Christian community in Corinth, "but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). "Are all apostles?" asks Paul; "Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?" (1Corinthians 12:29-30). To understand that all baptized people are ministers does not mean that they all do the same things or exercise the same roles.

[7] Ibid., 40. Because the *Augsburg Confession* was originally printed in both Latin and German, English translations traditionally present both versions, which differ in their wording.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America designates two distinct roles within the public "office" of proclamation: the role of pastor and the role of deacon. Pastors are those set apart by ordination for the public ministry of Word and Sacrament; deacons are those set apart by consecration for the public ministry of Word and Service. Both roles involve a particular vocation to engage the ministry of proclamation as a public trust and responsibility within the life of the church. Pastors also administer the sacraments while deacons serve in various positions of public trust within the church and at the forefront of the church's witness to the larger world. The ELCA maintains official rosters of all its pastors and deacons, who are therefore often referred to collectively as "rostered" ministers.

YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ROSTERED MINISTERS

How many pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have you known as *your* pastors? What are the most important things you ever heard them say in their preaching or teaching? Who was the pastor who baptized you? Who was the pastor who confirmed you? Who was the pastor who gave you your first Communion? In what ways have pastors most influenced your faith and your growth as a disciple of Jesus?

How many deacons of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America do you know? What positions do they hold and in what ways do they serve? How has the witness and proclamation of a deacon influenced your faith and your growth as a disciple of Jesus? How many deacons of the ELCA serve within your synod? If you don't know, how might you find out?

Have you ever attended an ordination or consecration? If so, how did that experience affect you?

Have you ever served on a call committee in your congregation or participated in a congregational meeting about calling a pastor or deacon? When was the last time your congregation prepared to call a rostered minister?

The ELCA designates the formal and formative preparation of people for its rostered ministries as "candidacy." Those who are preparing to become pastors or deacons are "candidates" for rostered ministry in the ELCA, and the collective work of each synod in the ELCA includes a candidacy committee, charged with the responsibility to accompany people in the discernment of a vocation to rostered ministry leadership. Candidacy in the ELCA involves a process that includes various initial steps of application and subsequent milestone occasions of interview and decision called Entrance, Endorsement and Approval. This process involves a period of years and occurs in conjunction with a program of theological study and supervised field experience undertaken

through a seminary or other school for the education and training of ministry leaders.

The candidacy committees in each synod of the ELCA guide the preparation of candidates, seeking to discern, cultivate and assess the necessary gifts for ministry leadership in Word and Sacrament or Word and Service. Their work is authorized by the ELCA's Constitution and governed by its Candidacy Manual, which can be found online under "resources" on the ELCA website. All men and women who become pastors or deacons in the ELCA come under the care of the candidacy committee in their home synod throughout the period of their preparation.

YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH CANDIDATES AND CANDIDACY IN THE ELCA

Have you ever known someone who was or became a candidate for ministry leadership as a pastor or deacon of the ELCA? If so, in what context or by what connection did you know that person? Did you ever have an opportunity to learn about the preparation that person was undergoing as a candidate for rostered ministry?

When was the last time a member of your congregation became a candidate for rostered ministry in the ELCA? How many rostered ministers in the ELCA have come from your congregation? If you don't know or you're not sure, who might you ask? In what ways does your congregation encourage people to consider candidacy for rostered ministry?

Do you know anyone who serves on your synod's candidacy committee? If not, how might you find out who serves on that committee? Consider asking a member of your synod's candidacy committee to speak with you about the work of that committee. What might you learn about the work of your synod's candidacy committee that surprises you or inspires you?

If this chapter has stirred your curiosity about or your interest in rostered ministry in the ELCA, consider asking a pastor or deacon that you know to tell you more. If this chapter has stirred your own discernment of a possible vocation to rostered ministry in the ELCA, the next two chapters can help you to move further in your discernment.

