



## Calling and Ordination Revisited

The issues surrounding ordination were treated in this journal in 1993 and in 1999 we took a look at the call to religious service. Time passes; new women ministers join the ranks and new readers come to swell our numbers. So we take another look at some of the issues. If our old readers detect something familiar in this material, forgive us. The central meanings have not changed; only individual experiences.

What is ordination and what does it mean? Why become ordained? What is a religious call? Both experiences carry great weight for people of faith. To look at the specific calling to religious service as vocation in no way negates the calling to faith demanded of all believers, clergy and laity alike. Nor does an exploration of ordination imply a lesser call by those not ordained for whatever reason.

The emphasis in this issue coincides with a heightened interest in career ministry, particularly evidenced in the Samuel Project now under way at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. The Samuel Project is a concerted effort by religious leaders and seminary to call out the called and replenish the ranks of ministers as persons retire, die or change careers.

VBWIM is cooperating with that project through a conference for college women considering a career in ministry and further study in seminary. The conference is planned for February 13–14, 2004, to be held at the Omni Hotel in Charlottesville. Information about the conference, how to register, how to recommend persons, conference topics and schedule will be available soon. Read *Ex Cathedra* on the next page for a description.

In the meantime, we hope the information on calling and ordination in this issue will be helpful to all who feel that what they do is in response to God's call to service. §

## Baptist Women in Ministry to Celebrate

Baptist Women in Ministry, based in Kansas City, will celebrate its 20th anniversary at its annual meeting in Charlotte, N.C., on June 25–26, 2003. The meeting, held prior to the annual Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, will include a banquet and celebration on Wednesday evening and business session and worship the following day.

Theme for the celebration and worship is "We Have These Treasures" and will feature an historical video and a concert by musician storyteller Kate Campbell. Dr. Amy Means, hospital chaplain in Augusta, Georgia, will speak on the theme. Both events will celebrate the gifts women bring to Christian ministry.

Karen Massey, president of the organization, said, "We will be honoring and reminiscing about the impact BWIM has had on helping women to live out their calling.... Our twentieth birthday will be a time of showing gratitude for the past and a time of making changes for the future." §

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## Woman Minister Honored

**Dr. B.J. Seymour** recently retired after 32 years as professor of religious studies and director of the department at Randolph Macon College in Ashland. She has received the S. Thomas Branch award for excellence in teaching awarded by students, the Samuel Nelson Gray award for distinguished teaching by the faculty, and an award by United Methodist Board of Higher Education for exemplary teaching in a UMC school.

She also achieved a number of "firsts." She was the first full-time woman on the faculty, first female administrator (assistant dean of students), first female chair of a department, and the first female to receive tenure.

An advocate for women in ministry, B.J. Seymour was one of the founding members of Virginia Baptist Women in Ministry in 1988 and helped in guiding its growth as a board member.

She is a graduate of Furman University, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and received a Master's in English from the University of Richmond and her doctorate from Duke University. Before going to Randolph Macon, she was Baptist student director at Woman's College (now UNC Greensboro), director of religious activities and taught in the religion department at Coker College and at Westhampton College.

She is a long-time member of River Road Church, Richmond, and has held many leadership positions as deacon, committee member and chair, guest preacher, choir member and soloist. She is currently a member of the pastor search committee. §

# IN MY OPINION

## Ex Cathedra

by Judith B. Bailey

I have always had a tremendous respect for the reality of "calling." I believe it is an intensely personal awareness of God that is powerful enough to sustain us even in the most difficult circumstances. When it comes to calling, we can affirm or question, but we can never assume the power to validate or negate another's experience. That is truly between the individual and God.

I shall never forget a former student at the University of Richmond who graduated in 1991. She was an outstanding student and campus leader. She was a dedicated Christian who knew that God was calling her into ministry, but she said she could not go through the "gauntlet of rejection" she would face as a woman in ministry. I was deeply disappointed and angered that the church of Christ would be denied her gifts, her spirit and her leadership. But, even though I encouraged her and talked with her often, she left college for graduate school and became a teacher. Nine years passed. I saw her again in 2000 at the CBF meeting in Orlando and learned that she had enrolled in the Divinity School at Wake Forest. When I asked her about her journey, she said, "The call just wouldn't go away."

Not only is it difficult to resist the call of God, the assurance of calling sustains us in times of difficulty. Women throughout history have demonstrated incredible courage, determination, effectiveness and faithfulness when convinced that God called them. One woman, Nancy Towle (1796-1876) was an itinerant preacher for ten years during the revivals of the early nineteenth century. At the time of writing her journal she noted her hardships: "left alone, destitute, no house, no home, no friend that dares to advocate their cause. . . ." In spite of all the difficulties she affirmed her relationship with God: "My conversion has been to me as much a reality as my existence, and my call to public testimony equally as sure. So that I can now say, in the review of my past life, that after all the storms and tempests I have had to encounter and for which I have nothing to show as a

recompense, it has never once entered my heart to repent of the undertaking to sound salvation; neither has the idea ever been indulged of leaving work but from the clearest conviction of duty."

Being able to live out one's calling gives strength and joy to life, as we are able to express who we are through the gifts we have been given. Discerning one's call is a very important undertaking, best considered in a community of support and understanding.

Since the college years are so significant in terms of vocational and relationship choices, Virginia Baptist Women in Ministry, through a grant from The Samuel Project, will sponsor a conference for women in college. On February 13-14, 2004, at the Omni Hotel in Charlottesville, Virginia, we will bring together college women "considering a call to ministry for discussion of the meaning of call, conversation on ministerial identity and roles, and fellowship with others who are pondering the same questions." The leaders for the conference will be women currently engaged in various ministerial roles. The conference will begin with dinner at 6:30 on Friday, February 13, and conclude with lunch on February 14, 2004.

