

Article 15. Ministry and Leadership

We believe that ministry continues the work of Christ, who gives gifts through the Holy Spirit to all believers and empowers them for service in the church and in the world. We also believe that God calls particular persons in the church to specific leadership ministries and offices. All who minister are accountable to God and to the community of faith as they serve the church.

Christ invites all Christians to minister to each other in the church and on behalf of the church beyond its boundaries. [1](#) Christ enables them for ministry in response to specific needs and opportunities. [2](#) Such service is a participation in God's creative work of building up the body of Christ in love and of witnessing to God's righteousness in the world. [3](#)

The church calls, trains, and appoints gifted men and women to a variety of leadership ministries on its behalf. These may include such offices as pastor, deacon, and elder as well as evangelists, missionaries, teachers, conference ministers, and overseers. [4](#) The character and reputation of leaders is to be above reproach. Following the example of Christ, persons so appointed preach and teach with authority, interpret the Scriptures and the faith diligently, speak divine truth with boldness, equip the saints, relate with compassion to the needy, and lead the congregation in faithful living, so that the church may be "built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God." [5](#)

The confirmation of the call to a particular ministry is a sign of mutual accountability between the church and its chosen representative. A time of discernment may be followed by ordination or a similar act, accompanied by laying on of hands. [6](#) This act symbolizes the person's responsibility as a servant of the Word. The congregation and the wider church or conference share in this act as an indication of their blessing and support and as a reminder of the person's accountability before God and the church, and of the church's responsibility toward the person.

(1) [Matt. 25:31-40](#); [1 Cor. 12:31-13:13](#).

(2) [Eph. 4:7](#); [Rom. 12:4-6](#); [1 Pet. 4:10-11](#).

(3) [Eph. 4:15-16](#); [Luke 10:1-37](#).

(4) [Eph. 4:11-13](#); [1 Cor. 12:28](#); [Rom. 12:6-8](#); [1 Tim. 3:1-13](#); [Tit. 1:5-9](#).

(5) [Rom. 10:14-15](#); [Matt. 7:29](#); [Titus 2:15](#); [1 Tim. 4:13](#); [Jer. 1:4-10](#); [2 Tim. 4:1-3](#); [Eph. 4:11-13](#); [Phil. 2:1-4](#); [Eph. 2:22](#).

(6) [1 Tim. 5:22](#); [Exod. 29:35](#).

Commentary

1. The Anabaptists called persons to special roles of spiritual leadership in the church. The study of the Bible, the need for order, and the recognition of giftedness led them to this practice. The purpose of such chosen leaders was not to relieve the other believers of responsibility, but to represent Christ and the church in the congregation and on the church's behalf in the world. The Anabaptists did not use the concept of the "priesthood of all believers" to downplay the need for spiritual leaders with special roles in the church. Menno Simons mentioned the "priesthood of all believers" to encourage all believers, as "priests," to lead a holy life in order to be witnesses to the God who called them from darkness to light ([1 Pet. 2:9](#)).

2. In the New Testament the earliest references to leadership ministries mention disciples and apostles. [Ephesians 4:11](#) mentions a fivefold ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. In [1 Timothy 3](#), bishops and deacons are named. We also see a threefold pattern emerging in the New Testament: bishops, elders, and deacons. In the Mennonite tradition this threefold pattern can be found as well. There have also been variations, such as sending out evangelists and missionaries. The church has adapted its leadership patterns from time to time and should have the freedom to continue to do so, including the recognition of evangelists, prophets, and teachers.

3. The act of ordination (or similar acts such as licensing and commissioning) symbolizes a combination of God's call, the congregation's affirmation, the recipient's dedication to ministry, and the blessing of the wider church. Ordination follows a process of discernment in the congregation and in the wider church or conference. It is a one-time event, kept active by continuing service in and for the church. Ordination is normally transferable from one congregation or conference assignment to another. Licensing for pastoral assignments is for a preliminary period of time. Commissioning is normally for a specific assignment.