

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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God Calls People to Special Service

Leviticus 8:1-13

Key verse: [Moses] “poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head and anointed him, to consecrate him” (Leviticus 8:12).

Many church signs use the following format. They give the name of the church in large letters, then in smaller letters the name of the church’s “minister.” For example:

Wesley United Methodist Church
Rev. Paul Smith, Minister

Some churches, however, are making a significant change. Their signs look more like this:

Wesley United Methodist Church
Ministers: the People of Wesley UMC
Pastor: Rev. Paul Smith

Signs don’t tell the whole story, of course. But this change signals an important shift in how churches understand the roles of clergy and laity. The older understanding saw the role of clergy to do ministry in and for the church, while the laity’s role was mainly to fill the pews and pay the bills.

However, a better understanding sees the role of clergy not to do all the ministry of the church but to inspire, train, and equip the laity to do the work of ministry. Ephesians 4:12 gives the purpose of clergy and church leaders as “equip[ping] the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”

Every Christian is called to be in ministry. Some are called, ordained, and set apart for special service as clergy persons in the life of the Church. This ordination has its roots in the calling and anointing of ancient Israel’s priests, as described in Leviticus 8:1-13.

Here we read how Moses brought the people together for the anointing and consecration of Aaron and his sons to serve as priests. Their ministry would involve overseeing and leading worship in the tabernacle. As a sign of their consecration, God instructed Moses to ceremonially *wash* Aaron and his sons (Lev. 8:5-6); to *clothe* them in special clothes that were visible reminders of their calling (Lev. 8:7-9); and to *anoint* Aaron as high priest (Lev. 8:10-12).

The purpose of the Levitical priesthood was to so order Israel’s worship and the system of animal sacrifice that its purity and integrity would be maintained and understood by all the people. For a similar purpose, *elders* (who usually serve as

pastors) are ordained in the United Methodist Church to ministries of “Word, Service, Sacrament, and Order.” Also, *deacons* (who serve in specialized ministries such as Christian Education, pastoral counseling, administration, etc.) are ordained in the United Methodist Church to ministries of “Word and Service.”

Just as the Levitical priests, by careful leadership and instruction of the people, maintained the integrity of Israel’s worship life, so our ordained clergy lead the church in its corporate life of Word, Service, Sacrament, and Order.

The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* describes ordained ministry this way: “ordained ministers devote themselves wholly to the work of the Church and to the upbuilding of the ministry of all Christians. They do this through the careful study of Scripture and its faithful interpretation; through effective proclamation of the gospel and responsible administration of the sacraments; through diligent pastoral leadership of their congregations for fruitful discipleship; and by following the guidance of the Holy Spirit in witnessing beyond the congregation in the local community and to the ends of the earth” (parag. 138).

Since the time of Moses, God has called individuals to be set apart for special service as consecrated, ordained ministers. Still today a called, trained, and Spirit-filled clergy is essential. Yet, the Church would benefit by having a continuing conversation about the role of clergy and laity in the 21st century.

Invite your class to discuss this important topic:

What does it mean that “every Christian is called to be in ministry”?

What does the New Testament teach us about “the priesthood of all believers”?
(see, for example, 1 Peter 2:9)

How can clergy persons and lay persons best work together in order to advance God’s kingdom and make disciples for Jesus Christ?

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