

Ministry, Mission, and Leadership A Bible Study

The goal of this Bible study is to explore themes of ministry, mission and leadership in the New Testament and to reflect on what this might mean for the church today. The Scriptures show us a God who calls, equips and sends – a God who gives gifts to God’s people for service in the church and for service in the world. The Scriptures also show us a church that from the beginning has been intentional in identifying and setting apart leaders to serve God’s people and God’s mission.

This study has grown out of the work of the Word and Service Entrance Rite Discernment Group. The 2016 Churchwide Assembly approved a new ELCA Roster of Ministers of Word and Service, whose members are called deacons. This new, unified roster combines three previous rosters: associate in ministry, diaconal minister, and deaconess.

The Entrance Rite Discernment Group is charged with making a recommendation to the Church Council for action by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly about what the appropriate entrance rite should be for this new ELCA roster. The term “entrance rite” refers to the order of service in which someone formally enters rostered ministry in this church. Ministers of word and sacrament are “ordained.” Until the 2019 Churchwide Assembly acts on this recommendation, ministers of word and service will be “consecrated.” This is because the entrance rite for two of the three former rosters (deaconesses and diaconal ministers) was consecration. Associates in ministry were “commissioned.”

As part of its work, the Entrance Rite Discernment Group has looked at New Testament texts and themes that address God’s gifts and God’s call for missional leadership. This study invites you to join in that process of learning and reflection.

The study is structured in four parts:

- God Gives Gifts
- Jesus Calls
- Responding to God’s Call
- The Church’s Call

Feel free to use this study in ways that fit your interests, needs and schedule. The study could be used as a Sunday forum topic over four weeks (or condensed into two weeks). It could be used all at once at a leadership retreat or could be used as a congregation council devotion over four months. It could be used with confirmation students who are beginning to explore their gifts, and it could also be used with seniors who are reflecting on how their gifts and call and the church’s needs are changing.

I. God Gives Gifts

[Illustration for part 1 of study: Puzzle pieces being assembled]

Opening hymn: ELW 576 We All Are One in Mission

1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 27-31

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

²⁷Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Ephesians 4:4-7, 11-13

⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. ⁷But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ¹¹The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

1. According to these two scriptural texts, what gifts does God give to the Christian community?
2. Why do you think God gives different gifts to different people?
3. According to these texts, what are God's gifts for?
4. How do you see these gifts at work in the church today? Consider your own congregation and synod, as well as the wider church.
5. What gifts does the Christian community need for its mission today? What new gifts might be needed that are not mentioned in these texts?
6. How do we help people identify and develop the gifts they have been given?

7. How are these gifts used by public ministry leaders (e.g., ministers of word and sacrament and ministers of word and service) in the church? How are these gifts used in the ministry of all the baptized?
8. What gifts has God given you? How have you used those gifts, both in the church and in your community? What opportunities do you see, both in the church and in your community, for using these gifts?

Some thoughts:

Our gracious God gives many different gifts to us as individuals. The scriptural texts are clear that these are not to be considered private gifts but are gifts to be shared for the sake of the community. God gave the early church the gifts it needed for mission in its time and place. God continues to give gifts to us today for mission in our own times and places.

Closing prayer:

“God our creator, you have given us work to do and call us to use our talents for the good of all. Guide us as we work, and teach us to live in the Spirit who made us your sons and daughters, in the love that made us sisters and brothers, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.”
(ELW, p. 331)

II. Jesus Calls

[Illustration for part 2 of study: Cell phone with caller ID “Jesus”]

Opening hymn: ELW 696 Jesus Calls Us; o’er the Tumult or ELW 798 Will You Come and Follow Me

Mark 3:14-19

¹⁴And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, ¹⁵and to have authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, ¹⁹and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Luke 10:1-2

¹⁰After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ²He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Here are some other passages you may wish to look at:

Matthew 4:18-22

18 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 lake—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹As 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. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Luke 9:23

23 Then he said to them all, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’

1. Why does Jesus choose the twelve?
2. Why does Jesus choose the seventy?
3. For what tasks are these leaders appointed?
4. Have you ever felt called by God to a particular task or role? If so, describe that experience.
5. We often speak about Jesus “calling” the disciples. The first two scriptural passages use the words “appointed” and “sent.” How would you describe the relationship among these three words? What are the similarities and differences?

(The word “appointed” used in Mark 3:14 and Luke 10:1 translates two different Greek verbs, both of which convey the meaning “to give a task to.”)

6. Have you ever experienced a sense of God’s call? To what do you think God has called – or is calling – you? Have you experienced God’s call as a dramatic change of life, or within your daily life, or in some other way?
7. What things have kept you or others you know from responding to God’s call? Has it ever been uncomfortable or difficult for you to follow God’s call?
8. What can we learn from these passages for our ministry in the church and world today?

