

Choosing A Path

Not everyone is called to a church vocation. However, if you continue to be interested and feel compelled to explore some of the options listed in this resource, you will find a myriad of choices before you, more than you ever dreamed were available. Perhaps some of the things you would like to do in your life and work will be in the context of the church or a related institution. As you continue to explore the possibilities and reflect, as you come to know more fully the range of your talents, skills, interests, and abilities, you are encouraged to talk with counselors, your pastor, friends, and family.

The creative operation of God
does not simply mold us like soft clay.
It is a Fire that animates all it touches,
a spirit that gives life.

So it is in living
that we should give ourselves to that creative action,
imitate it, and identify with it.

Meditation with Teilhard De Chardin, Blanche Gallagher

All of God's people are called to respond to God and live faithful lives. Their ministry may be from a pulpit, from behind a desk, on the playground with children, or in an overseas service ministry. What is your ministry? Where does your path lead?



Resourcing Committees on Preparation for Ministry Churchwide Personnel Services

National Ministries Division

Room M041 • 100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396
(502)569-5771 • Fax (502)569-8748
e-mail: Evelyn.Hwang.parti@pcusa.org

Gifted by the Flame *Professional Church Vocations*

Gifted

Gifts come unbidden
only to be received.
To be the steward, discovering how
to celebrate the blessing
to let the gift unfold
to live out the gift. . .
therein lies the challenge.

A gift drops into life's stream
and the stream changes,
never quite the same again.

New horizons open up,
new paths beckon,
new challenges emerge,
new testings come. . .
And we wonder, ponder, struggle,
awkwardly accepting the gift.

Mostly gifts challenge,
and the gifted must respond.
Good gifts jar us into re-collection
of nearly forgotten skills,
dormant and dusty in far corners of self.
Surprised we try again
after so long away
and discover the joy when rusty talent
shines again...works again...serves anew.

How little it takes sometimes
to evoke the wonder
and the power of our giftedness.
How humbling to attempt...to begin...
to try life enriched by a gift
and to find our gift resonating deeply in others.

The miracle of a gift
is when it becomes
our gift shared,
no longer ours alone,
but ours together,
so we can now be thankful,
celebrating
the Gift from whom
we first
unworthily received.

William E. Chapman ©

Introduction

Your skills and abilities, your unique personhood, are God's precious gifts to you. Your determination of how these gifts will be used is the "I/Thou" relationship. Gifts are God's call to you, putting them in service to God and community is your acknowledgment of acceptance. The miraculous aspect of these gifts is that they evolve throughout life to be found again as circumstances change. As Bill Chapman wrote, "Good gifts jar us into re-collection of nearly forgotten skills, dormant and dusty . . . surprised, we try again."

In the Triune God, it is the Holy Spirit, bearer of the flame of passion, that provides the light with which we discover our gifts. For some of us the light shines bright and pure, like a laser beam, pointing the way. For others, the light glows bright and then dims, flickering as we attempt to discern the path. However, if we pray and focus our energy on God's quiet voice, the way will be made clear.

Perhaps, this resource fell into your hands by chance. Perhaps, it was given to you by your pastor or Christian educator, or another member of your church who sees in you gifts for church service. Perhaps, you deliberately sought resources to assist you determine your vocation. This may be your first career, or second, or third, or fourth. It really doesn't matter. God calls you. Heed the call.

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At the Crossroads

Choosing a career is often bewildering. Sometimes, we know better what we don't want to do than what we do want to do. The number of occupational choices is staggering. "What is the right job for me?" "What questions should I be asking?" "Whose advice should I listen to?" Things are rarely clear. Sometimes, it is totally confusing. It is easy to become preoccupied with the thousands of bits of information and advice we are given. If you are thinking, "HELP," now is the time to stop, pull back, and do some self-reflection.

Within that quiet space, listen to what God is saying to you; pray, and have faith that God will assist you in your vocational quest. Know that God will give you everything you need for your life's journey—you need only listen. You may hear that God calls you to a church occupation as one way of expressing your total life commitment to Christ. When you hear God's call, you can begin to act in an intentional way: put the information and advice you receive into context; evaluate your gifts, skills, talents, and abilities; explore your fields of interest; speak with vocational counselors, family members, pastor, and friends. Continue to listen to God's voice and search within for ways to outwardly express the message of Christ found within you. If you are called to a church occupation, you will find the area that best manifests the gifts you bring to ministry.

Some think that only persons ordained to ministry of the Word and Sacrament are called to ministry. Reformed tradition believes that all people of God are engaged in ministry as they respond to the call that begins in baptism. Whether our occupations are in the secular world or in the church, we are called to respond to God through faith, obedience, and work. Roy Lewis wrote in *Choosing Your Career, Finding Your Vocation*, "... The work becomes the fulfillment of the ministry and mission of that presence of God within. This work is called vocation."