CHAPTER THREE:
THE VOCATION OF CANDIDATES FOR ROSTERED MINISTRY

Entering the process of formation for public ministry leadership in the ELCA involves a discernment of vocation not only to the role of pastor or the role of deacon, but also to the transformative experience of candidacy itself. Several years of study, learning, practice and growth precede ordination as a pastor or consecration as a deacon. Before God calls people to *serve* as pastors or deacons, God calls people to *prepare* for those ministry roles. The period and process of preparation, called "candidacy" in the ELCA, involves its own focused discernment of necessary gifts, aptitudes and capacities. Candidacy requires a considerable commitment of one's life, relationships and resources. Jesus once asked his disciples, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether [you] have enough to complete it?" (Luke 14:28). That question applies to all aspects of Christian discipleship, including the particular vocation of candidacy in the ELCA. Careful discernment *prior* to candidacy is just as essential as the careful discernment that continues throughout candidacy and in the daily lives of pastors and deacons.

Lutheran Christians understand and teach that the discernment of a vocation, which is to say the discernment of God's call, involves attending to both the *internal* and *external* stirrings and promptings of the Holy Spirit. Both dimensions – internal and external – are necessary to trustworthy discernment. The internal dimension of God's call includes the inclinations and aspirations that stir within an individual. The external dimension of God's call includes the counsel and encouragement of others that might prompt an individual toward a certain decision or course of action. Discerning any call, including a call to candidacy, involves careful attention to internal stirrings and external promptings.

With regard to the internal dimension of discernment, relevant questions include the following:

- Is this something I have ever thought about doing?
- Is this something I can envision myself doing?
- Is this something I want to do?
- Do I feel myself drawn to this?

Questions relevant to the external dimension of discernment include the following:

- Has anyone ever suggested that I might do this?
- Has anyone ever said that I have the gifts for this?

- Has anyone ever encouraged me to consider this?
- Has anyone ever told me that I might be suited for this?

For our purposes, "this" refers to candidacy for ministry leadership in the ELCA, but the same questions are relevant to any occasion of discernment in the lives of baptized people. Again, both dimensions of discernment – the internal and the external – are essential to trustworthy discernment. If "this" is something in which or for which I have no interest, no desire and no consideration, then I am likely not being called to it regardless of the suggestions or encouragements of other people. Conversely, if no one other than me thinks that I am being called to "this," then I am likely not being called regardless of how strong my interest or desire might be. An internal sense of call in the absence of external affirmation is likely not trustworthy, nor is the external encouragement of other people reliable in the absence of internal stirring or motivation.

The ninth chapter of Luke's gospel narrative includes several incidents that illumine the necessary congruence of the internal and external dimensions of discernment:

> An argument arose among [the disciples] as to which one of them was the greatest. But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, and said to them, "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest." (Luke 9:46-48)

> As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "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." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57-62)

The first incident suggests a strong desire on the part of some disciples to become prominent leaders among the followers of Jesus. They aspired to greatness within the community, but Jesus' response indicates that their internal aspirations did not align with the true requirements of leadership within the sort of community that Jesus was forming. Their internal stirrings found no external affirmation. The incidents narrated in the second passage suggest that the external dimension of God's call did not align with the internal motives and

aspirations of those who were being encouraged to discipleship. Jesus' call to "follow me," doubtless sincere, did not find a corresponding internal interest or desire on the part of those who wanted first to attend to other commitments in their lives.

Compare those incidents with this account from Mark:

> As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea – for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. (Mark 1:16-20)

Mark's narrative provides no description of the internal motivations that stirred within Simon, Andrew, James and John, but we may reasonably surmise that something within them found congruence with the external prompting of Jesus to follow him upon a new course of life, a new vocation.

DISCERNING YOUR INNER AND OUTER SENSE OF CALL

Have you ever envisioned yourself becoming a ministry leader in the ELCA? What are the personal motivations and aspirations relevant to your consideration of candidacy? In what ways do you feel drawn toward candidacy for ministry leadership? What excites you about that possibility? What worries you about that possibility?

Has anyone ever suggested that you consider candidacy for ministry leadership in the ELCA? Has anyone ever encouraged you to pursue that possibility? What reasons have they given you for their suggestions or encouragement? What gifts, relevant to ministry leadership, have they recognized and affirmed in you? What have you learned about yourself through the suggestions and encouragement of others?

Invite some ELCA pastors and deacons to speak with you about their own internal and external sense of call to candidacy and ministry leadership. How do their stories of discernment help you in your discernment? In what ways do their experiences seem similar to yours? In what ways do their experiences differ from yours?