Through an application/nomination process women will be invited to attend the conference with all expenses paid except for travel. Nomination forms will be available by the end of June on our website and will be distributed through other means as well. ([www.baptistwomeninministry.org](http://www.baptistwomeninministry.org))

I am very excited about this conference and the opportunity to discuss the meaning of call, to study the scripture passages that pose problems for women, to hear the stories of other women, to learn about the strategies and options for pursuing one's calling and to worship together. I invite each of you to think of the college women you know who might find this conference helpful, let them know about it and nominate them. §

*The Rev. Judith B. Bailey is co-pastor of Taylorsville Church, and chair of VBWIM*

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## A Meditation on Ordination: “Learning to Walk”

by Nancy Rock Poti

When a child is about one year old, everyone is asking the parents, “Is she walking yet?”

It’s a developmental milestone anxiously awaited and then usually, somewhat laughingly, as the toddler is into everything, wished away by the now exhausted Mom or Dad! Learning to walk is a precious time. First steps are usually made only after lots of handholding and encouragement. Along the way there are bumps and bruises, stumbles and falls. Tears are met with loving embraces — and sometimes Band-Aids. But little ones are helped up or climb up on their own time and time again.

*Learning to walk.* We take it for granted. We even invent other ways to walk. A couple of decades ago people added the “moon walk” to our repertoire. Frankly, I’ve never figured out how they do it! We power-walk, and mall walk, and walk a fine line. If it is easy, it’s “a walk in the park.” We walk off, walk out, walk through. Lucky for us nobody has had to “walk the plank” for a while. Why we have even invented the *Walkman* to keep us company as we walk, so that we can listen to our favorite tunes—although I doubt those include “The Baby Elephant Walk” or “Walk Like an Egyptian” anymore.

*Learning to walk.* I often find it quite amusing how the answers to my questions sneak up on me at the least expected moments. I consistently find little sermons in the ordinary tasks of the day. While learning a vocabulary list of New Testament Greek verbs, I read right past the principal parts, past the definition and stopped with a start when I read that the verb which is transliterated *peripateo*, and meaning “I walk,” is used metaphorically for “I live.” It was right there, literally, in black and white. At nearly every previous word my mind had been wandering to the question that I’m certain countless seminary students before me had asked themselves, “What am I doing here?” Don’t misunderstand. I was sure of my calling. But on this particular morning I was struggling more than usual with a disease called lupus and the effects of my medication. My deteriorating left hip throbbed from climbing up and down the stairs in Virginia Hall carrying a briefcase full of books and papers. Yet, as I looked at that little parenthetical statement I could only laugh out loud, startling my beloved professor, Dr. Sandra Hack Polaski, who was kind enough to continue pronouncing the list with my classmates, leaving me behind in my revelation. “That’s it,” I thought to myself. “I’m learning to walk.”

It was then that I saw my own struggles with walking as a metaphor for life. Colossians 2:6-7 reminds us, “*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*”

Charles Poole says in *Is Life Fair? Good Works For Hard Times*, “...even when the load is so great that we find ourselves heartbroken by the unbearable weight of an enormous problem, even then, by the grace and goodness and power of God, we live. We actually live to laugh again. We live through things that, if someone had told us we were going to have to live through, we would have sworn we could not have done it. But we do live

through those broken places, and by the grace and goodness and power of God, we actually emerge from them better, kinder, wiser, and stronger. By the grace and goodness and power of God, we limp across the rugged terrain of our complex lives, until limping becomes its own dancing, because God is at work to make us strong, even (especially!) in broken places.”\*

And so, we learn to walk, learn to live. We look to the walk of our Lord and Savior Jesus, whose terrain was rocky, was rough, was rugged. We see him walk into the wilderness of temptation and walk out again. We see and hear him call, “Walk with me,” to people just like you and me. We see him walk among those whom no one else would dare walk, and ask ourselves, “Could we walk there?” We see him walk to his disciples and stop before them. He takes off his robe and ties it around him and stoops and, taking a basin and a towel, he washes their feet. Ironically, it is when he is stooped the lowest that his leadership is the highest. And on that same night, after he breaks and blesses and gives the bread and pours the wine for them, he still must make the long walk up a hill bearing a cross.

*Learning to walk.* God will be working constantly to make the path straight, to give strength in the broken places. God will be holding our hands. God will be encouraging us if we but listen. If and when we fall, God will be embracing us until we are ready to try again. We are never walking alone, for God is with us as we minister with one another, each of us called to risk everything for God, *to walk by faith* and learn what Jesus knew: by risking all, *we live*.

As I went through the ordination process, and on the evening of my ordination service, I particularly remembered that lesson I learned in my New Testament Greek class. My pastor, my church family, my family of origin, my friends, my professors, and my colleagues, laid hands on me and let me know that they are ready to help me take the next step in my ministry and calling. With Jesus as my model, I became a servant of the servants of God. For that is

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truly what ordination means. It is to be set apart, but not set above. It is to be called to leadership by God and the church to use my gifts as I minister with my parishioners as a priesthood of believers.

As I continue walking on this path of ministry, I, like a child, will stumble and fall, laugh and cry, misstep and dance. My faith community is called to hold my hand, to help me up when I fall, to direct my steps, to dance with me, even as they pray with me and for me, and as they serve alongside me.

We learn to walk. We learn to live. Together. §

*Nancy Rock Poti is a student at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond and resides in Midlothian.*

\*Poole, Charles E. *Is Life Fair? Good Works for Hard Times*. Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys, 1996, 1999, p. 10.

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# The Dynamics of the Call

By Henry D. Holland, M.D.

Over the last twenty-nine years I have been a psychiatric consultant for the International Mission Board (formerly Foreign Mission Board) of the Southern Baptist Convention. During this time I have asked countless missionary candidates “Why do you want to be a missionary?”

