

Monthly Leader Guide for Coming Alive in Christ: Training for PC(USA) Ruling Elders and Deacons based on the Constitutional Questions

This first version of this leader guide is intended for use at the beginning of meetings of the session and/or deacons or other gatherings where training may be able to take place in multiple meetings. The lessons are approximately fifteen minutes in length and are designed in three parts: **Review, Reflect, Respond**. In the **Review** section, suggestions are provided for presentation of key points in the resource material. It is suggested that you study the full sections in this material prior to leading, pulling your own highlights of the topics within. In the **Reflect** section, suggestions are provided to engage the session or board of deacons with the material and allow them to reflect on their call, their faith, and their spiritual leadership. The **Respond** section offers suggestions for responding through prayer, conversation, or action.

The second version of this leader guide consists of suggestions for using these materials in a three-session format training ruling elders and deacons prior to ordination/installation. The first session covers the introduction and three of the constitutional questions while the second includes four of the questions. The third session covers the last questions including that for ruling elders and the question for deacons. It is suggested that the officers engage in this time of learning and growing together, exploring the variety of gifts necessary for service. Consider using these as a part of a retreat including time for fellowship and relationship building.

A visual supplement for the leader guides provides images that enhance and reinforce each lesson. PowerPoint slides are referenced by number in each lesson. If you do not have the ability to project these images, you may wish to print them for participants to view.

Keep your ministry context in mind. Just as you prepare to preach by exegeting a biblical text, as you prepare to teach, exegete your context and your leaders. What is the focus of officer training? What opportunities for leadership development have been offered in the past? What are the expectations of officers in your context? What are the greatest challenges leaders face in your setting? Consider providing the sections of the material for those participating in the training for their further study.

Finally, as you prepare each lesson, take time to reflect on your own call as a spiritual leader and allow God to speak to you, to refresh your soul, and to restore your energy, creativity, imagination, and love for the people of God.

About the writer

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INTRODUCTION—Baptism, Call, and Membership

REVIEW

1. If possible, arrange chairs in a circle. If you have a small group, you may choose to seat them around one round table, ensuring there is room for everyone. Invite leaders to focus on the image or, if they are seated in a circle or at a table, to look around the circle as you begin.
2. **(Slide 2)** Using content from the resource material, introduce the study by talking about how our call to leadership is rooted in our baptism and incarnated in our belonging to the body of Christ. Read I Corinthians 12:4–11, 27.
3. **(Slide 3)** Letty Russell, a 20th century Presbyterian theologian, uses another image for the church. Her vision of the church is a round table; “a place where all people gather around as partners in ministry connecting to the world and each other in faith and for a life of reflection and action.”
4. **(Slide 4)** What does a leader look like in this vision? “Leaders have authority of purpose rather than authority of position. Leaders with authority grounded in purpose humbly recognize that they are SERVANT LEADERS not leaders with servants” (Letty Russell, *Church in the Round*).
5. **(Slide 5)** The call to servant leadership begins at our baptism. At baptism, we affirm that each person is a gift from God, chosen for salvation and for service, endowed by God with gifts to be used in obedience to Christ and for the building up of the Kingdom. God's call begins before we are even aware and is nurtured by the covenant community as we grow. We grow to understand and experience God's call through the life and worship in the community of faith.
6. **(Slide 6)** How do we live out our call? Reformed theology talks about our call as our vocation. “Vocation comes from the Latin word, *vocare*, meaning to call or to summon, suggesting that “vocation is a calling from someone to someone for some purpose. [Vocation is about] emphasizing how we serve and give ... rather than on what we receive for our labors” (Richard M. Webster, “Considering Your Call and Vocation: Study to Enrich Inquirers and Candidates”).
7. If you are using the PowerPoint slides, use **Slide 7**. If you are not using the slides, print copies of the slide for each participant. What is my vocation? How can I discern my call? Our vocation or our call from God can be found by identifying our gifts, asking how our gifts have been nurtured and affirmed in the body of Christ, and exploring how our gifts have been or may be used for the common good. At the intersection of these three exercises, we find our vocation.

REFLECT

1. What gifts have you identified in yourself? How have your gifts been nurtured and affirmed by this community? How are you using your gifts for the common good?
2. What does it mean to you that you have been called as a ruling elder or deacon in the body of Christ, the Church?

RESPOND

If you are using the PowerPoint slides, use **Slide 8**. If you are not using the slides, print copies of the slide for each participant or write the content on a board or flipchart for all to see. Invite those gathered to say these words from the *Book of Common Worship* to reaffirm their baptism and their call to leadership.

