

The Priesthood

The Nature of Priesthood

Discipleship, Ministry, and Priesthood Discipleship is the fundamental call to all Christians. The only real reason for the church to exist is to embody the ministries of Jesus in our own time and place. Because of that the church is known as the body of Christ. Each member is considered a follower, or disciple, of Jesus. To be a disciple is the most basic and important element of our Christian identity. Ministry also has a universal dimension to it in that all of us who would be disciples of Jesus are called into service.

Sometimes ministry is thought to be something done only by those who are ordained. But the Christian faith as understood by the Community of Christ invites all members to be ministers.

) “All are called according to the gifts of God unto them”.

This is a statement about both the affairs of the church each person has a ministry to bring and those of the world our Christian witness extends to all aspects of life.

Priesthood is a particular expression of that more universal ministry to which we are all called. Priesthood members carry out many of the specialized functions in the church, those ordained to a particular type of ministry. Divine calling to special functions emphasizes the involvement of God in all aspects of life. It is a match between the needs of the church and the gifts and commitments of some of its members. God is concerned about all of life and is involved with us in every part of our experience.

) All can be Disciples of Christ and follow him, But it take a special person to be his Apostle and be that leader of others who follow Christ which as a Priest you are held of a higher standard that is needed and that takes more educational training, Heart of a true calling, mind, body and soul, which you have to put all in it and that God, has anointed you by his grace. Not all have the true calling to be a Priest of God.

The Origin of Priesthood

Priesthood has its origin in Jesus Christ. In Christ we see God ministering to the human race and humans responding to God's ministry. According to scripture, "For in him [Jesus] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9). Jesus has revealed the full response of our humanness to the divine will. He lived out in practice the meaning of his prayer in Gethsemane, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:36 IV).

In the Restoration movement we sometimes speak of the priesthood as having been "restored" at the time the church was founded. This emerged from a belief in that time that the churches had gone astray and that the power of ministry had been lost. While the extent to which that is true may be argued, it is our faith that something sacred and authoritative happened when our church was founded. We continue to embrace the spirit of that experience now. It is not about rejecting other churches or their ministries. Instead, the key principle is our belief that God blesses us in our ministry when we faithfully respond and serve. The effectiveness of our priesthood is never based on some historic event from another era but on the spiritual vitality we exhibit in our own time.

A divine call to minister is a call to join the Lord Jesus in the continuing interpretation of the purposes of God in terms of earthly human life. In a sense, this is what it means to be prophetic. Priesthood is to give form and substance to the word of God. It is to make the word flesh in each generation so that God's truth and will may be understood among the people. This requires our personal response to the spirit of revelation and the discipline appropriate to those who are "laborers together with God." The church is the divinely established structure that permits human beings to relate to God and each other in effective group life.

What Is Priesthood?

Priesthood is a sacred covenant with God and the church. Priesthood members are ministers dedicated to creating sacred communities that prepare, equip, and send disciples in Christ's mission. God calls them for specific ministries and servant-leadership roles. Each role or office represents a different part of Jesus' ministry.

) Represent Christ primarily as ministers...

Of presence who model Jesus as Friend in households, families, congregations, and community.

) Especially proclaim and promote...

God's gift of unconditional love for each household and family member.

) Particularly minister with...

Households and families to support their spiritual growth and discipleship response through prayer, knowledge of scripture, and nurturing relationships.

) Support sacramental ministries by...

Preparing households and families by helping find pathways for healing. Preside if needed and perform some sacraments. This also including Given of Last Rites.

) Promote community by...

Advocating for members, households, and families throughout the congregation and community.

) Promote justice and peacemaking by...

Being involved and knowledgeable about community services that may assist those in need. Bring peace to households and families. May include Spiritual Counseling.

Calling and Acceptance of Calling

Every human organization has people who perform certain special functions. These functions are necessary to help the group be united in its purposes, mobilize and use its resources effectively, carry out its decisions, and meet the needs of its members. In order for the group to function smoothly without internal conflict, it is important for the people who perform these functions to understand their roles and be accepted by the group. When the members of a group have well-defined roles and sense the unique contribution they can make, the entire body benefits. Likewise, one's own sense of personal ministry is thereby acknowledged, bringing fulfillment in service.