This question essentially provokes a response in which the individual will describe his or her call to missionary service. Frequently the call may originally simply have been to full-time Christian service.

Most calls to religious service are psychologically and spiritually healthy. Others are psychologically flawed or less healthy. I will attempt to explain the dynamics of a religious call in psychological, emotional, and spiritual ways.

## Psychological Dimensions

The psychological aspects of a call may involve issues of guilt, low self-esteem, compulsive strivings, and even delusional thinking, which is rarely psychologically healthy. Many will trace their religious call back to an adolescent or college age period of time. During this vulnerable time many teenagers and young adults may feel some guilt over real or perceived sins. Often the sins may provoke a teenager or young person to try to find some way to compulsively “undo” a real sin or to make amends for a cognitive sin. For some a real sin might be related to being sexually active, having premarital sexual relations, indulging in masturbation and looking at pornographic material. Some who are troubled by lingering thoughts or a guilty conscience might construe sexual or lustful thoughts and fantasies as cognitive sins.

For many who grow up in a Christian church or a family with Christian values, one possible way of “undoing” the sin, sins, or guilty feelings would be to devote one’s life in serving God. St. Francis of Assisi felt guilty when he saw lepers and a run-down church and he compared the plight of the poor to his own relative comfort. Jesus based the “final judgment” on what we have done for the least among us. Thus, committing one’s life to the service of God can be a type of repentance and absolution. This potential for guilt may be enough to motivate a conscientious Christian to experience the call.

There is a small group of people who actually experience or perceive a call from God as part of a psychotic mental illness. They may be plagued by auditory hallucinations that are interpreted as the voice of God, Jesus or possibly the Virgin Mary. In less frequent cases these people may report that they have seen a vision or visual hallucination of Jesus, Paul, or the Virgin Mary. Some of the alleged events are often reported in the media. These psychotic people may also have delusional thoughts and believe that they are Jesus or some other well-known Biblical person. Such types of identities are forms of grandiose delusional thinking. Most of these people are recognized as being mentally ill and are treated with some success.

Often in the Bible the people of God were influenced by dreams. To this day some people have been convinced of a call from God by means of a dream or dreams. Dreams are considered to be a

window into the unconscious mind and their interpretations are often symbolic. Thus, who can say for sure that a dream may not be a source of spiritual influence?

In a more psychologically healthy manner, a religious call may result from sublimating certain drives, conflicts, angry feelings, fantasies, and impulses into more goal-directed behavior such as serving God.

## Emotional Dimensions

The call may also originate from and for emotional reasons. Peer pressure in some Christian youth groups or evangelical camps can evoke considerable pressure for young people to make a commitment to God in order to feel good about themselves and even somewhat better than their peers. Who would question a call from God? I remember in my own youth that considerable pressure could be placed on vulnerable minds in evangelical settings, often using an evangelical style similar to Billy Graham’s crusades. When some would start forward, the desire to be included can contribute to a young person’s decision making. If one is experiencing low self-esteem for whatever reason, being accepted among the called can actually bolster self-esteem, at least initially or temporarily. What percentage of these emotion-based calls survive? I do not know of any valid data on this subject other than to state that the majority of people would return to their usual religious behavior and thinking after the evangelist left town.

Other emotional pressures for devoting one’s life to God may originate from family pressure or expectations. This is probably more frequent in the Roman Catholic Church. However, occasionally a parent may select one of his/her children to be God’s child. This early identification with serving God may actually become a part of that child’s identity as he or she grows up.

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## Spiritual dimensions.

The third and hopefully most genuine and valid call would be based on spiritual influences. Abraham’s obedience to the call by God and Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus are two of the most familiar “calls” in the Bible.

In my experience most Christians experience a call to vocational Christian service as the result of a process over time and a lesser number experience their call as a one-time spiritual event. There are actual occasions of one-time spiritual calls with these calls or conversions having a lasting effect and the individual called does make a healthy lifestyle change.

Occasionally among today’s younger missionary candidates are folks who have been involved in alcohol, tobacco and substance abuse, have been sexually active or have indulged in self erotic behavior, had homosexual thoughts or even had abortions, but all of this “sin” occurred before their conversion and call. Most of these

*(continued next page)*



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folks do make a genuine change in their lifestyles and lead a more God-centered life.

It is sometimes almost miraculous how some who are called have grown up through the developmental stages in what seems to be the unhealthiest of home or family environments and yet they “turn out” with good value systems and compassion for other people. Often they will credit their youth group, a Christian friend, or a grandparent as being the guiding light during their childhood and youth.

The more common call and probably most understandable is the call that evolves as a process with no particular one-time event. Among Baptist groups, many will recall the influence of GAs, RAs, Acteens, youth leaders, particular ministers or contacts with active or retired missionaries. Some will have gone on voluntary mission trips during adolescence, summers while in college or even as adults. The experience of college and perhaps some religious studies may enhance an interest in the larger world. A few may have served as journeymen in the International Mission Board’s two-year journeymen program or may have served a similar two-year period in the International Services Corps. Often these experiences confirm a call to missionary service and provide valuable experience serving on the field before making a career decision. This type of process call seems to be a more mature and lasting call to vocational Christian service.

