

**M**inistry of the Word and Sacrament isn't for the faint-hearted or the lazy. And yet, as you walk with individuals who are caught in the passion of ministry, who have been touched by the flame, and who face the absurd, the tragic, and the all-too-ordinary dimensions of life, you will find rich rewards. As you laugh and celebrate, listen and sometimes weep, worship and reflect, serve and allow yourself to be served, lead and are led, a profound sense of grace and blessing will be found. It is in this sense of God's presence and leading and your faithfulness to the vision, that you'll find true "success" in ministry.

Day by day as you search for God's often hidden presence, your challenge will be, as Henri Nouwen states: to listen to the soft, gentle, and loving voice of God. A Christian leader is called to help people hear that voice and to be comforted and consoled.\* As you respond to God's inner call in your life, you may be called to Ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

If you are interested in this vocation, you are encouraged to continue to examine yourself, seek God's guidance, to pray, and to talk with your pastor and other church officers about your feelings and directions of ministry.

\*H.J.M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*.  
New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989.



## **Resourcing Committees on Preparation for Ministry**

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# **Touched by the Flame**

*Minister of  
the Word  
and Sacrament*

# Vocation

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**T**here are all kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of society, say, or the Superego, or Self-interest.

By and large a good rule for finding out is this:

The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work

- a) that you need to do, and
- b) that the world most needs to have done.

If you really get a kick out of your work, you've presumably met requirement a), but if your work is writing TV deodorant commercials, the chances are you've missed requirement b).

On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you have probably met requirement b), but if most of the time you're bored and depressed by it, the chances are you have not only bypassed a), but probably aren't helping your patients much either.

Neither the hair shirt nor the soft berth will do. The place God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

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Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*,  
*A Theological ABC*, 1973.  
Harper & Row, p. 95

# Introduction

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**T**he place God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

Does this sentence fill your heart? Lift your soul? Move you to action? Perhaps these are the very words you've been seeking. Words that provide motivation to do important and life-changing work. Not just a job, 9 to 5, and a paycheck, but work that will change the lives of people, and you as well. If you feel the inner call to work in the service of God, you may find what you are searching for among these pages.

Explore the world of Minister of the Word and Sacrament. Let your heart be open to hear the call to service that awaits you. If you think this may be the work you should do, talk to session members, your pastor, your Christian educator, college faculty and others who know you and can assist you assess your gifts, talents and potential for this work and life.

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# Touched by the Flame

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## Minister of the Word and Sacrament

Most people don't discover their call overnight. More often it is a journey, a series of progressive steps. Along the way doubts may surface that intrude and cause delay: "Is what I feel God's call, or am I on an ego trip?" "Do I have what it takes to be a 'good' minister?" "With all my faults, how can I be the one God has called?"

This self-examination is crucial. At one time in Presbyterian history, people were warned not to consider choosing a church occupation unless they felt such urgency that they could do nothing else! The call had to be so compelling, so clear, so strong, that no other occupation was possible! Some people try to ignore the call, or to fight its manifestation. The way is too difficult, they think. But those whom God chooses are touched by the flame, and no matter how much it flickers and wanes and threatens to die out, the passion remains untouched by the debris and messiness of ordinary life. Like Jacob, we tend to wrestle with that which we don't understand, but can't ignore, forget, or put behind us. However, as the journey continues, and as you gain insight through prayerful contemplation and with guidance from others, you will discern God's call.

## Qualities for Leadership

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While you have your own unique gifts, skills and interests, people who share the call to Ministry of Word and Sacrament have common qualities that indicate fitness for this profession. Some of these are:

- knowledge of self and one's gifts, talents, and limitations;
- desire to alleviate suffering;
- sense of spiritual presence and a living faith;
- qualities of compassion and caring;

- acceptance of risk;
- ability to face the absurd and tragic dimensions of life in a way that points toward hope;
- ability to live with ambiguity and accept rejection;
- affirmation of Biblical faith and how it relates to questions facing society today;
- commitment to working in partnership, in common ministry with other members;
- ability to manage conflict and work toward resolution;
- flexibility, openness, and the ability to learn;
- visionary leadership for the Church;
- sense of humor and lively personal interests;
- ability to listen and be led by others;
- ability to form and sustain positive relationships with persons of all ages;
- commitment to participation in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

These qualities, when combined with intelligence and academic ability, self-discipline, organizational skills, communication skills, particularly verbal, time management, moral integrity, physical good health, and emotional stability, equip a person for Ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

If you feel you have the potential to develop the qualities listed, and if after prayer and frank assessment of your abilities and weaknesses, you "hear" God's persistent call, you may want to do some of the following:

- shadow your pastor for a time to see the day-to-day reality of this ministry;
- participate in a Mission Volunteer program;
- read some or all of the resources listed on page 9.

