



# Exploring Call



photo credit Jens Johnsson pexels.com

## Table of Contents

All Called Through Baptism .....	4
In the World as we all are .....	7
Call and Servanthood .....	9
Called to Leadership .....	13
Called to Eldership .....	15
Vocation is tested and discerned .....	18
Being called by many voices .....	21
Vocation often means letting things go .....	23
The Spirit of the Lord is Upon us .....	25

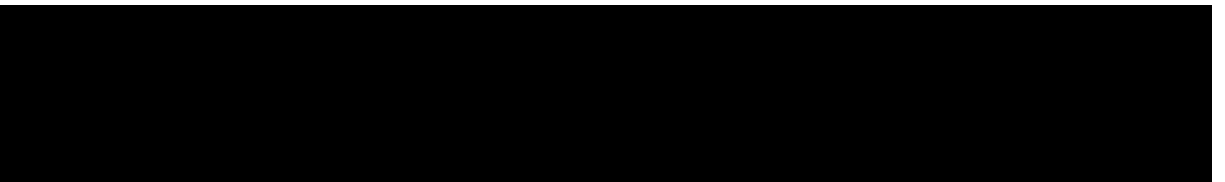
Vocation, or calling, are central facets of the life of the Church and, in our Reformed tradition we're clear that call is heard in the context of our various Councils. Local churches nurture and encourage leadership and stimulate discipleship. Our Elders' and Church Meetings discern calls to Eldership, Accredited Lay Preaching, Pioneer Ministry as well as Church Related Community Work and the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments – in their many forms. These reflections, most of which were first disseminated through the URC's Daily Devotions, help us think about a number of aspects of Call – I reflect on the fact that our Baptism is the basis of all our callings, Leo Roberts, the Children and Young People's Officer for the North Western Synod reminds us of God's universal call to serve in the world, Ruth Whitehead reminds us to ask who benefits from any particular sense of Call. Some are called to the specific task of leadership and John Proctor reflects on what this might mean whilst Gordon Woods reflects on the ministry of Eldership. I consider the way in which we discern in the URC – never a personal thing alone, always a discernment task done together. Susan Durber examines the fact that we are all called in multiple ways and John Ellis helps us consider the call to let go and move on. Finally I reflect on the different ways in which the URC offers to



I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

In the West we have forgotten the power of Baptism. We see it as a lovely rite of passage for babies, or as a moving way of showing adult conversion and commitment to Christianity. Either way it's seen as safe, maybe even quaint, in our culture. For converts to Christianity in some countries, however, Baptism is dangerous, subversive and life threatening.

I have given evidence in the asylum courts on behalf of people who have converted to Christianity. Most converts were reluctant to get baptised until they reached a safe country. Some, from Iran, would visit Turkey to seek Baptism as the



To be baptised is to make a complete commitment to Jesus, to turn one's back on "Satan, and all his works and empty promises" (to quote the 1970s Catholic rite.)

However, Baptism is more than just turning away from sin. In the reading from St Matthew's Gospel, Jesus linked Baptism with discipleship. The

That incorporation, however, demands a response. We're not baptised into a club. We're not **baptised into social status**. We're not baptised so that we're saved in isolation.

and where Baptism is a death sentence.

May we learn from their courage  
and offer a warm welcome  
to those who flee in order to be free. Amen.

maybe put up a few posters? Or was it about beginning ministry, doing the groundwork, sharing the Gospel?

Did He send out complementary teams? A great preacher with a healer? A fantastic teacher working alongside a miracle worker? A wise old head w8







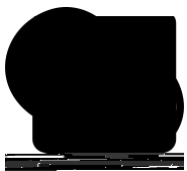
Ruth's colleague's wry question "to whose benefit is this ministry?" is interesting and is why in the URC we test calls to formal ministry through the various Councils of the Church. Why do you think people confuse a call to serve with something which makes them feel important?

How might local churches discern better about the





I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so 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.



'Some are called to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments' and some to 'the ministry of church related community work'. So says the URC's Basis of Union (paras 21 and 22). The first of those roles helps the local church to shape its worship, its pastoral life and its outreach. The second role enables congregation and local community to work together for justice and the common good.