When Simon, Andrew, James and John left their nets and their boats to follow Jesus, their lives took a dramatic turn. They were likely skilled in their tasks as fishermen and habituated to the culture of that particular vocation. As disciples of Jesus, they would have to acquire different skills and become habituated to a different culture, involving its own standards of thought and understanding, speech and action, values and practice. In time, all four of those

earliest disciples would become apostles, living not only as followers of Jesus but also as prominent leaders of other disciples. As Christianity began to develop and mature, they would rise in reputation and tradition as pillars of the faith and founders of the church. In the beginning, however, they were unformed novices, neophytes with everything yet to learn.

The gospel narratives are full of stories about how slowly, how fitfully, even how reluctantly the first disciples acquired the maturity and understanding necessary to their later roles as ministry leaders. Simon – to whom Jesus gave the name Peter – provides an outstanding example of the extensive transformation required by the dramatic turn from fisherman to apostle. Perhaps because he later came to be regarded as preeminent among all the apostles, all four New Testament gospel writers shine an unflattering light upon Peter's earlier faults and failings. Peter was the disciple who almost simultaneously recognized Jesus as the Messiah *and* scolded Jesus for choosing the way of the cross (Matthew 16:15-23; Mark 8:29-33); Peter was the disciple who displayed almost simultaneously an astounding faith by stepping out of a boat upon the surface of the water *and* a wavering faith by losing his nerve and starting to sink like a stone (Matthew 14:28-31); Peter was the disciple who insisted that he would never deny Jesus, and then did so not just once but three times (Matthew 26:31-35,69-75; Mark 14:26-31,66-72; Luke 22:31-33,54-62; John 13:36-38; 18:15-18,25-27).

Peter and the other disciples who became apostles had to learn new ways of thinking, new ways of conducting themselves in the world, and new ways of regarding and relating to other people before they could serve as ministry leaders within the community of disciples. So, too, all candidates for ministry leadership in the ELCA are expected to undergo transformative experiences of new learning, new understanding, new attitudes and new behaviors. The gifts, aptitudes and capacities necessary for ministry leadership must be cultivated and honed through study, practice, and critical reflection. Candidates for ministry leadership in the ELCA engage in transformational learning under the guidance and instruction of many partners, including synod candidacy committees, seminary faculty and staff, mentors and supervisors, congregational communities, and peers. The ELCA *Candidacy Manual* lists – under the term "competencies" – many of the gifts, aptitudes and capacities necessary for rostered ministry leadership in the first section of its second chapter under "Standards for the Offices of Ministry"; the Candidacy Manual is available on the ELCA website and can be accessed through this link: http://www.elca.org/Resources/Candidacy.

No list of competencies relevant to ministry leadership, no matter how long and detailed, can ever be complete or exhaustive, because ministry leadership is always contextual; the gifts, aptitudes and capacities required for ministry leadership can differ from one context to another, and from one circumstance to another. Nevertheless, several broad areas of competency can be identified as relevant to every circumstance and every context of ministry leadership.

Preeminent among all the gifts necessary for ministry leadership is faith. Faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit that animates the engagement of all other gifts relevant to the vocation of baptized people, including the vocation to candidacy and ministry leadership. The previous chapter explained that rostered ministry leadership in the ELCA involves the public office of proclamation, exercised both by pastors and by deacons. Rostered ministers of the ELCA share a public trust and a public responsibility for the proclamation of gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, which is the creative and redeeming Word of God for the blessing of the world. No one can sincerely proclaim the Word of God without also sincerely believing it, trusting it, knowing it and living it. Those whose vocation is to nurture vibrant faith in others must themselves be people of vibrant faith.

Peter testified to the importance of faith in his own dramatic turn from fisherman to apostle when he said to Jesus, "You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68). Apart from that believing and that knowing – which is to say, apart from faith – Peter could never have become an apostle. If, despite following Jesus, Peter had not come to believe and had not come know, neither could he have led others to believe and to know. In the first of the two New Testament letters that bear his name, Peter writes to encourage those he has nurtured in faith. He tells them:

> [You] are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith . . . may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1: 5-9)

To nurture such faith within and among others, Peter had also to embrace such faith within his own life and living. Faith, as Martin Luther teaches in his *Small Catechism*, regarding the Apostles' Creed, means not merely knowing things *about* God but knowing *God* in ways both personally motivating and publicly relevant.