Because Presbyterians are a connectional denomination, a presbytery Preparation for Ministry support and discernment process is in place to assist you explore the dimensions of your particular call. Ask your pastor about this process and do your ground-work before you enroll in Seminary. Your theological journey will be enhanced by taking the time to do a complete exploration of your call, the needs of your family, if appropriate, your financial situation including indebtedness, and knowledge of the Preparation for Ministry process.

# A Typical Church

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Sixty-five percent of the 14,271 active Ministers of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are in congregations. Below is a composite sketch of a “typical” church and the kinds of duties required.

## Church “X”

The typical church will have approximately 124 members. It will be in a rural, small town or inner-city setting. It may be yoked with another church; it may be a shared ministry; it may be a tentmaking ministry. Over one-fourth of its members will be over 65; 61 percent will be women. Your days will consist of member visitation; nursing home and hospital visits; counseling; typing bulletins and church correspondence; interpretation of the Presbyterian denomination’s mission, policies, and programs; funerals, weddings, and baptisms; going to court; committee meetings; presbytery responsibilities; evangelism; teaching confirmation classes and other Christian education programs; preaching; worship leadership; and a host of miscellaneous tasks. There will be many community demands on your time. You will be acutely aware that Sunday comes every week; and in between all your other duties and responsibilities, there is a sermon to write and Bible lessons to prepare. Your salary will be public information and will be determined by the financial capacity of your church or by the presbytery. Housing and car allowance and pension benefits are included. Working conditions vary considerably.

While the above is the typical church, there are Presbyterian churches with fewer than 100 members and many with 50 or less congregants.

Many of these churches are located in rural America or in small towns and villages. Solo pastors who can minister to every aspect of a church’s needs are desperately needed. The demands upon the minister are great, but so are the personal rewards.

At the other end of the spectrum are 1,208 Presbyterian churches with memberships of 501 or more who seek associate pastors with gifts and skills in youth and young adult ministries, pastoral care and counseling, new member recruitment and assimilation, mission programs, and community outreach, to assist the Head of Staff minister to a large congregation. Working in a multiple staff church as a team member, knowing that you are helping to create a holistic ministry that is more effective than its individual offices, can be a stimulating and challenging ministry.

As you explore your vocation, remember your call comes to you through baptism into the Presbyterian church community. As a minister you remain a member in that community. Becoming a Minister of the Word and Sacrament doesn’t take the place of the baptismal call; it is a part of it. In that sense, every minister is an integral participant of his or her congregation.

Ministry is a partnership between pastor and congregation. This partnership values the integrity of all participants and enables spiritual growth. Ministry that is not pursued as a partnership between pastor and people becomes a ministry of confrontation. Members drift away and the pastor experiences a sense of emptiness — each holds the other responsible for the conditions that exist.

# Presbyterian Theological Institutions

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## Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

100 East 27th Street  
Austin, TX 78705  
(512)472-6736  
FAX (512)479-0738  
[www.austinseminary.edu](http://www.austinseminary.edu)

## Columbia Theological Seminary

P.O. Box 520 • 701 Columbia Drive  
Decatur, GA 30031  
(404)378-8821  
FAX (404)377-9696  
[www.CTSnet.edu](http://www.CTSnet.edu)

## University of Dubuque Theological Seminary

2000 University Avenue  
Dubuque, IA 52001  
(319)589-3122  
FAX (319)589-3110  
[www.dbq.edu](http://www.dbq.edu) (click on "seminary")

## Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary

700 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, SW  
Atlanta, GA 30314  
(404)527-7781  
FAX (404)614-6349

## Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

1044 Alta Vista Road  
Louisville, KY 40205  
(502)895-3411  
FAX (502)895-1096  
[www.lpts.edu](http://www.lpts.edu)

## McCormick Theological Seminary

5555 South Woodlawn Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60637  
(773)947-6300  
FAX (773)288-2612  
[www.mccormick.edu](http://www.mccormick.edu)

## Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

616 North Highland Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15206  
(412)362-5610  
FAX (412)363-3260  
[www.pts.edu](http://www.pts.edu)

## Princeton Theological Seminary

P.O. Box 821  
64 Mercer Street  
Princeton, NJ 08542  
(609)921-8300  
FAX (609)924-2973  
[www.ptsem.edu](http://www.ptsem.edu)

## San Francisco Theological Seminary

2 Kensington Road  
San Anselmo, CA 94960  
(415)258-6500  
FAX (415)258-1608  
[www.sfts.edu](http://www.sfts.edu)

## Southern California Campus

1325 North College Ave.  
Claremont, CA 91711  
(909)621-9885  
Fax: (909)626-3265

## Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education

3401 Brook Road  
Richmond, VA 23227  
(804)355-0671  
FAX (804)355-3919  
[www.utsva.edu](http://www.utsva.edu)

## By Covenant Agreement with General Assembly

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## Auburn Theological Seminary

3041 Broadway  
New York City, NY 10027  
(212)662-4315  
FAX (212)663-5214  
[www.auburnsem.org](http://www.auburnsem.org)

## Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico

776 Ponce de Leon Avenue  
San Juan, PR 00925  
(787)763-6700  
FAX (787)751-0847  
[hptp://netministries.org/see/charmin/CM01399](http://netministries.org/see/charmin/CM01399)



# Ministry Development Councils

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**M**inistry 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

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## Available from the Office of Resourcing Committees on Preparation for Ministry

- The Divine Call: A Meditation on 1 Samuel, Ronald E. Peters, SEIC Project
- The Calling Word of God: A Meditation on Jeremiah, John T. Campbell, SEIC Project
- Worthy of the Gospel: A Meditation on Philippians, Richard M. Webster, SEIC Project
- A Theology of Vocation, The Rev. Dr. Jack Stotts
- Discerning Your Call and Your Gifts for Ministry, Professor Roy W. Fairchild

## General Resources to Assist You Explore Your Theological Call

- Learning to Lead from Your Spiritual Center, Patricia D. Brown. Abingdon.
- Knowing Me, Knowing God: Exploring Your Spirituality with Myers-Briggs, Malcolm Goldsmith. Abingdon.
- Your Personality and the Spiritual Life, Reginald Johnson. Victor Books/SP Publications, Inc.
- Discover Your Spiritual Type, Corinne Ware, Alban Institute.
- What Shall I Say?, Walter R. Bouman and Sue M. Setzer. Division for Ministry, ELCA, Chicago, IL.
- Becoming Church, Becoming Community, John M. Buchanan. Westminster.
- Dancing with Dinosaurs: Ministry in a Hostile & Hurting World, William M. Easum. Abingdon.
- Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community, Susan G. Farnham, Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean, Susan M. Ward. Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, PA.
- Rural Congregational Studies: A Guide for Good Shepherds, Shannon Jung and Mary Agria. Abingdon.
- What Unites Presbyterians: Common Ground for Troubled Times, Clifton Kirkpatrick and William H. Hopper, Jr. Geneva.
- Sealed in Christ, John M. Mulder. Geneva.
- Can You Drink the Cup, Henri J. M. Nouwen. Ava Maria Press.
- Belonging to God: A Commentary on "A Brief Statement of Faith," William C. Placher and David Willis-Watkins. Westminster John Knox.
- 21 Bridges to the 21st Century: The Future of Pastoral Ministry, Lyle T. Schaller. Abingdon.
- A Brief History of the Presbyterians, James H. Smylie. Geneva.
- The Will of God, Leslie D. Weatherhead. Abingdon.
- The Presbyterian Source: Bible Words that Shape a Faith, Louis B. Weeks. Westminster John Knox.
- Quarterly Review: A Journal of Theological Resources for Ministry. Cokesbury. 1-800-672-1789.