### The ongoing call

Once a call to Christian service has been experienced as genuine, the process of an ongoing call with successes and disappointments is often what the real world reveals. There is also the possibility of personal sin creating some doubt or frustration. Even the best among us has to acknowledge Paul’s struggle with sin as well as our own. Paul reveals in the seventh chapter of Romans:

*“For even though the desire to do good is in me, I am not able to do it. I don’t do the good I want to do; instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do. If I do what I don’t want to do, this means that I am no longer the one who does it; instead, it is the sin that lives in me.”*

In short, a religious conversion and a call by God does not eliminate personal sin. Despite the reality of sin, those called by God have enriched our faith on a personal level, corporate church level, and in the international arena. §

*Dr. Henry D. Holland is a Christian psychiatrist in private practice, consultant with the International Mission Board, and a Sunday school teacher and lay leader at River Road Church, Richmond.*

**On the following pages are the stories of several women pastors in Virginia. They tell of experiences with their calling and ordinations. Future issues will feature women in other ministry roles.**

## What is God Expecting of Me?

By Betty Pugh

As I reflect upon “the call” in my life for Gospel ministry, I was not like those who had a major shift in their lives from point A to point B, from a drug abuser to an evangelist. I remember as a young child that I didn’t think I had much of a testimony. I was not like those who got a clear message in written form inside a hamburger. God never gave me literal indications about what I needed to do. Nor did I get a sign from heaven in the form of a dove, as Jesus did. I suppose this kind of communication is left for the holy one, alone. My call came over a number of years, beginning in my adolescence and continuing in my decision to go to seminary. My call came because it was where my joy was and where my gifts matched the needs of the Christian community of faith.

I grew up in a wonderful church community in Danville, Virginia. West Main Baptist was a great faith home where I developed a love for people, an appreciation for music, and a sense of my own gifts as a leader. To the dismay of SBC demagogues of today, for many young women church life was the beginning of thinking and acting as a leader. It was a safe place to try out new opportunities and to ask the question, “What is God expecting of me?”

Clearly God touches our lives through people, and one of the ways God calls us is through the community of faith and people who bless us along the way. I have been so blessed with encouragement, discerning friends, and persons who challenged me to consider my call to ministry—and to consider that the call might even include becoming pastor of a church. I’ve done youth and music ministry, camp and recreational ministry, and generalist associate ministry in the past. Would another opportunity exist to pastor and lead a staff and congregation?

I will have served as pastor for Grace Baptist Church six years this coming July. And this experience, as well, has helped to further hone and discern my call. To serve the intergenerational family of the church, to have the opportunities to do a variety of things, to be a role model for other women and to mentor them along the way—these have all been wonder parts of being a minister in this place and time. Such experiences have confirmed the call and have broadened the call. The call, at least in my experience, is a constantly forming, ever-changing process. And while the call may change in specifics and details, the balance in my life has been about the joy the community of faith brings to my life and the gifts that I can bring to its need.

I wish I had something more dramatic, maybe a little more supernatural and exciting to share about my sense of call. But then again, maybe how we get there and all the ways that God uses people and processes to urge us along a path of growth and discernment is pretty exhilarating.

Where does your joy intersect with the world’s need? Where can your gifts in leading impact the needs for the community of faith to be lured forward? This is where the call becomes real, dynamic, and ever changing as we journey on each day, asking God, “Now, what is God expecting of me?” §

*The Rev. Elizabeth Pugh is pastor of Grace Church in Richmond.*

## My Calling to Service: The Great Peace of God

By Vallerie King

My call to ministry and my true conversion to Christ were, for me, the same event. I was sixteen years old and actively participating in Clifton Park Baptist Church. I joined the church and was baptized at age twelve. Most of my “junior” Sunday school class joined and we were baptized together. I followed along because I did not want to be left out. I loved Jesus and believed to the best of my ability. My baptism was a very meaningful experience, but for me it was not true conversion.

My call to ministry and the beginning of my devoted walk with Christ came one day when I was in my bedroom at home. For months I had been feeling restless and unsettled. I was beginning to ask myself questions like, what will I do with my life? Will I attend college? If so, where and what will I major in? Will I marry?

No right answer would come to me. The unknown future and the unsettled feeling persisted. I was resisting something but I was not sure what.

That day, in the quiet of my room, I knelt by my bed and prayed. My prayer was simply: “Dear Lord, I am yours. I will go wherever you want to go and do whatever you want me to do.” Tears filled my eyes. I felt as though my body was on fire. As I rose from prayer, an incredible peace filled my soul. My angst was gone and the great peace of God quieted my spirit.

I knew God was asking me to give my life to full time Christian service. I shared my experience with my pastor. I also shared it with my mother. Neither really believed me. But I knew. I belonged to God and I was willing to follow the Savior’s lead.

My journey has taken many twists and turns. I did not follow a straight path to ministry, but I did pursue my call. In December of 1985 I graduated from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. I received the M. Div in Christian Education.

Prior to my graduation in the early spring of 1985, I was in my seminary dorm room when the phone rang. It was the chair of Deacons at my home church, Takoma Park Baptist in Washington, D.C. She was calling to ask me when I wanted to be ordained. I was ordained to the Gospel Ministry on Pentecost Sunday, 1985. It was the happiest day of my life.

I would not trade anything for my journey. The next step in discerning my call was finding places of service.

### Finding My Specific Calling: “You Should Be a Pastor”

When I entered the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the fall of 1982, becoming a pastor was not even on my radar screen. I was enrolled in an M. Div. degree program because my pastor had told me that this degree would provide me with the best all around education. I felt my number one spiritual gift was teaching. I had just received an undergraduate degree from the University of Maryland in voice. It was my intention to become a good minister of education and music.

In my second year of seminary I was called to Milton Baptist Church in West Virginia as a minister of youth for the summer. Milton was an American Baptist Church and a conservative church. It was a very good position and I enjoyed my work, particularly my work with youth. During my tenure, while the pastor was away, I assisted the chairman of Deacons with hospital visits. That Christmas, the chairman of the Deacons wrote me. I will never forget reading his letter at my desk in my seminary dorm room. He told me how impressed he was when I accompanied him on the hospital visits. Then he wrote these words: “Vallerie, you should be a pastor.” This was the first time God opened my heart to the possibility of becoming a pastor.

It was my seminary professors who confirmed this call. They encouraged my giftedness, particularly the gift of preaching. They pressed me to preach as I had opportunity. I was one of the several women who invited to go on “seminary days” trips. These out of town jaunts were designed to give seminary students the chance to preach. On one of my “seminary days” trips, I was sent to another Milton Baptist Church. This Milton was in Wisconsin. The pastor of the church commended me and told me that I needed to be a pastor.