Occupations will differ, yet each of us is called to make responsible decisions and choose work that is meaningful and useful in the church and world. Each person is equipped with spiritual gifts as well as specific talents and skills, which are meant to work for the common good.

Now there are varieties of gifts, 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 every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

(1 Cor. 12:4-7 NRSV)

Although this passage specifically addresses spiritual gifts, it points us to the understanding that each of us is equipped for and called to a vocation, indeed a life, of response to God. If you feel led to explore a church vocation, some of the qualities you and others have noticed about you may include:

- a sense of spiritual presence and a living faith;
- qualities of compassion and caring;
- desire to alleviate suffering;
- strong connectedness between your faith and your work;
- commitment to participation in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Varieties of Service

In the Congregation

Minister of the Word and Sacrament.
(See Touched by the Flame, PDS#72-218-01-002)

Christian Educator —

Working with the pastor and the education committee, the Christian educator is responsible for the educational program of the church, including teacher recruitment and training, leadership and counsel to all age groups, setting long-term goals for the educational program and finding opportunities to integrate every aspect of life into the congregational education program. Christian educators need to be creative and resourceful. Currently, the call for Christian educators outweighs the number of available candidates. This is particularly true in racial-ethnic congregations. Christian educators hold a Master's degree in Christian education; many also hold a dual Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree. Certification is recommended.

Spiritual Director —

Working with individuals and small groups, the Spiritual Director is a guide, assisting persons to deepen their awareness of and responsiveness to God's presence and purpose in their own lives. Many churches are calling Spiritual Directors to be a part of their staff team. Spiritual Directors may be lay people or ministers of the Word and Sacrament, who have specialized training from a recognized Spiritual Formation institute. More information is available from the Office of Spiritual Formation, Congregational Ministries Division, PC(U.S.A.) (502)569-5305.

Director of Music —

Working with the pastor and worship committee, the Director of Music plans Sunday worship and other special services and programs. Music is integral to Presbyterian worship and the Director is responsible for the choir and accompaniment and other musical ensembles. The astute Director of Music knows how to blend the new and innovative with the traditional to teach as well as to please. The Director will hold a degree in Music and have a deep understanding of Reformed tradition.

Other church vocations include administrative assistants, business administrators, office secretaries, parish visitors, social workers, nursery and day-school teachers, youth directors, and custodians. Each has an important role in the daily life of a dynamic church.

Varieties of Service (Continued)...

In the Field

Chaplaincies —

These vital ministries are found in many vocational areas. A Master of Divinity degree (M.Div.) is required, and often, other advanced degrees or areas of expertise are part of the position description. Chaplains are called and salaried by the institution they are working for and follow employment guidelines set by that institution. Chaplaincies are many and varied. There are chaplains in the military, colleges and universities, fields of counseling, prisons, and hospitals. In many large cities, chaplains work in the Office of Human Resources for the city government and in police and fire departments. Some sports teams even have chaplains. For an in-depth understanding of a variety of chaplaincies, read *A Day in the Life Of . . .* in your presbytery's Resource Center.

Mission Service Worker —

There are international service opportunities for individuals with special gifts to work in countries that have identified a particular need. An M.Div. is required for some positions, but all call for degrees in specified fields such as education, medicine, or social science. Mission Service Workers serve three-year terms and are salaried employees meeting employment guidelines of the agency/country that calls them. If you are interested in international service and have the ability to live a simple lifestyle, enjoy intercultural experience, have language acquisition skills, a professional experience or credentials which match the position, and a willingness to make a commitment to service, call 1-800-524-2612 for an application form, ask for PDS#74-400-98-062. For more information about Mission Service opportunities, visit the web site at www.pcusa.org/msr. The Mission Service Worker program is an office of Worldwide Ministries Division, PC (U.S.A.).

Presbyteries/Synods/General Assembly —

There continues to be opportunities for individuals with special gifts needed by the regional and national offices. Some positions require an M.Div; many do not—however, prior experience in the area of competence and familiarity with the Presbyterian system is important. Because of financial constraints, many presbyteries and synods are depending more on contract personnel and volunteers and less on full-time, salaried employees.

For a listing of available positions, call (502)569-5225, and ask for a Diversified Opportunities List, or see the Churchwide Personnel Services web site at <http://www.pcusa.org>; click on Call Referral Services.

There are many opportunities to serve in the Presbyterian denomination. Individuals with creativity, flexibility, and innovation will find work that is satisfying and meets crucial needs. Sometimes, one has to survey needs in the church and in the community and build a new position description. Sometimes fund-raising may be a part of the position. However, if you are excited by challenge, invigorated by hard work, and find success in service, you will be amazed at what is open to you.

Ministry Development Councils

Ministry Development Councils . . . provide quality counseling resources for vocational discernment for ministerial leaders at points of entry, enrichment, transition and exit. The Councils are for individuals who are . . . deciding about a vocation in the church or elsewhere. From: *Work, At Its Roots, Is A Spiritual Matter*, Ministry Development Councils' interpretative brochure.