*"In baptism God claims us,
and seals us to show that we belong to God.
God frees us from sin and death,
uniting us with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection.
By water and the Holy Spirit,
we are made members of the church, the body of Christ,
and joined to Christ's ministry of love, peace, and justice."*

(Book of Common Worship. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, p. 408.)

a. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

REVIEW

1. **(Slide 9)** In this session we will focus on three concepts: The Trinity, the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and salvation through Jesus Christ.
2. **(Slide 10)** Ahead of time, read <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/what-we-believe/trinity/>. Summarize the historical understanding of the Trinity, illustrated in the Trinity Knot symbol, often found in European cathedral windows. The central ring affirms monotheism. There is one essence of God; the emphasis is on oneness, not three-ness. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God—but they are one God. An equilateral triangle around the circle represents the equality of the three expressions of the Godhead. This symbol also conveys the idea that there are three simultaneous expressions of the divine substance. It is not that first we have God the Father, then, at a later time, God the Son, and after both of these the Holy Spirit carries the relay torch.
3. Read the illustration of the Trinity in the resource material as another way to understand the Trinity: three aspects of the sun—light, warmth, comfort.
4. **(Slide 11)** How many names are there for God in the Bible? An internet search will reveal somewhere between 20 and 953. In this question, we find two of the most common names for Jesus—Lord and Savior—names we may often take for granted that we understand.
5. Summarize the resource material on the Lordship of Christ, highlighting the historical roots of the word “lord.”
6. Summarize the meaning of the Greek word *Soter*, noting again the historical associations with political rulers, like Caesar.
7. **(Slide 12)** Salvation is a repeating cycle of God’s action and our response. “God acts with grace; we respond with gratitude. God claims us as beloved children; we proclaim God’s saving love. God redeems from sin and death; we rejoice in the gift of new life. This rhythm of divine action and human response—found throughout scripture, human history, and everyday events—shapes all of Christian faith, life, and worship” (Book of Confessions [BOC], W-1.0102).

REFLECT

1. How would you explain the Trinity to a new Christian?
2. What does it mean to you to call Jesus Christ the Lord and Head of the Church?
3. What responsibilities do we carry as people and as leaders who have received the salvation of God?

RESPOND

(Slide 13) Print copies of the names included below for each participant.

What name do you use most often for God? Ask participants to look at the names and choose one that is new or unfamiliar or one that particularly speaks to them. Close in prayer. Create space at the beginning or during the prayer for each person to take turns and say their name for God out loud.

EXPANDING OUR NAMES FOR GOD

Advocate
Alpha and Omega
Bread of Life
Bridegroom
Cornerstone
Dayspring
Deliverer
Emmanuel
Everlasting Father
Fountain
Good Shepherd
High Priest
Holy One
I Am
Lamb of God
Life
Light of the World
Mediator

Messiah
Morning Star
Prince of Peace
Prophet
Redeemer
Refiner's Fire
Refuge
Resurrection
Rock
Rose of Sharon
Shepherd
Sun of Righteousness
Teacher
Truth
Way
Wonderful Counselor
Word of Life
Vine

b. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you? (Slide 14)

REVIEW

1. **(Slide 15)** Review the types of literature found in the Bible. A variety of visual images may be found on the internet or you may wish to print the image on Slide 14. After a brief review, ask participants which part of the Bible they know best and which one is less familiar?
2. **(Slide 16)** Briefly review how the canon was formed, emphasizing the some of the criteria used to establish whether an ancient text belonged in the canon. You may wish to mention that some of the books that did not make it into the canon can be found in a section of some Protestant Bibles called the Apocrypha.
3. **(Slide 17)** What does it mean to say the Bible is the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ? It means (1) God's Spirit guided the ancient writers and (2) God's Spirit continues to guide contemporary readers. The 123rd General Assembly (1983) of the PCUS published a statement on *Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture* that affirms the church has had a long tradition of interpreting scripture according to the 'rule of faith' and the 'rule of love' including that the witness of scripture must be consistent with the basic teaching of the church through history and the interpretation of scripture must never conflict with the commandments to love God and neighbor.
4. **(Slide 18)** What is the Word of God? The Gospel of John uses the word "logos" to describe the Word of God, meaning the rational principle that gave order to the cosmos—God. For John, the logos is Jesus himself, God's wisdom incarnated.

Summarize Barth's idea of the Threefold Word of God: revealed, written, and proclaimed. The Word of God is revealed in Jesus Christ and in the written word of scripture and in the word proclaimed and taught. If we want to know God's Word, we look to Jesus; to the Bible, which provides us the best and most reliable witness to Jesus, "a witness without parallel" (BOC, The Confession of 1967).

REFLECT

What does it mean to you to affirm this constitutional question?

RESPOND

If you are using the PowerPoint slides, use **Slide 19**. If you are not using the slides, print copies of the slide for each participant or write the content on a board or flipchart for all to see. Invite those gathered to say these words taken from The Confession of 1967 as an affirmation of the witness of scripture in our lives:

"The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel. ..." (BOC, 9.27)

- As a way of introducing the topic of the next session focusing on the Essential Tenets of the Reformed faith, you may share the link to Jack Rogers class on YouTube prior to the next session—<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdkyab7H73Y>

c. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
(Slide 20)

REVIEW

1. **(Slide 21)** Review the definition of a confession taken from the Book of Confessions.
2. Summarize the section “What Is Meant by ‘Essential Tenets?’” from the resource material.
3. Choose one of the options below for presenting the Essential Tenets
 - a. **(Slide 22)** One of the foremost teachers on the Essential Tenets was Jack Rogers, Professor of Theology Emeritus at San Francisco Theological Seminary and Moderator of the 213th General Assembly (2001) of the PC(USA). Below is an excerpt from a blog which Rogers wrote in 2008:

Essentials are those doctrines that can be embraced by people of different schools of interpretation. They cannot be the property of only one school of thought. The essentials are the great themes of the Christian, Protestant, and Reformed traditions that bind us together, not the differing interpretations which sometimes have kept us apart.