THE GIFT OF FAITH IN YOUR LIFE AND LIVING

"Woe to me," writes Paul, "if I do not proclaim the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16) One way to understand that remark is to regard Paul as feeling himself driven to the ministry of proclamation, unable to do anything else because of the strength of that drive, that motivation, that desire.

Do you feel yourself driven to share God's gift of faith with others? Do you enjoy engaging with other people in practices related to the nurture of faith and the expression of faith? Do you seek to grow in faith and to help others also to grow in faith?

Make an inventory of the ways you actively engage your faith through the activities to which you frequently devote much of your time, your energy and your interest. How many of those activities involve sharing experiences of faith with others?

Has anyone ever told you that your faith has encouraged or strengthened their own? If so, consider the contexts and the circumstances in which that happened. Did it happen intentionally or accidentally? How *might* your engagement of faith help to encourage or strengthen faith in other people?

How many of the people involved in the familiar course of your life know you to be a person of faith? Is your faith something that most people know about you, or is it known only to those closest to you? Have other people ever sought you out because of your faith? If so, why? What did they ask of you or request from you? What did their question or request teach you about yourself?

Another area of competency relevant to ministry leadership is summarized by the values of humility and openness. During their own transformation from fishermen to apostles, "James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to [Jesus] and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' And he said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.'" (Mark 10:35-37) Apparently, concern for their own status, privilege and prestige was recurrent among the earliest disciples, who seem on perhaps more than one occasion to have argued among themselves about which of them was the greatest, the most important.

> When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:41-45)

Ministry leaders are called to serve not their own recognition but that of Jesus; the name under which they exercise the public office of proclamation is not their own, but Jesus'. Accordingly, to serve in ministry leadership is to serve as Jesus

served. Genuine humility is a necessary attribute of public ministry leaders. Humility is not weakness, nor is it low self-esteem; rather, it is a capacity to subordinate one's own self-centered impulses and anxieties to the vocation to bear the creative and redeeming word of God in Jesus Christ to other people. In that sense, humility is a strength, a capacity that can be developed and increased through learning, practice and exercise. Christian tradition remembers James and John as extraordinary leaders of the early church. Their transformation from fishermen to apostles involved learning to subordinate their earlier concern for their own greatness to the greater concern to become proclaimers of God's good news in Jesus Christ.

Humility is necessary not only to the vocation of ministry leadership, but also to the vocation of candidacy. The transformative experiences that constitute the period and process of candidacy require the subordination of self-centered impulses and anxieties for the sake of increased capacity to bear God's word to others and to cultivate others' growth in faith. People who have a hard time "getting over" themselves will likely experience candidacy and ministry leadership as dispiriting and discouraging, because those vocations involve continual expectations of on-going growth and formation.

To engage well the vocations to candidacy and ministry leadership requires being open – and remaining open – to new learning, new understanding, new attitudes and new behaviors. An aversion to criticism, correction, challenge and change is incompatible with the openness required by the vocations to candidacy and rostered ministry. Openness and humility work hand-in-hand in those vocations, because both values pertain to the expectation of on-going growth and formation. The new learning required in candidacy and ministry leadership is never complete; the new understanding is never fully achieved; the new attitudes are never fully formed, and the new behaviors are never fully mastered. Without humility, candidates and rostered ministers remain preoccupied with their own recognition to the neglect of Jesus Christ. Without openness, candidates and rostered ministers become insensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit in their own lives and the life of the world. The vocation to candidacy is a call to discovery – about God, about the world, and about oneself. Humility responds to that call by confessing, "I have much to learn." Openness responds to that call by professing, "I am ready to learn."