The year I graduated from Southern Seminary, in 1985, I received the Clyde T. Francisco Award for preaching. Upon leaving seminary, I knew that one day I would be a pastor. I knew, not because of who I am, not because of any talents or gifts I may have, but because I trusted the voice of God. God is not a trickster. God called me to be a pastor and I knew I would not leave this earth without the opportunity to fulfill that call.

I served four churches in a variety of associate pastor positions before I was called to Emmaus Baptist as a pastor. Each one was important. Each gave me the opportunity to preach, to marry and to bury. I am grateful to each of them. I am also grateful to a deacon in West Virginia who took time to write me a letter many, many years ago. His courage and insight allowed me to hear God’s call.

Listen to the voices around you. God may be calling you to his service—perhaps even to the pastorate.

Thank you for allowing me to share my story. §

*Vallerie King is pastor of Emmaus Baptist Church, Quinton.*

### Are You Ordained?

If your mailing label has the word “Rev.” before your name, we have counted you among the ordained in the statistics. If you are ordained and do not find that title on your mailing label, please let us know. You may mail a note to the address on the back or email Judy Bailey (see membership form). Or better yet, complete the membership form and mail it. We need your support.

## My Call to the Ministry and Ordination

Nancy Stanton McDaniel

After I accepted Jesus Christ and asked Him to be Lord of my life at the age of twenty, I went along with my original career plan—to be an elementary school teacher. Everything worked out so well. I was given a third grade teaching position at the school where I did my student teaching, and I loved it—the school, the children, the teaching. And then halfway through the first year of teaching, at my church in Williamsburg, during the singing of the hymn “Wherever He Leads, I’ll Go,” I found myself making my way down the aisle to the pastor to share with him that I felt called to the ministry. This hadn’t even been in my thoughts, but it was real. I only knew at that time that I was to go to seminary and study to be the best minister that I could be. That meant three years of study; it concerned me that I would be so old when I finished seminary—27 years old! My ministerial studies were great and the three years passed quickly.

During my last year of seminary, I was an intern minister at a church in North Carolina. I felt that educational ministry was my calling at that time, and I had the opportunity to fine-tune my skills at that church. The pastor insisted that I do some preaching and other pastoral duties, which I found very fulfilling.

Sometime during the last month of my internship, the pastor said that the church would like to ordain me. That also had not been a part of my thinking. So I told my pastor that I would really need to think about it and pray about it. It wasn’t that the idea of an ordained woman minister was foreign to me. My grandmother was an ordained minister in the Salvation Army in the early 1900s. But in my Baptist denomination, the ordination of women to the ministry was not then and is not now—shall I say—widely accepted. And I wondered if I really wanted to fight that battle. Would ordination be a detriment to my ministry for the Lord because some people would not be able to get past the fact that I was an ordained woman?

I will never forget that holy moment when God gave me the answer. I was driving my car home to see my parents. I even remember where I was on the road between my aunt’s house and my parents’ house. I remember how the trees were thick on either side of the road, how they almost arched over the road, and how the sun was shining through the trees. It was at that moment that the Lord spoke to my heart. I felt the assurance of the Lord’s acceptance of me and my ministry and even of my ordination—that God knew that I was sincere about my call and my strong desire to serve Him and that it didn’t matter what other people thought since it was what God wanted me to do. That was a holy moment—God’s leadership was so real and strong.

On that Sunday in July when I knelt for the Laying on of Hands, I experienced another holy moment as most of the church family came, touched my head or my shoulders, gave me a blessing, and affirmed my ministry. Then the children came. I had been teaching the 4- and 5-year-olds in Sunday school. They came and hugged me and told me they loved me. When I rose to my feet, tears were flowing—tears of joy—for the Lord’s call on my life, for these precious friends who had shown their love, and for the knowledge that I was doing what God wanted me to do.

Being an ordained woman minister has not been an easy road. I’ve had a few experiences that might surprise you. There was the time that another minister would not officiate at a funeral with me because I was a woman. And then there was the time when I was allowed to teach in a particular church but not stand in that church’s pulpit to preach.

But I know that I heard God’s call and followed His leadership, and I plan to continue to serve Him and His people for the rest of my life. §

*Nancy Stanton McDaniel is pastor of Rhoadesville Church, Rhoadesville.*

### VBWIM STATISTICS

The body of Virginia women ministers continues to grow. The VBWIM mailing list now includes around 800 names. These are persons—clergy or lay, paid or volunteer—who consider what they do to be ministry and who wish to support the work of the organization. The list also includes persons by virtue of position, such as agency executives and campus ministers. Women in ministry include church staff, seminary and agency employees, chaplains, religion professors, journalists, retired, some not currently employed, as well as seminary students.

To date there are 225 women serving Virginia Baptist churches in various capacities, including 15 pastors, 23 associate pastors, 20 ministers of education, 28 ministers of youth, 77 ministers of children, 60 ministers of music, and 2 directors of missions.

Sometimes titles are misleading. Many ministers of education function as associate pastors, assisting with administration, counseling and visitation as well as education. Many ministers of education have responsibility for a total education program that includes youth and children. Some ministers of music have responsibility for youth and children’s work.

The general mailing list statistics do not reveal the total number of ordained. However, those who joined the organization and paid the yearly dues or attended an event and completed the registration form were asked if they are ordained. In the last three years, out of a paid membership of 76, we know of 33 who are ordained. There may be others.

The good news is that Virginia churches are receptive to the ministry of women and most Virginia women have not had the open opposition many women have encountered elsewhere. §

## Why Ordination?

by Barbara Jackson

Is ordination important? Well, of course. Why else is the ritual so closely guarded and why has it been perpetuated for centuries? Why else are churches and factions lining up on one side or the other over the ordination of women, a central issue dividing fundamentalists from mainstream? Why else has denial of ordination become part of the armament raised to keep women in their places? And why is it women in religious life have decided they need it now?