Closing prayer:

“O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” (ELW, p. 317)

III. Responding to God's all

[Illustration for part 3 of study: Student(s) in classroom, raising hand ???]

Opening hymn: ELW 574 Here I Am, Lord

John 4:5-42

⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." ²⁶Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

²⁷Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" ²⁸Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him. ³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." ³²But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" ³⁴Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that

sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.” ³⁹Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

1. How does the Samaritan woman respond to Jesus in this text? Consider both her words and her actions.
2. How do the disciples respond to Jesus? Consider both their words and their actions.
3. Is it appropriate to call the Samaritan woman an “evangelist” (one who announces the gospel)? Why or why not?
4. Verses 31-38 seem to interrupt the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. How do you think these verses are related to the rest of this passage?
5. In verse 35, Jesus tells the disciples, “look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.” What do you think he meant? What is the harvest God is calling us to today?
6. In Matthew 9:38 and Luke 10:2, Jesus tells the disciples, “therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Where do the laborers for God’s harvest come from? How do we identify and equip them for their work?
7. How might you describe your own role as someone who works for God’s harvest?
8. During the course of her encounter with Jesus, the Samaritan woman moves from *being ministered to* by Jesus to then *ministering to others*. How is responding to God’s call an act both of receiving and of giving?
9. How might this passage help you respond to someone who says “I’m not a minister” or “I’m not a leader”?

Closing prayer:

“Draw your church together, O God, into one great company of disciples, together following our teacher Jesus Christ into every walk of life, together serving in Christ’s mission to the world, and together witnessing to your love wherever you will send us; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” (ELW, p. 75)

IV. The Church Calls

[Illustration for part 4 of study: Laying on of hands]

Opening hymn: ELW 676 Lord, Speak to Us That We May Speak

Acts 1:21-26

²¹So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.” ²³So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” ²⁶And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

Acts 6:1-7a

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ²And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, ⁴while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” ⁵What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem.

Acts 14:23

²³And after they [Paul and Barnabas] had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.

1 Timothy 4:14

¹⁴Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders.

Romans 16:1-2

¹I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, ²so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

1. What situations in these scriptural passages required the selection of new leaders?

(For the shorter passages in this study, it will be helpful for you to open your Bibles and read the surrounding verses to gain a sense of the broader context for the verses included here.)

2. How did the early Christian community choose leaders in these passages? What actions did it use to designate or appoint these leaders? What similarities and what differences do you see in these passages?
3. What can we learn from these passages that might be useful for how the church identifies and appoints leaders today?
4. In Acts 6, the apostles tell the community to “select [leaders] from among yourselves.” What does this suggest about the role of local Christian communities in identifying church leaders?
5. How might we help people hear God’s call through the call of the Christian community today?
6. Have you ever been “set apart” for a particular role or office in the church? In your community? In your work? How did you feel about that experience?
7. If possible, talk with a pastor or deacon about their experience of “call.” Which came first, an inner sense of call or having their gifts recognized and lifted up by others? How was the church involved in validating the individual’s sense of call, through other pastors or rostered leaders, through the candidacy process, etc.?
8. Have you ever attended a service of ordination or consecration? (Neither of these words appears in the New Testament) What do you remember about the service? Such services typically include a promise by those in attendance to pray for and support the work of the person being ordained or consecrated. Why is that important?

Closing prayer:

“God of compassion, your Son came among us not to be served but to serve. We give you thanks for the women and men whom you have called to the ministry of word and sacrament and the ministry of word and service. Give them faith to serve you with gladness; sustain them with a living hope, especially in the time of despair; and kindle in them your love, so that they may see in every neighbor the face of Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.” (adapted from ELW, p. 73)

Some concluding thoughts

The Scriptures are full of accounts of God giving gifts to God’s people and calling them to use those gifts in service of others. We believe that God still gives gifts and calls us to service, both in familiar and in new ways.

Through baptism, all Christians are given gifts and called by God. In that sense, we are all ministers, and we are all leaders. From the beginning, the church has also recognized the gifts of some individual Christians and called them to *public* leadership positions within the church, for the sake of the church and the world. Both the New Testament and later church history show that this calling and setting apart of public ministry leaders has not always taken place in exactly the same way. God's people have acted faithfully in response to God's call and to the needs of the church and world with a variety of terms and practices.

Having participated in this study, what are your thoughts about:

- the mission of the church here and now;
- the gifts required to carry out the mission of the church;
- the leadership needs of the church today;
- how to equip both members and public ministry leaders for service in God's world; and
- how the church sets people apart for public ministry and the appropriate rites for doing so.

Feel free to send your responses – or other thoughts related to the entrance rite for those called to the ministry of word and service to cherlyne.beck@elca.org.

This Bible study was written by the Rev. Dr. Kathryn A. Kleinhans, assisted by the Entrance Rite Discernment Group.

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