Phoebe might have done well in either of those roles. She had a key position in the local church as a 'deacon'. That word suggests both humble service – someone who's not afraid to roll their sleeves up – and also a position of trust and respect.

She appears to have been the carrier of the Letter to the Romans. So she might have been asked to talk about its message with Christians who received it. 'What's Paul getting at? Does he tell other churches about these things? What difference have these ideas made to your life?' I

wonder if Phoebe was an off-the-cuff theologian, who could talk with others about God in unrehearsed yet serious and searching ways. That's quite a gift, but we continue to need people who can do it well.

Generous God, help me to be like Phoebe:  
open and kind, when others are in need;  
practical, when there's a task to be done;  
confident, in finding my feet somewhere new;  
respectful and helpful, among people of all kinds.

And help me to notice the Phoebes arou





position at work, being an Elder isn't a promotion, it is simply another form of service. And unlike any promotion exercise I've ever run, potential candidates tend to reflect long and hard before allowing their names to go forward!

Let us pray for those we call to be Elders that they may feel able to accept this call to serve God and their local churches in this ministry.






O God,  
you call all people to yourself,  
and are heard in myriad ways,  
help us to trust in you as we discern together,  
to have confidence that you speak to us through our  
Councils,  
that we discern and test so that your mission to our world  
is strengthened. Amen.

### How Clear Is Our Vocation Lord

Fred Pratt Green 1981 © Hope Publishing Company CCLI 1064776

Tune: Repton (Dear Lord and Father of Mankind)



How clear is our vocation, Lord,  
when once we heed your call:  
to live according to your Word,  
and daily learn, refreshed, restored,  
that you are Lord of all  
and will not let us fall.

2 But if, forgetful, we should find  
your yoke is hard to bear;  
if worldly pressures fray the mind,  
and love itself cannot unwind  
its tangled skein of care:  
our inward life repair.

3 We marvel how your  
saints become  
in hindrances more sure,  
whose joyful virtues put to shame  
the casual way we wear your name  
and by our faults obscure  
your pow'r to cleanse and cure.

4 In what you give us,  
Lord, to do,



be thought of as vocations. Being in a covenant relationship (like marriage), having a job, volunteering in the community, being an artist – are all things that might be understood as vocations. One person might have several such vocations. The model of the celibate priest is one simple model of vocation, but for most people, vocations are multiple.



if what is coming next is unknown. Those around us greet the idea with anxious incomprehension: why are you leaving us? Only later do we see that if we had not been willing to let go and wait, we could never have taken on the next calling that God had in mind. Once experience has taught us that, trusting the Spirit may even become a little easier.

The task in Cyprus proved immensely tough. The next calling is not often an easy reward for good behaviour in the last one. We may wistfully look back on what we agreed to leave behind. Yet in God's Providence we were being equipped. As a hymn that we have forgotten used to say:

Father, I know that all my life  
is portioned out for me...







to a growing sense of Call. Each Synod trains people to become local leaders of worship or Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers – might this be something you are called to? If you do lead worship and aren't trained it's always good to explore training so the worship we offer is as good as it can be and always honouring the God whom we serve.

Some people feel called to plant new expressions of Church – often supported by their local congregations. Messy Church is one such expression of Church but there are many others. Pioneering ministry is about releasing ordinary people to do the extraordinary things they dream about – enabling crazy, and not so crazy, ideas to take shape as part of the mission of the Church.

We train people now to undertake this powerful voluntary ministry. Then, of course, some are called to be Church Related Community Workers – either as volunteers or as paid ministers. CRCWs work in the community on behalf of the Church to show practical love and care. Ministers of Word and Sacrament are the types of minister we're most familiar with. Now we train people for stipendiary or voluntary service with different forms of voluntary service meaning that some can be trained locally for particular local ministries.

Our various ministries are used to sustain and give growth to the Church. All the ministries we exercise are designed to give contemporary expression to Jesus' priorities outlined in that first sermon in Nazareth – good news to the poor, release to the captives, liberation for the oppressed and the ability to see the world as it really is. It's quite a challenge.

