

## ***CALLED TO DISCIPLESHIP***

This booklet is about preparing women and men for positions of leadership in the church. It is about taking lay leadership seriously. (G-14.024)

This booklet is about God –

God's goodness

God's call

God's faithfulness

God's mercy and love

God's promises

God's reign

God's church.

This booklet is about the Church –

Its...ministry

calling

work

faithfulness

mission

responsibility

renewal

vitality

and its people.

This booklet is about people –

Who are...called to discipleship

called to leadership

called to faithfulness and responsibility

entrusted with the mission of the church

and who are equipped and transformed.

This booklet is about transformation –

In...education

community

trust

leadership

communication.

This booklet is for –

ministers and lay leaders

sessions and presbyteries.

This booklet is dedicated to –

the glory of God.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to the many Westminster officers who have helped to shape this program over eight years and to friends and colleagues who have shared teaching responsibilities. Paul Capetz has an enthusiastic fan club of church officers who knew very little about Reformed History and Theology before taking his classes. Margaret McCray shares her wise expertise in Group Dynamics. Walter Rockenstein brings his lifetime commitment to the church and his legal perspective to Parliamentary Procedure and How to Run a Meeting. Sam Cooke somehow makes our budgetary process coherent for those who become responsible for the church's finances and ministries. Cindy McCreary brings depth and passion to the classes on Self-Awareness.

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Thank you all!

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## PREFACE

*You never know where you will encounter 'living water'. Especially when you don't know how desperately you thirst for it. I found it in a fledgling program designed simply to train me to be an elder.*

*Our very first exercise on our very first day of Westminster's very first officer training class nearly humbled me right out of the program.*

*We sat at round tables, newly elected elders and deacons, instructed to list what we believed were the traits of good church officers.*

*Committed to the church. Absolutely. I am that.*

*Hard working. Without a doubt. This list grew. So did my confidence.*

*Willing to listen to others. Um, getting better at this.*

*"You should have a mature faith," one of my table mates said emphatically.*

*"I'm out," I remember saying to myself. After all I'd only been baptized a decade earlier.*

*Maybe, I fretted, surrounded by third generation Presbyterians, I wasn't ready to be a church officer after all.*

*But the months of training that followed would not only prepare me for my leadership role. They awakened in me a deep spiritual thirst, an intellectual curiosity that continues to this day. This thirst shapes my church experience and that of many others.*

*We began by reading the Biblical call stories of Samuel, Isaiah, and others, daunting in their reminder that we, too, had been called by God - to learn and to lead.*

*But they are reassuring, too. Samuel was but a boy when God called his name. Even Isaiah felt he needed to be prepared before he served.*

*"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'" Isaiah 6:8*

*We studied together. Read together. Prayed together. Ate together. A supplemental reading list and a special section in the church library called out to me, too. I couldn't read enough. I checked books out then bought them for myself because I wanted to highlight and underline.*

*I read the Gospels with fresh eyes and a thirsty spirit. What does it really mean to be a disciple? To follow Christ? To do the humbling, risky, life changing work of the church?*

*In our carefully planned classes, with dynamic instructors such as Dr. Paul Capetz, we learned about Knox and Calvin, and about the gift of grace. We learned what it means to be part of a church that is "reformed and always reforming." I began to understand why of all the churches in the world the very first church where I felt at home was Presbyterian.*

*Polity, church history, the Book of Order, the Book of Confessions. The class leaders found a way to make it all interesting and relevant to our calling. The simple truth is I wouldn't have wanted to be an elder without this preparation. I am a better officer for it.*

*More than that, I am a better person of faith. I know myself better. I know my church better, I know my relationship with God better.*

*My passion for learning, my thirst for knowledge have led me to work on Westminster's Adult Education program. It is my hope that in helping shape the classes available for Westminster members I can share some of the 'living water' I found both in intellectual study and in the spiritual growth I experienced in officer training. It is a time for which I will be forever grateful.*

**Elder Trish Van Pilsum** served on Session for six years and chaired the Adult Education Council.

## **INTRODUCTION**

When Presbyterian Church officers are asked how much training/preparation they received prior to assuming leadership, their answers vary from none at all to a few hours to a few weeks. One pastor said he provides OJT – on the job training.

This book is the story of one congregation, Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis, MN, and its journey in preparing members for office as elders, deacons, and trustees. It is not a researched story, but a lived one. It is not an analysis of various training practices, but a reflection on experience and meaning. While the congregation in this story is a large one with considerable resources, the principles and outcomes of the journey reflect universal resources of intention, commitment, good planning, and the power of God.