In the Community of Christ priesthood responsibilities involve a sense of calling on the part of the priesthood member and acceptance of that calling by the people who will be served. This same principle pertains to every priesthood office at every level of church life. The calling is discerned by the church officer responsible for initiating priesthood calls, usually the pastor of a congregation. After appropriate approvals have been received the call is presented to the individual for a personal decision. The people then submit it to a conference for approval. This process honors the place of personal calling and also acknowledges the rights of those who will be the recipients of the ordained ministry.

The Calling

Individuals need to experience the call of God personally if they are to be affirmed as chosen of God and able to accept the given of their life's present situation within which ministry is to be offered.

The call of God is received as something intensely personal rather than a call to something in general: "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). Also, "I have called you by name, you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1). It is this sense of personal calling that makes faith real.

One may well say:

“Faith is the assurance that I am called of God and that I have been chosen. God’s purpose in my life is recognized in the call of God to me. Being called is to recognize that I belong to God and thus I live in dependence on God.” We recognize the importance of each person sensing very deeply that “I am called according to the gifts of God unto me” as well as being able to recite that “all are called according to the gifts of God unto them”.

Members should be encouraged to see their baptism and confirmation as the church’s official recognition of their calling to “the office of member” and their own acknowledgment of Jesus’ call to discipleship.

Called to Grow

Those in the priesthood must continue to grow in understanding and ministerial effectiveness. This means that priesthood members are to serve and are to lead others into service.

They are commanded to study, to read all good books, and to do those things that will help them be prepared to serve effectively.

Skill in ministry, however, will also require actual pastoral care of members of the church and nonmembers. As priesthood members seek to qualify for ministry, their training programs will often be in conjunction with actual ministry.

Opportunities for training and education is always available and is continue in study to better improve oneself. (2Tm:2:15 Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.)

There are some expectations for pre-ordination classes, but often the initiative for continuing education rests upon the priesthood member. Another valuable method for learning is in mentoring.

It is helpful to identify someone who can serve as a mentor for new priesthood members, sharing their firsthand experience and knowledge. Pastors should explore that with new priesthood members. Where that is not provided for directly, it would be appropriate for the priesthood member to ask a trusted minister if he or she would serve in a mentoring role. God will give you guidance.

Priesthood Roles in the Congregation

Roles in society are undergoing changes and new understandings. This is also true of priesthood. Today we recognize that various persons can perform many functions once thought to be only the province of priesthood, whether ordained or unordained. This is an acknowledgment of our central understanding of ministry as all of us doing the work of Jesus in the world. Most people want to contribute to the church in whatever ways they can through their giftedness and in accordance with their commitment.

While this manual deals with the ministry of priesthood, its principles apply to all who would be disciples of Jesus Christ. Both the ordained and unordained share in the work of God and may perform ministries of great value to the church and its members. It is primarily in administering the ordinances and sacraments of the church and in some presiding functions that those in the priesthood have exclusive roles that cannot be performed in the church by anyone else. More important than the question of what one can or can't do is the question of what one feels called to do and is willing to accept responsibility for in the life of the church.

Priesthood Is a Call to Service

Priesthood is a call to serve. According to a well-known scripture passage persons do not take priesthood honor unto themselves, but are “called by God, just as Aaron was” (Hebrews 5:4). If one’s ministry is to be effective he or she must respond to such a call humbly and with a desire to serve. Even Jesus “did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest” (Hebrews 5:5). Those ordained must be willing to yield their lives to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Through study, experience, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit they grow in their capability to express and share this ministry with others. They must 13 concern themselves continually with the welfare of all people everywhere and in every condition.

Priesthood members are responsible for creating conditions that contribute to the full growth and development of all people. They should be patient and long-suffering, willing to sacrifice for others. They must be able to lead people to dedicate themselves to discipleship as followers of Christ.

Both personal ministry and sacramental functions performed by priesthood members are channels of ministry. When properly administered by authorized officials the sacraments bind the church to legal provisions such as church membership, child blessing, ordination, and marriage. However, the spiritual content of these relationships is not guaranteed by the official action alone. The spiritual dimension of ministry is a gift from God but is usually a result of personal discipline, study, moral righteousness, and compassion for people, as well.

These are personal elements that priesthood members must nurture and develop. Official functions should contribute to them, but cannot replace them. Priesthood is a sacred trust, and those accepting it must account for the manner in which it is used. It is not an earthly honor, for honor's sake, not a privilege for human glory (John 7:18). It is not like an earthly bequest, controlled and administered for personal selfish interests. Priesthood is the highest conceivable kind of stewardship, involving responsibility to both God and humankind. Because this is so, no person can demand to be ordained as if it were a right.