The ninth and tenth chapters of Acts recount a profound experience of new learning on the part of Peter. The crux of the lengthy narrative is that Peter came to a new understanding that God's grace embraced not only the Jews, God's chosen people of Israel, but the Gentiles as well, meaning all the people of world. This was a momentous change not only for Peter, but for the entire church in its

early years. "I truly understand," Peter declared after his transformative experience, "that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." (Acts 10:34-35) Had Peter not been open to the transformative experience of new learning that led to new understanding, his capacity for leadership would have been stunted. His dramatic turn from fisherman to apostle led him to new discoveries about God, the world and himself.

ASSESSING YOUR GIFTS OF HUMILITY AND OPENNESS

Recall a time in your life when you have had to "get over yourself" for the sake of some larger concern, some larger good within a community of other people. Who or what helped you to do that? What made it difficult for you to do that? What did you learn about yourself through that experience?

Compare what Jesus says about being "slave of all" (Mark 10:44) to what Paul says about Jesus in Philippians 2:5-8. In what aspects of your life do you find most difficulty imitating the humility of Jesus? What gets in your way? How might you overcome those obstacles in order to "do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit," but, instead, to "let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus"? (Philippians 2:3,5)

Recall a time in your life when you have had to become open to new learning, new understanding, new attitudes or new behaviors. Who or what helped you to do that? What made it difficult for you to do that? What did you learn about yourself through that experience?

How do you normally respond to criticism, correction, challenge and change? Do you tend to avoid those experiences and recoil from them, or do you seek to learn and grow from them? What do you learn about yourself when you are faced with such experiences?

A third broad area of competency relevant to ministry leadership might be described as cultural and relational competence. Relevant here are the gifts, aptitudes and capacities for understanding and engaging empathetically with other people, especially those very different from ourselves. In the ninth chapter of his first letter to the Christian community in Corinth, Paul writes:

> Though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I might share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

In this remarkable passage, Paul describes his capacity to subordinate his own personal preferences, perspectives and proclivities in order to engage with others for the sake of the gospel. That capacity required the values of humility and openness discussed above, but also an ability to understand the preferences, perspectives and proclivities of other people in order to engage with them on their own terms in witness to Christ. Such an ability is essential for those called to public offices of ministry.

Much of the transformative work undertaken during candidacy aims at assessing and increasing one's ability to engage empathetically with others. The study, learning, practice and growth required during candidacy have, as a large part of their purpose, an aim to help candidates relate well to various cultures and people different from themselves, and, simultaneously, to learn how their own cultural conditioning and personality traits either aid or impede their engagements with other people. Candidates who can only relate to people of like mind and similar background will be unable to engage with people who do not share the same orientations. And candidates who insist that their own preferences, perspectives and proclivities must be accommodated in relationships with others will be unable to "become all things to all people," because they will lack the capacity to subordinate themselves to the needs and circumstances of others for the sake of the gospel.

The vocation to become a "slave" to others, as addressed both by Jesus and by Paul in passages quoted above, falls subject to easy misunderstanding. Ministry leaders are *not* called by God to do whatever people happen to expect or demand of them, regardless of what that might be. Pastors and deacons are not answerable to the whims of other people; instead, pastors and deacons are answerable to God, and to the public trust of gospel proclamation. In order to fulfill that trust, however, pastors and deacons must be able to engage with other people in ways that might nurture faith. This requires an ability to understand others' points of view, no matter how different those might be from one's own, and to empathize with other people no matter how offensive their attitudes, words or actions might sometimes be. Even when ministry leaders must reprove or reprimand the attitudes, words or actions of others they must do so as ambassadors of Christ and not merely as affronted partisans of their own points of view.

Developing cultural and relational competence requires self-awareness and emotional intelligence. Before I can understand other people, I must understand myself; before I can engage with other people I must know my own strengths and weaknesses, my own "buttons" both of empathy and aversion. Ministry leadership involves on-going, life-long cultivation of self-awareness and emotional intelligence, and the transformative experiences of candidacy are occasions to begin that cultivation with new intention for the sake of the gospel.

If, after reading this chapter, you believe that God might be calling you to candidacy for rostered ministry in the ELCA, read on through the next (final) chapter for further suggestions regarding your continued discernment and inquiry.