The crisis in the denomination has risen up to hit us in the face. The current power structure has asserted male dominance and women's submission. Women's role in the church is a central issue.

The reality is, women are under siege. To seek ordination is to deny the power structure the right to define who we are. To become ordained is to have one's gifts for ministry recognized and affirmed. In the face of barriers raised to women in the church, it seems that the ordination question is truly a central issue for today.

In our understanding of calling, we state unequivocally that all believers are called. We affirm the ministry of the laity and note that calling is not limited to the professional clergy. In working out one's calling, therefore, ordination is not a necessary component. Yet, it is a matter for grave consideration.

What are the functions, then, of ordination?

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**“Ordination is a recognition of humanity and equality before God, a recognition that God calls and uses both women and men in carrying out His work.”**

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- Ordination is the stamp of approval given by denomination and congregation. Ordination says: we accept you and your ministry. We affirm your calling. We share a like doctrine. We will listen to what you have to say and we will accept your leadership.

- Historically, ordination was and is an expression of apostolic succession, that tenuous cord of faith and function that stretches back to the beginnings of the church. Ordination is a system of ownership and control devised by the early church to handle church properties and income and ensure purity of doctrine. Today, in this country it is a minimum standard used by the state to determine who can confer legal status to marriages and by the IRS to give the ordained self-employment status for tax purposes.

- For women in ministry ordination is a recognition of humanity and equality before God, a recognition that God calls and uses both women and men in carrying out His work. It is a symbol of professional competence and attainment. It is a validation of education. Ordination conveys a mantle, an acknowledgment of role. It is a pact between congregation and minister to work together in mutually defined goals. §

## The Power of Call: Some Theological Considerations

by Barbara Jackson

The idea of a call to divine service is one of the most powerful forces operating on human beings. Calling has given meaning and purpose to life for millions and individuals who felt called by God have changed the course of history. Jacob's call founded the nation of Israel. The apostle Paul institutionalized a sect of Judaism and transformed it into a religion for people of all races. Joan of Arc, Martin Luther, Roger Williams, and Martin Luther King come to mind. William Carey felt called to India and inaugurated the course of modern missions.

What does it mean to be called? Where does a call come from? Why does it happen? Who are the instruments of communicating God's call? Is call a good thing? Is call different from vocation? Why some people and not others? Are only ministers called? Or are laypeople called as well? Is a call specific to a place or a function? Can one be called to go to Africa or North Dakota? Or is the place incidental? Are all Christians called? The idea of call is not only one of the most powerful forces in life, it is also complicated. What are the ramifications and criteria for understanding?

Help in discerning one's call is often crucial. There are teachers and mentors, examples and role models. There are books and study and prayer. There are events and natural phenomena that offer interpretation. There are opportunities and lack of them. There are open doors and shut doors. There are gatekeepers and officials, employers and bureaucrats, church staff search committees. There are health issues, handicaps, anger and depression that may work against fulfilling one's promise. How can one know what to think?

In assessing call, one is advised to evaluate talents and gifts, to ask if plans are within God's will—God's will for His kingdom, God's will for one's own life, God's will for mankind! Heady stuff!

For some, God's call was laid upon one's heart during teenage years, a time when young people are assessing plans for career and study. Someone suggests a possibility that God may have a plan and that the young person with some gifts may fit into His plan. The young person responds because he or she seeks meaning and purpose. In other scenarios, Bible study, prayer, reading, meditation or a focus on spirituality leads to an inner conviction.

Everyone, whether Christian or not, contemplates the meaning of life and the possibility of contributing something of significance, if not to mankind in general, at least to one's passion. Joseph Campbell suggests that we each seek to find our bliss, the thing that makes us happy and gives meaning to life. Frederick Buechner says “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”

### Theological and Biblical Insights.

William Barclay, in his book *New Testament Words*, has a chapter on the Greek *kalein*, (to call). The relevant idea is a summoning to an office. The Christian is the one who hears the summons of God and has the responsibility of answering or not

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answering, of accepting or rejecting. The summons is to a task or duty and is an invitation to be useful, an invitation to privilege and fellowship with God, to judgment, and a call to account.

Barclay points out that the calling comes not because we deserve it but because God wills it as an act of grace. "It is not as if God chose us because we stood out because of special goodness or special attainment. It is out of the goodness of his heart that God calls us who never deserved to be called." (p. 148)

Barclay says another essential idea is the call to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, to walk in a way worthy of our calling, to seek holiness—not to make us deserve to be called by God but to be counted worthy. This call includes the responsibility of service to others, a mission to spread the word of the Kingdom, and by extension, a call to serve the larger goals of the Church.

In the Bible we find stories of God calling ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Abraham traveled to Canaan and heard God's promise to build a new nation. Moses was tending his flock when God spoke to him out of the burning bush. Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, *Whom shall I send and who will go for us?* He answered: *Here am I Lord.* Mary likewise responded to the messenger of the Lord: *Here am I, the servant of the Lord: let it be with me according to your word.*

God called Jesus, and at his baptism Jesus declared: *The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me.* Jesus called the disciples and gave them a commission: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.* Paul turned from persecuting the followers of Jesus to spreading the good news throughout the region.

There are many other biblical persons: Jonah, who had a vision to take the message to Nineveh; Lydia, the businesswoman who was led to use her financial resources to undergird the young church. Ruth, who was called to follow the faith of her new family.

The idea of call is central to the message of scripture. Persons in the Bible who experienced God's call suggest that there are some common elements. The called ones may be ordinary people who come to have extraordinary vision. Those who are called have not earned the distinction but have it thrust upon them.