This is a story about change. As this congregation took seriously its obligation to equip and prepare its lay leaders, the church experienced a season of renewal, vitality, and growth in spiritual leadership of the laity. Individuals experienced transformed lives and deepened faith, and the congregation fulfilled the Presbyterian model of partnership in lay and clergy leadership. Community and trust grew among church officers and produced strength in leadership and ministry.

You are invited to enter into the story with your own congregation in mind, to employ whatever ideas work for your setting, and to be an agent of change and renewal in the church for the sake of God's reign on earth.

## **HOW IT ALL BEGAN**

Jacqui is a Ph.D. professor of history at a local college, and chair of her department. She is brilliant, articulate, experienced, and capable. She had all the makings of a strong leader. But when she was elected to serve on Westminster's Session, she looked like the proverbial 'deer in headlights' for the first year. When she admitted to feelings of inadequacy, we knew something was amiss.

Officer training at Westminster consisted of four to six hours of orientation. The senior pastor and one associate led this time, giving information on the structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), particular ministries in the congregation, a few comments on Presbyterian ethos, the basic structure of worship, and about 20 minutes on Reformed history and theology. The time was packed and rushed and totally inadequate. No wonder the new elders' eyes were glazed over for months.

In 2002, the Session named a task force to study and recommend the most effective size for the board and to explore and articulate the function of the Session beyond the directives in the Book of Order.

The task force considered suggestions and ideas from various groups of leaders, including the clergy. One suggestion was the establishment a new program for officer training. Four to six hours of orientation and instruction was simply not enough to give new officers what they needed. A recommendation of required, extended training for Elders was included in the report to the Session, and it was adopted.

(The report of the task force on the function of the Session reinforced the importance of spiritual leadership as part of the calling of church officers. More about that later.)

The Board of Deacons voted to require this training for their members as well, and a planning team was appointed to begin forming a curriculum. Jacqui was an important member of that team.

The outcome of this planning is *Called to Discipleship*, an extensive, in depth training program for church officers designed to engage the whole person and deepen a sense of commitment to the extraordinary call to service in the church.

A critical schedule change shifted the election of officers from February to November. The Congregational Nominating Committee (CNC) now begins its work in the spring and presents a slate of Elders, Deacons, Trustees, and at-large members of the CNC to the congregation the second Sunday in November. Training begins the day of election and continues through April, with three weeks off for Christmas and Easter. Officers are ordained and/or installed and begin their service in May.

Trustees and at-large members of the CNC are currently not required, but are strongly encouraged to go through the training, and many of them do. This allows both groups to have a broad view of the ministry of the church. Members of the CNC can speak first-hand about the preparation process when they contact those recommended for office.

Lots of questions surfaced when the program began, particularly around time commitment, but over time, the reputation of the training grew and some people joke that they said yes to nomination just so they could take the training!

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **1. Questions of Ordination as Organizing Principle**

The Questions of Ordination (W-4.4003) form the hinge of the program with the premise that officers should be able to answer these questions authentically when they are ordained/installed. Each question is addressed in the curriculum. Corresponding Journal Sheets include the ordination questions addressed in the lesson topic, and a Bible verse and hymn for personal reflection.

## 2. Instilling a Sense of Call

*As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea – for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him.*

Mark 1:16-19

**All of God’s people are called to discipleship.** Jesus’ invitation to Simon, Andrew, James, John, and to his other disciples, is the same invitation he extends to us today. “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

Jesus came proclaiming the advent of God’s reign on earth and calling us to live according to that reign as Jesus’ disciples. Jesus calls us to love God with all our heart, mind, and soul, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. (Matthew 22:37-39) Paul calls us to “live lives worthy of our calling” (Ephesians 4:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12) in how we treat others, how we relate to the world around us, how we honor God in all things.

John Dominic Crossan says Jesus preached a “moral eschatology,” that places a responsibility on Jesus’ disciples to live in such a way that love is known and justice is afforded to all people. (*Jesus to Christ* Frontline DVD)

Being a disciple of Jesus is serious business. It is not a part time or weekend affair. Discipleship defines the whole of our lives, our identity, our purpose, our hope, our world view.

