

BIBLICAL AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR BOTH ORDAINED AND CERTIFIED LAY MINISTRY

The early Christian leaders such as Peter and John were “unschooled, ordinary men” who gave evidence “that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Perhaps they were like today’s certified lay ministers who, for the most part, do not have a great amount of formal education, but have spent time learning through core classes and apprenticeship/mentoring.

As the church began to grow, leaders such as Paul and Apollos were raised up by God. They had an excellent formal education. Perhaps they were like ordained ministers of today.

The early church did not put either apostles (clergy?) or deacons (laity?) higher or lower than the other, but provided for their different roles (Acts 6:1-4). Each was important in the work of the church

It is recorded that the local church laid hands on deacons (Acts 6:5-6) and evangelists/missionaries (Acts 13:1-3). Elders were ordained (Acts 14:23). We do not know if the ceremonies differed. We do know that God does the gifting and the calling (Ephesians 4:11-13), and those with the different roles are to work together (Romans 12:3-8). Deacons had to be spirit-filled administrators with good reputations (Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:8-13). This also applied to elders/overseers (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Down through Christian history the church has been vital and vigorous when both ordained and lay ministers have been trained and freed to minister. Institutions such as Bucknell University (1846) came into existence to train such people. Seminaries and the Academy of Christian Training and Service are among the agencies that provide training today.

Certified lay ministers are fulfilling a needed role at the beginning of the twenty-first century. According to a 1997 study by the Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board, sixty percent of American Baptist churches have a budget under \$50,000, and therefore many churches have difficulty supporting a full-time seminary-trained pastor. Lay ministers, often bi-vocational or retired, are being trained and certified to meet this need. They also have become more prominent in church planting and working with the ordained leadership in established churches.

Today recognition of the call to ministry is given through the cooperative work of the local church, the Association, and the Region. This recognition usually takes the form of Licensure for the pre-ordination candidate, Certification for the certified lay minister, and Ordination for the seminary graduate. Although Licensure is now used only for a preparatory period, Certification and Ordination indicate that the local church, Association, and Region acknowledge a person’s ability and authority to be involved in ministry

Both ordained and certified lay ministers have important parts to play in providing leadership for the growth of Christ’s church.