CHAPTER FOUR:
THE VOCATION OF PASTORS AND DEACONS

Those who become candidates for rostered ministry in the ELCA do so through the candidacy committee of their home synod. All synods of the ELCA, in some cases working jointly, are constitutionally responsible for maintaining committees of baptized people, including but not limited to rostered ministers, who accompany candidates in the process of formation for public ministry leadership in the ELCA. The work of candidacy committees involves the discernment and nurture of competencies for ministry leadership within those who become candidates. Candidacy committees also exercise an evaluative role, determining whether and when a candidate, or an applicant to candidacy, is ready to progress in the formational process toward rostered ministry.

The candidacy process includes three major occasions of formal interview and decision: Entrance, Endorsement and Approval. Those words are capitalized here to indicate their formal use in the candidacy process. The Entrance interview and decision determines whether an applicant to candidacy will formally enter the process of formation for rostered ministry; the Endorsement interview and decision determines whether a candidate will proceed toward Approval; the Approval interview and decision determines whether a candidate is ready for assignment and call as a rostered minister. In addition to those three occasions of formal interview and decision, candidacy committees engage in ongoing guidance and support of the applicants and candidates with whom they relate.

Endorsement is the occasion at which candidates are required to declare formally their intention to prepare either for ministry of Word and Sacrament or for ministry of Word and Service. The ELCA identifies Word and Sacrament ministers as pastors and Word and Service ministers as deacons. Although pastors and deacons may serve in a wide variety of specific roles over the course of their lives, the primary role of pastors is to lead congregations and the primary role of deacons is to lead other ministries, under the auspices of congregations, synods or the churchwide organization.

The *Augsburg Confession*, widely regarded as the preeminent Lutheran confessional document contained in the *Book of Concord*, offers insight relevant to the respective roles of deacons and pastors. The core conviction of the Lutheran reformation was – and is – the biblical insight that God's love for human beings is not dependent or conditional upon any measure of human worthiness but, instead, flows freely from God's own nature and purpose. The reformers insisted that human beings receive God's love as God's own gift, freely

given in Jesus Christ; human beings do not somehow earn or deserve God's love as a reward for anything they are or anything they do. That conviction is expressed most directly in Article IV of the *Augsburg Confession.* All the articles that follow Article IV explicate the consequences of that conviction in other matters of Christian practice and understanding. In Article VI the Lutheran reformers teach that "faith is bound to yield good fruits and . . . to do good works commanded by God."[8] As ministers of Word and Service, deacons in the ELCA lead some aspect of the church's vocation to "yield good fruits" and "do good works." Deacons serve in various roles of ministry leadership either within the church or at an interface of the church's engagement with the larger world. Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession* teaches that the church "is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly."[9] As ministers of Word and Sacrament, pastors in the ELCA serve primarily in leadership of such assemblies, chiefly congregations or other types of worshipping communities. Without drawing or insisting upon too sharp a distinction, the role of pastors might be described as leading the church in its vocation as a community *gathered* while deacons lead the church in its vocation as a community *sent*, both of which are dynamics of the church's liturgy.

DEEPENING YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF PASTORAL AND DIACONAL MINISTRY

Identify and contact a pastor and a deacon in your synod with whom you have not previously spoken in the course of your discernment through the previous chapters. (If you're not sure how to do that, ask a pastor or deacon you already know to help you.) Arrange to speak with that pastor and that deacon, either separately or together, either by phone or in person. After introducing yourself and explaining your purpose, ask each of them:

- What is your current ministry role, and what are the major aspects of your work in that role?
- How do you understand the primary vocation of pastors/deacons in the ELCA?
- How do you understand the relationship between pastors and deacons in the rostered ministry of the ELCA?
- What motivated you to become either a pastor or a deacon in the ELCA in contrast to the other roster?
- What do you find most satisfying in your call as a pastor/deacon?

Women who are discerning a call to rostered ministry in the ELCA and interested in the role of deacons might also want to learn about the Deaconess

[8] Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 41.

[9] *Ibid.*, 43.

Community. With historic beginnings in the nineteenth century, the Deaconess Community currently serves both the ELCA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Members of the Deaconess Community can be rostered as deacons in the ELCA or as diaconal ministers in the ELCIC, according to their membership in either of those Lutheran church bodies. Information about the Deaconess Community is available at www.deaconesscommunity.org. Readers of this discernment guide interested to learn more about the Deaconess Community are encouraged to speak with a deaconess directly according to the directions and questions in the preceding inset.