**God’s people are called to service.** When we respond to Jesus’ call, the orientation of our lives shifts from self-centered to other-centered living. The first Other, of course, is God. We are creatures of the Divine Creator, called to live in relationship with God and in obedience to God’s will. The second ‘other’ encompasses all of God’s creation, human and non-human alike. The call to love means that we join in God’s care for creation and preference for the poor. It also means that all of our relationships are brought into the sphere of God’s claim. To love others as we love ourselves means working for justice, doing kindness, and walking humbly with God. (Micah 6:8) It means that we treat those close to us and those far away with generosity and compassion. It means that we work to make the world a better place for all people.

**God’s people are called to vocation.** God equips each of us with gifts of the Spirit so that we can serve God and serve God’s people. We are each called to particular service using those gifts. This call may change form or color over time, but to understand our lives as vocation is a part of being disciples of Jesus.

Instilling a sense of call, from God and from the congregation, is an essential part of preparing church officers. First, we are called to discipleship – to follow and serve Jesus Christ. That call begins with baptism, and is reiterated and developed over a lifetime. Each Christian is called by God to service, and some are called to leadership. Differentiating this call from election to the city council or the School Board is critical. Officers of the church do not ‘sign up’ for some committee work or simply volunteer. The call of God is both internal and external – and it is life-changing.



This is a new concept for many church officers. They are given a new name, (Genesis 32:22-28), a new identity which empowers them to lead and to act in particular ways. Understanding this idea of ‘call’ deepens a sense of responsibility and intensifies commitment in transforming ways.

*I was serving FEAST (Westminster’s monthly meal for the homeless) a few years ago when I heard that someone wanted to meet with a male “leader” of the church. It was about 6:30pm on a Sunday and there were no ministers around, so as a former Session member and then current trustee-in-training I offered to go and see what they wanted. In the chapel I found an elderly woman and her daughter and son-in-law. They had just come from the hospital where her husband of many years had been taken after having suffered a massive stroke. The family had decided to take him off life support and the woman was looking for someone to talk to. She and her husband had been married at Westminster in 1960 and been very active at the church for many years before moving to a church closer to their home. She wanted to talk about her husband and whether or not she had made the right decision to take him off life support.*

*I clearly did not have the professional or pastoral experience to offer guidance on these matters, but I thought about my ordination and my officer training class. I thought of how we are all called to be the church, and when we kneel at ordination and have others lay hands on us, we are called in turn to lay our hands on those who need Christ’s love and compassion.*

*As we sat in the chapel where they were married, the woman talked about her life with her husband and what the church meant to her. She was sure her husband would not want to be in a vegetative state. I asked her what she would want him to do if the roles were reversed, and she said the same thing that she was doing. I told her that just because it is the right decision does not mean that it is the easy decision.*

*In truth, she did not need convincing that what she was doing was right. All she needed was someone “official” at the church to talk to. As we all held hands, I prayed about how confusing the ways of the Lord can be and how sometimes when we are left with pain and sorrow all we can rely on is trust in the goodness of God. I asked for love and support for the woman and her family, and thanked God for the knowledge that an eternity together will follow the brief separation. She left seeming to feel better about what she had to do.*

*I share this story as reminder to officer training students that we are all called to be the church. Sometimes we are called to be leaders that set a bold new course for the church and sometimes we are called to be a quiet voice of comfort and a shoulder to cry on.*

**Elder Brent Hall** served on the Session for six years, and currently serves on the Board of Trustees.

**Church officers are called to spiritual leadership.** While this principle is inherent in the function of Elders as designated by the Book of Order (G-6.0304a), *Called to Discipleship* takes the position that Deacons and Trustees are also entrusted with the

spiritual well-being of a congregation. A Westminster Trustee had one of those ‘aha’ revelations during Communion one Sunday. As the bread and juice were described in the liturgy as being set aside “from a common to a sacred use,” the lights came on, and he realized that’s exactly what being a Trustee is all about – caring for the common, ordinary money and property of the church as sacred stuff which keeps the reign of God in one particular place viable. Deacons come to understand that they are the hands and feet of Jesus in their ministries of compassion and mercy.

## CONTENT

Being a Spiritual Leader, of course, requires a certain amount of particular *knowledge*. This is one of the goals of the training program along with *commitment*, *discernment*, and *community*. The training schedule included in this booklet gives an overview of how the content is organized with the following topics:

- Bible - Grounding in the biblical tradition (Acts 8:26-35) in a way that speaks to officers’ call and impending leadership.
- Polity and Structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- Parliamentary Procedure, and Guidelines on How to Run a Meeting
- Mission of the Church (G-3.0000 – G-3.0401)
- History and Theology of the Reformed Tradition (G-2.0000 – G-2.0500)
- Self- and Other-Awareness through a brief Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory
- Spiritual Gifts
- Spiritual Practices
- Reformed Worship

*Called to Discipleship* uses a tool called *LifeKeys - Discover Who You Are*, to look at life gifts and preferences. The exercises highlight the variety of interests and abilities that make up church boards. A deeper appreciation of one’s own gifts and interests as well as the gifts and interests of others increases mutual appreciation and cooperation as people work together. As we honor the uniqueness of each officer’s individual call, gifts, and abilities, burnout is eliminated or reduced. Loving what we do and doing what we love is part of the discernment process in serving the church.

