

5838 McBryde
Richmond, California 94805
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Committee on Ministry
Northern California Conference

Dear Friends,

I'd like to share with you some reflections upon issues surrounding the ordination of Jody Parsons, Loey Powell, and Stacy Casulos. The model of ordination they propose is unique to us, but not new to the Biblical tradition. Biblical responses to the Word of God come in a variety of models, each expressive of different personal, community, and societal perceptions of the nature and task of ministry. No one model of ministry represents the only way the human community or God understands the means to make flesh the Word of Love and Justice.

Our concern lies with ordination, the setting apart of individuals by the people and God to perform particular functions with the Church and on the Church's behalf. Those who are set apart in Biblical tradition vary in title, function, and style: priests, prophets, shophetim (the English "judges" is not adequate to describe these "bringers of justice," "redeemers," or "liberators"), teachers, musicians, disciples, and so on. Some of these Biblical persons are set apart as individuals, others are set apart in groups.

One example of a Biblical model of shared ministry is that of Moses, Miriam, and Aaron. Micah 6:4 records the ancient tradition of this model: "For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." The three are recognized as being Levites in I Chronicles 6:3 and Numbers 26:59, and thus a part of the earliest "ministerial" leadership of our Biblical tradition. Each individual had a unique relationship with God and served the community differently. At the same time each shared with the others a common vision and a common connected approach to making the vision reality.

An example of how this "team" operated can be found in the stories of the Exodus in chapters 3, 4 and 15. Moses is called by Yahweh to bring the message of freedom to his people and to Pharaoh; Aaron is called upon to be a mouthpiece for his often hesitant brother Moses; and Miriam is charged with leading the song and dance of celebration following the miraculous crossing of the Reed Sea.

A careful reading of the exodus account along with the passages in Chronicles, Numbers, and Micah make this "team" relationship clear. You will note, though, that there are Biblical traditions which seek to uphold Moses as the sole minister of God, e.g. Exodus 24:1-2. This passage (and others) written by the Yahwist source at the time of the United Monarchy, has an interest to portray one-ness rather than group-ness: one God--one king--one temple--one state--one intermediary with God in the ancient traditions, Moses.

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It is significant to note that in the same chapter, Exodus 24:9-11, we read another source with a directly opposite view! The Elohist portrays the elders of the people as being able to commune with God -- not just Moses, but at least seventy others eating and drinking with God! The Elohist source favors group-ness, sharing favorable-looking traditions of the various "judges," the twelve tribes, and several different non-temple worship sanctuaries--a view quite different from that of the Yahwist.

There are other examples of this mutual or group ordination style:

- . Jesus calls the disciples in groups of twos and threes, and sends them into ministry two by two (Mark 6:7)
- . the Great Commission is given to a group of eleven, sending them with the "ministerial" authority of making disciples, baptizing, and teaching (Matthew 28:18-20)
- . the setting apart of the seven in Acts 6 with prayer and the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6)

It goes without saying that the earliest Biblical traditions and models of ministry informed the style which Jesus and the early Church chose when they sent groups of ministers into the world.

My thoughts and prayers are with you as you struggle with different ways of looking at our ministry in the United Church of Christ.

Peace,

Michael Bausch
Minister
Bay Association