In addition to the necessary competencies required of all rostered ministers, the ELCA also maintains standards of personal conduct and character for those who serve as pastors or deacons. Those are elaborated in the document *Vision and Expectations*, which, at this writing, is being revised as a single document for both rosters. (Previously, one version addressed the standards of personal conduct and character for ministers of Word and Sacrament, and another version addressed the standards of personal conduct and character for ministers of Word and Service.) *Vision and Expectations* can be accessed on the ELCA website under the heading "Resources" and the sub-heading "Candidacy." Those who read this discernment guide are encouraged also to read the current version of *Vision and Expectations* appropriate to either or both ministry rosters in the ELCA. Candidates for rostered ministry in the ELCA are expected to live in accordance with *Vision and Expectations*, and are formally asked at various stages of the candidacy process whether they are and intend to continue doing so.

YOUR PERSONAL CONDUCT AND CHARACTER IN ACCORDANCE WITH ELCA STANDARDS

What do you find in *Vision and Expectations* most encouraging of your discernment regarding candidacy and rostered ministry leadership in the ELCA?

What do you find in Vision and Expectations that calls you to repentance and the amendment of life?

How do you understand the relationship between your personal conduct and character as a baptized Christian and those of rostered ministry leaders? How does the vocation of rostered ministry leaders compare and contrast with that of all baptized people in terms of personal conduct and character?

Another important resource for discernment accessible under the sub-heading "Candidacy" on the ELCA website is the wholeness wheel, sometimes called the "wellness wheel." Integral to the ELCA *Candidacy Manual* itself, the wholeness wheel indicates seven dimensions of well-being: social, emotional, physical, financial, vocational, intellectual and – encompassing all of those –

spiritual. The essential conviction reflected in the wholeness wheel as it relates to ministry leadership is that one must *live* well in order to *lead* well. Living well involves all the dimensions of the wholeness wheel. Stress, dysfunction or neglect in one or more dimensions of well-being diminishes wellness overall. Conversely, attending to each dimension of well-being enhances wellness overall.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul offers apostolic counsel regarding the wellness of ministry leaders. Of bishops, who might also be termed pastors, he exhorts: they "must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, . . . apt teacher[s], not . . . drunkard[s], not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not . . . lover[s] of money"; he adds further comment about household management, child-rearing, the peril of conceit and the value of reputation (1 Timothy 3:2-7). Concerning deacons, he writes that they "likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; they must hold fast to the mystery of faith with a clear conscience," he adds, followed again by further comment about household management, family relationships and public reputation (1 Timothy 3:8-13). Although the context and content of Paul's remarks were particular to his counsel to Timothy, the Christian church regards this writing as scripture, inspired and instructive for the church in all times and places. Comparing these passages from 1 Timothy to *Vision and Expectations*, readers can easily perceive a similar concern for the personal conduct and character of men and women entrusted with public ministry leadership. Likewise, readers can easily perceive each of the seven dimensions of the wholeness wheel addressed in Paul's counsel to Timothy.

YOUR PERSONAL WHOLENESS AND WELL-BEING

An articulation of competencies related to each dimension of the wholeness wheel as those pertain to each of the milestone occasions of candidacy (Entrance, Endorsement and Approval) can be accessed on the ELCA website under the heading "Resources" and the sub-heading "Candidacy." After reading that resource, reflect upon the following:

Toward which dimensions of the wholeness wheel do you know yourself to be the most attentive and intentional? Which dimensions of the wholeness wheel do you regard as areas of strength in your personal well-being?

Toward which dimensions of the wholeness wheel do you know yourself to be the least attentive and intentional? Which dimensions of the wholeness wheel do you regard as areas of neglect in your personal well-being?

How do you understand personal well-being, in all its dimensions, in relation to the vocation of the baptized? How do you understand personal well-being, in all its dimensions, in relation to the vocation of rostered ministry leaders?

What do you find in the wholeness wheel that calls you to repentance and the amendment of life?