*Westminster is blessed to have an officer training program – what a gift it is! It provides a rich opportunity to learn about our faith tradition, our God-given gifts and our place within the church - and within our church in particular. Participating in this program provided me with the context and the words for things I knew in my heart about myself, my faith and about our tradition but struggled to articulate. At one of our first sessions, we learned about Ezekiel and the valley of dry bones. What I took from that story was that we know things in our bones. So many things I believed as a child and now believe as an adult I know in my bones – or in my heart – to be right and true. Elaine Pagels, Professor of Religion at Princeton University, describes our being created in the image of God as having a bit of God within each of us. To me, this knowing is recognizing that bit of God within me. Taking part in*

*officer training helped me move beyond simply recognizing that knowing to discerning God's call in my life. It helped me to find my voice.*

*My call revolves around children, youth and families. I hope to encourage parents to be intentional in loving, caring for and teaching their children, all the while nurturing their children's feelings of belonging and of significance. This hope is born of the promise we all make when a child is baptized at Westminster, to "love, encourage, and support them" – in other words, to recognize that bit of God within them and to honor it. In Officer Training we learned that through baptism, we make a covenant, a solemn promise, to the children of God who are placed in our care. It is a promise God calls us to honor, each in our own way. I know this in my bones - and in my heart!*

**Elder Marie Kruskop** served on Session for six years and chaired the Children, Youth, and Families Council.

Through study and worship, new officers are drawn into a process of spiritual formation and growth in faith. Lives are transformed, and relationships are deepened through common experience.

This training program for church officers in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) begins by affirming each Christian's call to discipleship by Jesus Christ. It emphasizes that each Christian is called to service. It maintains that service is a vocation of one's whole life. For church officers in particular, God extends the call to leadership that is not only practical, but also spiritual. This training program provides preparation through instruction for Knowledge, through expecting Commitment of time and attention, through encouraging Discernment of one's gifts and abilities.

## OUTCOMES

Since the expansion of officer training, Westminster has seen a flowering of leadership in the congregation as church officers take seriously their roles and responsibilities with confidence and awareness. They are prepared to take an active role in the ministry of the church in their first year of service. The enthusiasm they bring from their training experience provides a fresh excitement for the whole board on which they serve. They are ready to think creatively and act decisively rather than sit passively and try to figure out what's going on through 'on the job training.'

Being together for 16-18 weeks over the course of a program year, studying, learning, and worshipping together, builds Community. New officers come to know and care for one another and share a common bond. When they begin their board service, they no longer feel like strangers. They have friends and familiar faces around the table, and they know they have been given the tools to make a contribution right away. They have a broad vision of the mission of the church which includes their own particular area of service.

*Officer training was for me a journey of self-discovery and transformation. The journey began with my election to the office of Deacon, which signaled to me that the congregation recognized and affirmed my ability to be a leader at Westminster. The officer training curriculum grounded me in ways I hadn't been before – my faith was always somewhat passive. In discussing the various call stories in the Bible, I realized that God has a habit of making counter-intuitive choices when looking for leaders of faith communities. If a poor public speaker could be called to confront a world leader, or a persecutor of Christians could be called to become one of their most prominent leaders, then surely someone who had struggled as much as I had in the past had something to offer Westminster! I resigned from active service a year and a half after my ordination to take a staff position at Westminster and I am currently working to discern a call to service as a Minister of Word and Sacrament. Without officer training, my eyes and ears would not have been open to God's call to deeper service in the church and I would not have had the confidence to respond.*

**Deacon Dan Franklin** served on the Board of Deacons for one and a half years and gave leadership to the Usher Corps and Hunger Ministry.

