

Message: God's World Needs Leaders

This reflection could be incorporated into a celebration of Vocation Sunday or another suitable occasion

Considering Ministry

Have you ever wondered how a person becomes a minister in The United Church of Canada?

Maybe you've listened to hundreds of sermons and prayers and participated in more than a few worship services, or perhaps this is your very first venture into a United Church building. Maybe you're returning after an absence and you're wondering about the changes you experience, or perhaps you've been trying to figure out if paid accountable ministry is where God is calling you. Whatever your circumstances at this moment, questions may have crossed your mind about this journey. How does the United Church know when someone is interested, or has the gifts and talents and faith necessary to begin the process toward ministry?

Maybe you've been part of a discernment committee at your local church or part of a presbytery Education and Students Committee. Or you've watched the ordination, commissioning, or recognition ceremony at a Conference Sunday and wondered about the steps taken by the individual. Well, you're not alone! Many people have wondered all these things as well.

Whether it's someone from a story in the Bible or the friend you taught Sunday school with; whether it's the young person in the confirmation class or the one who got their picture in the paper taking part in a peaceful protest; whether it's the teacher, banker, or nurse from the next town, or the minister's child or partner—all who follow the path of someone who decides to enter ministry wonder how it all began. If you were to ask 10 different ministers, you would likely have 10 different answers! And if you were to know 10 different ministers, you would discover they are 10 very different people who were called to 10 very different ministries. That's the reality of ministry in The United Church of Canada.

Often we feel as though our journey needs to be exactly the same as our minister's experience or similar to those told in the Bible stories. The truth is that God's call is unique for each one of us. You may see some reflections of one story or another, but no two stories are the same. So we might feel we're too young or too old (like Jeremiah or Noah), that we've struggled along the way (like Jonah), or that it feels impossible (like Mary) to follow this path. But the way we respond is uniquely ours. One thing that is common to every story is the realization that it's good to talk to others to help discern God's voice in the midst of all the other voices in our mind and heart.

Like many other professions, how we live out our call to ministry has changed over the years. At one time, there was the tendency to fit a certain "mould" as a United Church minister. Today, there are various ways to be in ministry. With society and culture changing, with the increase of multicultural and intergenerational communities across Canada, and with technological innovations happening all around us, a minister in the United Church has any number of possibilities!

Minister's Reflection

Reflect on the problems that are faced in biblical stories, such as draught, hunger, doubt, overcrowding, and expectations (we've already tried that and it didn't work!).

Describe your call to ministry. Include the challenges and doubts, as well as the rewards and satisfaction. Highlight the ways your call has changed over the years and how ministry has impacted you personally.

Reflect on the abundance of the text: God's answer, elders, water, solutions, fish, other helpers nearby, a new path, and a new vision.

Describe some of the things that you love and appreciate about being a minister. What abundances have you discovered?

Congregational Reflection

Invite the congregation to form pairs or small groups to share with their neighbours some of the challenges that they faced in making major life decisions: career, family, lifestyle, and so on.

Invite the small groups to share what helped them make these decisions: prayer, mentors, friends, family, and so on.

Invite the congregation to consider whether they know someone who might be facing a life choice, e.g., a teenager considering college or university, a college student considering courses, someone looking for work. How might they offer support to that individual?

Leadership Reflection

Reflect on the leadership qualities found in the scripture: listening, observing, caring, prayer, questions, accepting help, gathering elders, inviting others to follow, courage, affirming, assurance, confidence, trust, invitation, and so on

Invite the congregation to consider if they know anyone with these types of leadership skills. Has anyone invited them to lead something or get involved in something? Do you see gifts for ministry in any of these people? Have you ever told them? Would you be willing to discuss ministry with them? Or just plant the seed?

*—Rev. Elizabeth Brown
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To learn more about call to ministry in The United Church of Canada, visit www.united-church.ca/leadership/entering-ministry.