

Ten Ways

TO DISCERN A CALL TO ORDAINED PASTORAL MINISTRY



As Reformed Christians, we recognize that every vocation can be a calling from God, a service in his kingdom. Yet the calling to ordained pastoral ministry is as old as the church, and it continues to be a significant form of service. How do you know if this calling is for you?

If you are feeling a pull to explore ordained pastoral ministry, these ten steps will help you discern whether that is the path God is calling you to take.

1. PRAY

If you believe you are sensing a call from God to enter ordained pastoral ministry, one of the best steps is to begin mentioning this sense in your prayer life. Ask God to examine the motives of your heart. Are you feeling any pressure to become a pastor, or feeling a need to impress God, yourself or others? Or is your desire rooted in a humble, obedient response to a sense that God is calling you?

2. READ SCRIPTURE, INDIVIDUALLY AND IN COMMUNITY

Spend time reviewing Bible stories that tell about the “calling sense” of various persons in Scripture (passages like Isa. 6:1-8; Jer. 1:4-10; 20:9; Ex. 3:1-14; 4:10-12; Acts 4:18-20; 9:1-16; 1 Cor. 9:16). As you read, seek to sense whether the Spirit of God has a word for you. Take notes that you can use to discuss this sense with others.

3. TALK WITH TRUSTED PEOPLE WHO KNOW YOU WELL

The gifts for pastoral ministry are never felt only within ourselves. They will be evident, in some form, to others. Ask several trusted friends, family members or ministry leaders if they see gifts in you that are useful in ordained pastoral ministry. Listen, respond with questions, and share your thought processes together. To help you process, view a list of “Characteristics of an Effective Pastor” in the Discerning a Call section of the Candidacy Committee’s website (crcna.org/candidacy).

4. ASK PASTORS ABOUT THEIR CALLING AND OBSERVE THEIR WORK

Serving the Lord and the church in an ordained pastoral role involves much more than preaching and leading worship on Sunday. Consider finding a pastor who is willing to let you “shadow” him or her for a purposeful period of time. This may give you a more informed idea of the expectations and responsibilities of ordained pastoral ministry. If you need help in finding a pastor in your region who would consider this form of service, you may contact the CRC’s director of candidacy at candidacy@crcna.org.

5. VOLUNTEER IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CHURCH

Purposefully get experience in varied aspects of church ministry. Teach a class to children; visit the elderly; be part of the “welcome ministry” of your church; organize an outreach project for your church and community; assist the high school or middle school ministry. Make a checklist of the

various aspects of church life, and get experience in as many of those aspects as possible. Then assess whether this engagement has whetted an appetite for more or if it has instead helped you conclude that pastoral ministry is not for you.

6. READ

Persons called to ordained pastoral ministry must possess or develop a love for learning and for reading. A love for learning makes pastoral ministry a joy; its absence makes for misery. Take time to read some of the great books that have blessed others. They may bless you in your discernment process. If you find them uninspiring or distasteful, it may be that the pastoral calling is not for you. A suggested reading list can be found in the Discerning a Call section of the Candidacy Committee's website (crcna.org/candidacy).

7. TAKE A CLASS

Local seminaries and Bible colleges offer various courses in ministry, theology, and biblical studies. Calvin Theological Seminary has various diploma and certificate programs available online that can help a person discern aptitude and interest in ministry (admissions@calvinseminary.edu). Investing time and a modest amount of money to enroll in a course or two may help discern whether a more extensive educational journey is wise.

8. MAKE A MINISTRY COMMITMENT

Sometimes it helps to engage in a full-time ministry project, if only for a few weeks or a year. Local churches may be willing to take on a volunteer intern, and mission agencies such as Resonate Global Mission offer a variety of short-term and mid-term opportunities.

9. ENROLL IN SEMINARY AND SEE HOW GOD PROVIDES

Many people find that taking the plunge of enrolling in a seminary program becomes a definitive discernment tool. It ought not be the first step of discernment, but it is surely a step that those in ordained ministry will testify to as helpful. The master of divinity degree is the program identified by the CRCNA as appropriate preparation for ordained pastoral ministry as a minister of the Word. Calvin Theological Seminary (and other seminaries) offers such a degree program through residential study and also through a distance-learning format.

10. DISCERN YOUR PASSIONS AND MINISTRY JOYS WITHIN COMMUNITY

Do what you can to discover the particular area of ministry to which you might be called. Seek the guidance of a mentor or spiritual director who can help you ask the right questions. Consider applying for a paid ministry position on a team serving in an area that fits your gifts and interests. If you are hired, that may be further confirmation of a call to ministry. To learn more about the gifts God has given you and how you might use them in ministry, contact Thrive for help in setting up a [vocational ministry assessment](#).

This resource has been developed by the CRC's Candidacy Committee in partnership with Thrive. If you have questions or would like support in ministry, please email thrive@crcna.org.

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