The Book of Order provides for a Board of Deacons to be under the jurisdiction of the Session. (G-6.0404) This has been a sore point for many Deacons. 'Second class citizens' is a term they frequently use to describe their relationship to the Session. As a result of training together, learning about the function of each office and the importance of the variety of gifts and ministries in the church (G-6.0106), the sense of hierarchy between the boards evaporates. Elders, Deacons, and Trustees are called by God and by the congregation. Each board has a particular responsibility for the mission and ministry of the church. When people have learned, laughed, grown, worshiped, and eaten together over the course of several months, a sense of greater or lesser importance is eliminated. Officers who are well trained understand that they are called to certain roles, and that each role is essential in the Body of Christ. Working together in partnership is more fun and more effective than working against one another in hierarchy.

Furthermore, the ministers of Westminster have experienced amazing evidence of leaders taking their place to lead, rather than always looking to or deferring to the ordained pastors. The elders, deacons, and trustees and ministers are truly partners in ministry, to the glory of God and to the benefit of The Reign of God.

## **YOUTH LEADERS**

Each year Westminster elects two deacons and two elders of high school age to serve one-year terms. These young people are required to complete the officer training program. The knowledge and leadership skills they acquire prepare them for service as church officers, and hopefully prepare them for leadership in the world beyond the church. See the Appendix for more details.

## **MENTORS**

Each new first-term officer is assigned a mentor who is serving on the board to which they are elected. The mentor provides encouragement and support through informal meetings, phone calls, emails, and prayer. When the new officer attends a board meeting during the training time, the mentor serves as host, introducing the person to serving officers and answering questions that arise.

## **EXAMINATION**

New officers are provided with an extensive examination paper early in the training program. They are encouraged to make notes on this paper in preparation for their examination by Session prior to ordination/installation. High anxiety often accompanies the prospect of *examination*, but having lots of time to think about the questions – which are reflections rather than giving the ‘right’ answers – lowers that anxiety and helps officers to integrate what they are learning. Time is given prior to the examination for officers to complete the exam paper, and copies are given to the examining elders on Session to use in the exam conversation.

## **PHASE II for SECOND TERM OFFICERS**

Officers who have completed Phase I of the training, *Called to Discipleship*, served three years on a board, and then are elected to serve a second three-year term, are provided a specially designed training period to complement their initial preparation for office. They are ready for deepening their spiritual leadership, growing in faith, and providing peer leadership for the first-time officers.

Phase II is called *Nurturing Spiritual Leaders*. These officers are required to attend the initial orientation to get acquainted with the new officers. They attend the Bible study sessions which focus on different texts than they studied before. They read a book together over six weeks to foster a more in-depth conversation around spiritual leadership. They provide small group leadership in the areas of spiritual gifts and spiritual practices at an overnight retreat near the end of the training program. At this retreat, Phase II officers participate in workshops on Public Prayer and Speaking Our Faith to equip them for greater comfort in public spiritual leadership. They consider the leadership of Jesus as a model for their own service. Throughout the year, they attend adult education classes to continue to grow in knowledge and faith.

The Examination for Phase II officers is a written paragraph reflecting on what has been learned or an area of growth during the year of preparation for a second term of office. Like the new officers, these Phase II officers are examined by the Session.

### ON-GOING NURTURE or PHASE III

As officers complete their terms of service on Session or the Board of Deacons or Trustees, their call from God is not terminated, it is simply changed (G-14.0210). Providing opportunity for church officers to think about their new season of discipleship after they go off a board brings health and life to the individuals and flourishing ministry in the church.

The College of Elders is a common term for those ordained but not currently serving on the Session. Because this training program focuses on all officers of the church, Westminster uses the term Community of Leaders. Twice a year this Community gathers around a meal to receive an update on the current ministries of the congregation, to ask questions, and to share ideas. They are given detailed information about specific projects, and made aware of current opportunities for service in the church. This component of nurture for church leaders provides opportunities for community and fellowship and honors the service these officers have given at Westminster or elsewhere. As a result, they are more fully engaged in the life of the church and provide excellent feedback for the clergy on the health and life of the congregation. Their particular board service may come to an end, but their role as leaders continues.

### CONCLUSION

The Church has responsibility to prepare elected officers for service. Education equips them to respond to Ordination Questions with authenticity and awareness and benefits their service, their own spiritual growth, and the quality of their leadership in the congregation. Knowledge, Commitment, Discernment, and Community within the lay leadership of the congregation promote renewal, health, and vitality, not only for the congregation, but also the work of God's Reign.

Just as the church is 'reformed and always reforming,' Westminster's Officer Training Program continues to evolve as each class offers suggestions and new needs call forth new ideas. In your own ministry of preparation, whether in a congregation or with several congregations in your Presbytery, start with what will work at the moment, and allow your officer training to unfold in the ever evolving work of God, to whom be glory in the church forever.