In some cases, the called person is forever changed by a new name, by a physical or spiritual wounding that serves to emphasize a dependence upon God, by a new understanding of God and his plan for the world and one's own role in making that plan happen.

## Modern-day Calls

Even though biblical calls are instructive, God still calls people today. Among the many women and men who serve in church, agency, mission field or elsewhere, women must continually fight to have their callings validated by useful assignments and ministry positions, equitable pay, or by ordination. Although statistics are hard to come by, women ministers of all denominations number in the thousands.

In any discussion of calling, it is necessary to reflect upon the ministry of the laity. In affirming that calling is not limited to the professional clergy, we affirm that laypeople are called. Ministry of the laity includes the men and women who are church leaders: the deacon, the teacher, the singer, the youth leader, the businessman

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## All Are Called: A Summary Statement

What does it mean to be called? The one essential calling is the call to be a Christian. God calls all men and women to discipleship, to commitment to a Person. To limit the call to the missionary or the pastor is a serious perversion of the gospel. All believers are called to a life of commitment, with the responsibilities which go with it. Responsibilities include worship and fellowship with other believers, serving and ministering, teaching, witnessing by word, deed, and total life.

The vocation to follow Christ means to be a Christian in all aspects of life: a relationship with people based on love and concern, an attitude of service, a dedication of mind and abilities, and an understanding of self as an agent of reconciliation in communicating love, justice, salvation.

The call to salvation, commitment, discipleship, and the call to serve in a particular way in a particular place must be seen in the context of the fellowship of believers who welcome the decisions, affirm its validity, and provide spiritual and material support and guidelines consistent with the aims of the church.

Today's concept of a division between clergy and laity is not found in the scriptures. This is an arbitrary distinction that developed late in Christian history. Further, the concept of religious vs. secular is contrary to biblical thought. To the Hebrew and to the Christian all of life is of God—created, sustained and directed by him.

Though there are many occupations and professions, there is only one calling: to follow Christ in commitment in our family life, our church responsibilities, our daily toil. One's occupation is thus seen as an arena for living out one's faith as one accepts responsibility and discipline, as problems are faced ethically, and as persons are dealt with as friends and brothers and sisters.

There are provisions for specialized ministry in the Scripture (Ephesians 4). These are for the "equipping of the saints (i.e., all believers), the work of ministering, and for building up the body of Christ." Today, missionaries, pastors, teachers, and other specialists continue to be called because of the need presented, the possession of spiritual gifts, and the empowering of the spirit. And so, the call to ministry and missions is not the primary call but is a call to a role and a location—an arena, a place of self-fulfillment and service to a world in need of the gospel.

Thus, the general call to follow Christ in commitment becomes specific in terms of occupation, the location of service, and finally, in terms of the day-to-day decisions that must be made. §

## Jackson... from page 9)

and financial expert—all who use their expertise to keep the wheels of church turning.

Ministry of the laity also includes those who minister outside the walls to the homeless, the refugee, the victims of abuse or disaster. They are the men and women who build houses, sponsor families, collect food, lead study groups. Such activity may be an organized outreach of the church, but it may also be an individual thing: the person who can listen and be a friend, the one who can help someone find a job. The possibilities are unlimited. The followers of Jesus are called to show love in relationships—to be priests to each other.

## God's Call is Universal

The concept of call is broader than a religious vocation. God issues the call. Those who respond become the called out. While all people are called—to faith, to follow, to devotion to something greater than self, to discovery of meaning in life, not all respond.

Yet even as we acknowledge that all are called, there continues to be a need for specialized ministries for the building up and equipping of the saints. And so, we distinguish in some way those who serve the institutional church. The rite of ordination meets that need. In the hands of church leaders, ordination is more than a holy rite. It is an instrument of power, a method of assuring succession, of control, of defining the in-group. Ordination is useful in preserving the patriarchy and is an important tool in keeping women under control. Knowing this helps to understand why ordination is an issue in the women's movement.

Yet, in the Bible calling is not confined to one gender. We read in Gal. 3:28 *there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, male nor female, but all are one in Christ Jesus*. Nor is calling reserved for persons of exalted gifts or unusual piety. Jacob was a rascal. The disciples were ordinary fishermen.

## Freedom and Call

Finally, call is freely issued and freely answered. While the concept of election may be a consideration, in truth there is no place for predestination or fate or reluctant bending to God's will. A person struggling with a call may feel a compulsion to follow a particular course. But, in the end, that person always has a choice.

Freedom to be. Freedom to choose. Freedom to decide. Freedom to say no. Freedom to weigh alternatives.

A concomitant notion is the expectation that God will take care of the one who devotes her life to Him. That too can be a delusion. God does not guarantee personal safety from danger or immunity from disease or natural disaster. God does not protect His servants from sexual or financial temptation. God does not lead one to success or positions of excellence. There are no guarantees.

Intentionality is a useful word. The called one must be intentional in choosing paths. It is never helpful to assume that "God will provide" or that God will lead and therefore one doesn't have to make a decision. To "go with the flow" is not usually a good idea.

To be intentional is to carefully assess your gifts and to know what your passion is. To be intentional is to pursue an appropriate education or training for what one feels called to do. To be intentional is to make decisions at the proper time and not leave things to chance. To be intentional is to achieve balance between the ideal and the actual, between fun and duty, between one set of obligations, such as family, and another, such as job or church or a cause.

The reverse of freedom and intentionality is coercion and guilt. And the by-products of guilt are unhappiness and failure. What is the use of piety if there is no passion, no pleasure!

## A Blessing

The person who hears God's call and responds with affirmation and enthusiasm is one of the blessed. To know that you have found meaning and significance in your life is all any of us wants. To have a passion for a cause, for people with emptiness and needs, for a vision of what could be—that is a blessing. To live in beauty, to create beauty, to find order in the world and know it is good—that is a blessing. To face disorder and human need with a cup of cool water or a word of hope—that is a blessing.

