

**O**ur Reformed tradition understands that a call through the Spirit is a corporate, not an individual, event. It includes many layers of accountability and discernment. An internal call is affirmed by those closest to the inquirer, in the local church; at denominational levels; and by those who guide the inquirer such as at seminary. How can we recognize the reality of confirming a call in a timely manner?

## Here's a reality checklist:

### Spiritual reality

A call is a continuous process. It is an emerging, growing, and shifting process; it is not static. An alive, moving God is at work through the Holy Spirit, calling people to fruitful service in God's name.

H. Richard Niebuhr identified four components of a call: *the call to be a Christian*; *the inward, secret call* (an inner urgency to serve God through a church occupation); *the providential call* (recognizing your gifts and that God is leading you into the ministry); and *the ecclesiastical call* (when the church, as the voice of the community, confirms your call).

The Reformed sense of call applies to all baptized Christians. Those who go into vocations such as teaching, law, and medicine may also have a sense of call. There are, however, some key distinctions in a call to the ordained ministry. John Calvin emphasized that the first qualification of the ministry is a "secret call." Calvin also said that inner conviction must be confirmed by a responsible church authority.

### Process reality

*It is never too early to get people into the process!* The inquiry phase is a chance for the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) to guide a person's inquiry into a call, helping to decide whether to attend seminary before investing time and financial resources. Once you and your CPM agree seminary is the next step, the CPM can help you decide which seminary to attend.

Many people enter seminary *before* they approach the CPM. Without the guidance of the CPM, some incur more financial debt by attending non-Presbyterian seminaries. The later that seminarians go under care, the harder it is to meet time requirements and to be certified ready to seek a call after all other requirements have been met.

## Church reality

A call, and recognizing a call, is a shared process among family members, pastors, friends, colleagues, session, CPM, and presbytery. Has your church developed a process of call discernment? Are there training events in your church to help church officers identify and encourage gifted young people to consider ministry as their vocation?

All those involved in the discerning of call process need to learn the appropriateness of when to say “yes” and when to say “no.” It has always been easier to say “yes” and harder to say “no” to those who believe they have been called to ordained ministry. All the same, sometimes the best support one can give to an inquirer or a candidate is to prayerfully raise serious questions about the call early in the preparation process and to stand with the inquirer or candidate if the decision to choose another vocation is being considered.



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## Consider . . .

# The Reality of Confirming a Call

*Consider your own call, sisters and brothers.  
(1 Corinthians 1:26)*