Southwest Career
Development Center,
624 Six Flags, #210
Arlington, TX 76011-6348
(817)649-8134

Career Development Center
of the Southeast
531 Kirk Road
Decatur, GA 30030-3798
(404)371-0336

Center for Career
Development and Ministry
70 Chase Street
Newton Centre, MA 02159-2233
(617)969-7750

Career and Personal
Counseling Service
4108 Park Road, #200
Charlotte, NC 28209-2259
(704)523-7751

Midwest Career
Development Service
P O Box 7249
1840 Westchester Blvd.
Westchester, IL 60154-7249
(708)343-6268

Midwest Career
Development Service
1520 Old Henderson Road, 102-B
Columbus, OH 43220-3616
(614)442-8822

Midwest Career
Development Service
P O Box 2816, 754 North 31st St.
Kansas City, KS 66110-0816
(913)621-6348

Mid-Atlantic Career Center, Inc.
1401 Columbia Avenue
Lancaster, PA 17603-2850
(717)397-7451

The Center for Ministry
8393 Capwell Drive, #220
Oakland, CA 94621-2123
(510)635-4246

Northeast Career Center
407 Nassau Street
Princeton, NJ 08540-4603
(609)924-9408

North Central Career
Development Center
516 Mission House Lane, NW
New Brighton, MN 55112-2571
(612)636-5120

Career and Personal
Counseling Center
Eckerd College
St. Petersburg, FL 33733-2560
(813)864-8356

Resources



Being Presbyterian

A Brief History of the Presbyterians, James H. Smylie. Westminster John Knox
Always Being Reformed: Faith for a Fragmented World, Shirley C. Guthrie. Westminster John Knox
Black and Presbyterian: The Heritage and the Hope, Gayraud S. Wilmore. Westminster John Knox
Book of Order, Chapters I - IV of the Form of Government (G-1.0000 — G-4.0403)
The Ordination Questions: A Study for Church Officers, Howard Rice and Calvin Chinn.
Presbyterian Publishing House
The Presbyterian Source: Bible Words that Shape a Faith, Louis Weeks. Westminster John Knox
To Be A Presbyterian, Louis B. Weeks. Westminster John Knox

Career Directions

Choosing Your Career, Finding Your Vocation, Roy Lewis. Paulist Press
Discover Your Spiritual Type, Corinne Ware. Alban Institute
Do What You Are, Paul D. Tieger and Barbara Barron-Tieger. Little, Brown and Company
How to Find Your Mission in Life, Richard N. Bolles. Ten Speed Press
Mid-Life Directions, Ann Brennan and Janice Brewi. Paulist Press
Navigating Midlife, Eleanor S. Corlett and Nancy B. Millner. Davies-Black Publishing
New Directions in Career Planning and the Workplace, Jean M. Hummerow, ed.
Davies-Black Publishing
Personality Type and Religious Leadership, Roy M. Oswald and Otto Kroeger. Alban Institute
Starting Out, Starting Over, Linda Peterson. Davies-Black Publishing

Guides to Living

Dancing with Dinosaurs: Ministry in a Hostile & Hurting World, William Easum. Abingdon
In Ordinary Time: Healing the Wounds of the Heart, Roberta C. Bondi. Abingdon
Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community, Susan G. Farnham, Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean,
Susan M. Ward. Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, PA.
Meditations with Teilhard De Chardin, Blanche Gallagher. Bear & Company
The Hero Within, Carol S. Pearson. Harper & Row, Publishers
When True Simplicity is Gained: Finding Spiritual Clarity in a Complex World,
Martin Marty & Micah Marty. Eerdmans

Discernment

A Day in the Life Of . . . Churchwide Personnel Services, National Ministries Division
Discovering God's Will Together: Spiritual Practice for the Church, Charles M. Olsen,
Danny E. Morris. Alban Institute
Gifts of the Spirit, Kenneth Cain Kinghorn. Abingdon
Listening to the Music of the Spirit: The Art of Discernment, David Lonsdale. Ava Maria Press
Rediscovering Our Spiritual Gifts: Building Up the Body of Christ Through the Gifts of the Spirit,
Charles V. Bryant. Upper Room
Remember Who You Are: Baptism, a Model for Christian Life, William Willimon. Upper Room

Spiritual Practice

Journaling: A Spirit Journey, Anne Broyles. The Upper Room
Knowing Me, Knowing God: Exploring Your Spirituality with Myers-Briggs,
Malcolm Goldsmith. Abingdon
Reformed Spirituality, Howard L. Rice. Westminster John Knox
Soul Feast, Marjorie J. Thompson. Westminster John Knox
Under the Unpredictable Plant, Eugene H. Peterson. Eerdmans