The third of the three major occasions of formal interview and decision in the ELCA candidacy process is Approval. By the time of their Approval interviews, candidates will have completed, or nearly completed, their seminary program of theological education and field experience; they will have declared (at Endorsement) the particular roster – Word and Sacrament or Word and Service – for which they have prepared; they will have cultivated the competencies necessary for public ministry leadership as a rostered leader in the ELCA; they will have begun to form the character and identity of a public ministry leader; and they will have begun the life-long growth and learning that belong to the vocation of pastors and deacons.

One of the most important responsibilities of candidacy committees is to help ensure that candidates coming for Approval are well-formed and well-prepared to exercise the vocation of public ministry leadership either as pastors or as deacons in the ELCA. Candidacy committees fulfill their responsibilities by cultivating relationships with candidates in order to provide wise counsel, direction and assessment intended to help candidates reach readiness for Approval. Other key partners in the candidacy process – teachers, mentors, supervisors and peers – serve the same intention in collaboration with candidacy committees.

Once they receive a favorable Approval decision from their candidacy committees, candidates enter the subsequent process of assignment for first call. The bishop of the synod to which a candidate is assigned for first call arranges interviews with congregational call committees or with other groups seeking candidates for rostered ministry leadership. Because rostered ministry leadership is not merely a job but a sacred vocation, candidates chosen for leadership positions receive not merely a job offer but a letter of call. Upon receipt and acceptance of a letter of call, candidates reach the conclusion of the candidacy process and proceed toward installation in their particular ministry role and entrance onto the roster of pastors or deacons in the ELCA.

The Christian church has always invested offices of public ministry leadership upon selected individuals by means of a liturgical rite. Over the course of the church's history, the terms used for such rites and the details of their liturgical enactment have varied, but the most common term used by Christians for the investment of public ministry leadership upon selected

individuals has been, and continues to be, *ordination*, and the most common practices in the rite of ordination are prayer and the laying on of hands (see Acts 6:3-6 and 13:2-3). In the ELCA, ordination (used here inclusive of all such rites at the time of this writing or previously) follows Approval, assignment and call; candidates for Word and Sacrament or Word and Service ministry leadership in the ELCA become pastors or deacons in the ELCA through the liturgical rite of prayer and the laying on of hands. Installation to a particular ministry role might occur in the same liturgy or on a subsequent occasion, depending on the circumstances.

Ordination involves a gathering of the church in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In addition to prayer, promises are made both by the church and by the candidate being ordained to live and serve together in the mutual ministry that belongs to the vocation of the baptized. Thus, while attention focuses on the person or persons being ordained, the larger purpose of the rite, as of all public ministry leadership, is to build up the church and to cultivate the growth and maturity of all baptized people in their shared vocation of ministry. (See again the first chapter of this discernment guide.)

ANTICIPATING YOUR ORDINATION

Once again, arrange to meet with a pastor and a deacon in the ELCA, with whom you may already have spoken or whom you might meet for the first time. Ask them, in advance of your meeting, to retrieve a copy of their ordination (or consecration or commissioning) liturgy for you to review together.

During the meeting, reflect together upon the liturgical rite by which the person or persons you are meeting with became a pastor or a deacon. Consider together the scripture readings included in the liturgy, the prayers that were spoken, the promises that were made, and the actions that were taken. Ask the person or persons you are meeting with to recall that occasion, how they felt and what they were thinking. Ask them to recall other memories of the occasion; reflect together on any mementos from the day – such as the sermon that was preached, a video recording that might have been made, greetings they received, and so forth.

Ask them to talk with you about the significance of that day in relation to all their days since then. Ask them whether and how they observe the anniversary of that day. Finally, offer to pray with them for their continued faithfulness in public ministry leadership.

If your discernment has taken you this far in your use of this resource, an appropriate next step is to make further inquiry about candidacy by contacting your synod office. Your synod bishop and staff can answer your questions and explain the steps and procedures for applying for candidacy in the ELCA. Your

synod leadership can also provide suggestions for additional discernment related to candidacy for public ministry leadership. If you're not sure how to contact your synod office, ask a pastor or a deacon whom you know to help you.

Direct us, Lord God, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and extend to us your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name; and finally, by your mercy, bring us to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. (*ELW*, p. 86)