A calling is good. The woman minister who hears a call and responds is blessed. And so are a lot of other good people who live ordinary lives. Their lives are blessed because they have found a passion and pursue their course. Those are blessed who achieve excellence in what they do, those who meet people's needs, those who create beauty. Their calling is where their deepest hunger, their passion, meets the world's deepest need—the demands of life. §

*Barbara Jackson is the editor of Synergy*

Sources: William Barclay, *New Testament Words*, SCM Press, 1964; Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*. HarperCollins, 1973.

## Announcing Publication of New Book

Deborah Moore Clark, *O Come, Let Us Bow Down and Worship: A Spiritual Guide for Leadership*. Smyth&Helwys, 2003. Paper \$18, or \$14.40 online. ([www.helwys.com](http://www.helwys.com))

Deborah Moore Clark is a former Virginian and former member of VBWIM, now living in Charlotte, N.C., where she worships and serves as liturgist, deacon and Bible study leader at Myers Park Church.

Her new book examines the question, Why worship? and gives scriptural models, a basic theology of worship, tools for assessing a church's style, and for addressing contemporary

issues. She outlines the principles of planning, organizing the creative process and implementing a team approach.

The book includes worship resources, discussions of the components of worship, analysis of inclusive language in worship, and many teaching helps.

The book will be a useful resource for the minister or worship planner. Equally, the ideas presented will challenge small study groups in a church setting. Questions to spark discussion are included after each chapter. The full bibliography will assist the serious student in exploring other writers on topics of interest. A fine addition to the library of a religious leader. §

# RESOURCES

## The Bookshelf

Carol E. Becker, *Leading Women: How Church Women Can Avoid Leadership Traps and Negotiate the Gender Maze*. Abingdon, 1996.

Verna Dozier, ed., *The Calling of the Laity*. Alban Institute, 1988. Anthology of articles exploring the meaning of ministry.

June S. Hagen, ed., *Rattling Those Dry Bones: Women Changing the Church*. LuraMedia, 1995.

Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition*. Fortress, 1986.

Heidi Bright Parales, *Hidden Voices: Biblical Women and Our Christian Heritage*. Smyth & Helwys, 1998. Interpretation of biblical texts through feminist scholarship.

Terry-Anne Preston, *Your Call Is Waiting: How to Recognize God's Purpose for Your Life*. Augsburg, 2001.

Through exploration of biblical call, a seven-step discovery method, a practical activity program, and a step-by-step Bible study, the author empowers one to discern God's calling.

Bob Roth, *God's Call and Your Vocation: A Look at Christian Calls and Church Occupations*. United Methodist General Board, Nashville, 1998. Study book for youth, leader's guide.

Ruth & Elmer Towns, *Women Gifted for Ministry: How to Discover and Practice Your Spiritual Gifts*. Thos. Nelson, 2001.

A workbook for self-examination. Using tools of biblical study, self-exams, practical application, praying, journaling, questionnaire, the book is a useful guide to discerning gifts through self-study.

Nelvin Vox, *Seven Days A Week: Faith in Action*. Fortress, 1985.

A book for laypeople seeking to relate faith and daily life, calling and ministry.

Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang. *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*. Westminster John Knox, 1998. Useful study containing primary data and statistics. Gordon T. Smith, *Listening to God: The Art of Discerning God's Will*. InterVarsity Press, 1997.

The author proposes the development of discernment through discipline and growing in relationship with God, an intentional approach to decision making. §

### MEMBERSHIP for 2003 VIRGINIA BAPTIST WOMEN IN MINISTRY

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Membership for 2003  
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Membership fee is \$20 for one year (students, \$10). Members joining in summer or fall will be credited for the following year. Membership includes announcements of conferences and other events, book lists and discounts on conferences. Please enclose check with this form and send to: VBWIM, Box 70970, Richmond, VA 23255. For information, telephone Judy Bailey, 804-740-4037, or e-mail JudithBBAiley@aol.com

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**SYNERGY**

## WOMEN IN THE NEWS

### New Positions and Changes

**Priscilla Meadows** is director of student ministries, Mount Ararat Church, Stafford.

**Joanna Harris** is youth minister at May Memorial Church, Powhatan.

**Susan Barclift** is youth and children's minister at Raleigh Heights Church, Chesapeake.

**Kristina Callaway** is family ministry coordinator at West Main Church, Danville.

**Susan Leftell** is minister of music and youth at Waverly Place Church, Roanoke.

**Kristi Gibson** is youth minister at Hopeful Church, Montpelier.

### Ordinations

**Tracey Robinson** was ordained on March 23 to the gospel ministry by Winfree Memorial Church, Midlothian, where she is minister to youth.

**Lina Sohn** was ordained on February 2 to the gospel ministry by Columbia Church, Falls Church, where she is a member. She is a chaplain at Johns Hopkins.

**Lynn Ailor** was ordained on June 8 by Hebron Church, Afton, where she is a member.

### Graduations

From Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond

Doctor of Ministry:

**Patricia G. English**, Fredericksburg

Master of Divinity:

**Elizabeth G. Caldwell**, Richmond

**Wanda Gardner-Slater**, Hopewell

**Cynthia P. Ross**, Marion

**Julie Ashe Ball**, Richmond (from N.C.)

**Allison L. Farr**, Richmond (from La.)

**Miriam Dakin**, Warrenton

**Robin C. McCall**, Chesterfield

**Amanda Kathryn Allen** (from N.C.)

**Susan J Burnette**, Richmond (from Ind.)

Master of Divinity With Christian Education:

**Jennifer H. Jarrell**, Richmond (from N.C.)

Master of Divinity with Church Music:

**Sylvia C. Cooper**, Midlothian

**Kathy E. Hulin**, Richmond (from Md.)