I believe a helpful metaphor that reflects our Presbyterian understanding of essential tenets is to think of a series of concentric circles. According to our Confessions, Jesus Christ is the center of our faith as the one in whom we meet the triune God. That is the heart of Christianity and unites Christians in faith around the world. For Protestants, the next layer of our core values is a belief in Scripture and justification by grace through faith. The third layer in the circle is made up of the characteristically Reformed concepts of sovereignty, election, covenant, stewardship, sin, and obedience. ... (<https://www.drjackrogers.com/2008/06/a-quick-guide-to-essential-tenets.html>)
 - b. Make copies of the section “Some Essential Tenets of the Reformed faith, as Expressed in the Confessions” from the resource material, leaving out The Calling of the Church that will be used during the REFLECT time. Separate each of the six essential tenets and distribute them to your participants. If there are more than six people participating, create six small groups. Ask each individual or small group to read the material and identify one-to-two key points for each tenet. Ask them to reflect on how the particular concept informs and guides them in their role as spiritual leaders. If time allows, ask individuals or groups to share the key points with the larger group.

REFLECT

As we considered our call in the first session, we heard these words: At baptism, we affirm that each person is a gift from God, chosen for salvation and for service, endowed by God with gifts to be used in obedience to Christ and for the building up of

the Kingdom. An additional tenet of the Reformed tradition is that we, as members of Christ's body, have a particular calling in the world and to discern our calling we look to Christ.

- To what have you been called?
- Are there particular tasks that you believe God is calling you to carry out to deliver the message of the free grace of God in Jesus Christ?

RESPOND

If you are using the PowerPoint slides, use **Slide 23**. If you are not using the slides, print copies of the slide for each participant or write the content on a board or flipchart for all to see. Invite those gathered to say these words taken from The Confession Belhar (10.5) as an affirmation of our calling as the Church to witness to the grace of Jesus Christ:

"We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells. ..." (*Book of Confessions*, 10.5)

d. Will you fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?

REVIEW

1. **(Slide 24)** The last two sessions focused on the role of scripture and the confessions in our discernment of our call to ministry. Those conversations led us to this ordination question, which brings together the three core principles of the Reformed faith: the centrality of Jesus Christ, the authority of scripture, and the historical witness of the confessions.
2. Note the word order of this question. The ordained are to be OBEDIENT to Christ, STAND UNDER Scripture's authority, and be GUIDED by the confessions.
3. **(Slide 25)** What does it *really* mean to obey Jesus Christ? Obedience to Jesus Christ shows our willingness to get out of our own way, letting go of what we believe to be possible, right, or lawful, for a reality that God knows to be true. Ask: How is this different from or similar to your understanding of obedience to Jesus Christ. You may wish to use the story of the church near Seattle as an illustration of obedience leading to transformation or provide an illustration from your own experience.
4. **(Slide 26)** The confessions act as windows into our faith: reflections of who the church believes itself to be and the injustices it has overcome to seek the kingdom of God in its life together. The past matters because in our confessions we see pieces of the church's history and the church's response to the contextual needs of people of faith at that time, rooted in scripture.

REFLECT

1. Invite participants to reflect on the context of the entire congregation by exploring the content and question provided in the resource material in the "Called to lead: But, where?! How?!" section of question (d) within the resource material.
 - What experiences have you had as a congregation that have led you to look at ministry in a transformative, creative way?

Invite them to reflect on their history as a congregation and any challenges (economic, theological, staffing, facility, cultural) they have faced that have caused them to innovate and be transformed in their approach to ministry.

1. How do you allow scripture to nurture you as a leader? How do you allow the confessions to guide you? Is there an area of growth you'd like to explore in either of these areas?

RESPOND

Invite each person to think of one person they know who is invested in the ministry of the congregation: someone who may be behind the scenes, someone who faithfully gives of their time and energy for the Body of Christ, a Sunday School teacher, food pantry volunteer, office volunteer, usher. Challenge participants to reach out to the

person this week and express gratitude for their gifts in ministry and to acknowledge them as a valued member of this Body.

e. Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?

REVIEW

1. (**Slide 27**) Polity is simply the form of government of a religious denomination. The polity of the PC(USA) is based on shared leadership. Clergy do not hold the reins of power, nor do members of any ruling board within the congregation. The language of this question highlights the mutuality of ministry and governance.
2. Summarize the three types of polity (**Slide 28**) described in the resource material. Highlight the difference between a representative democracy and a pure democracy. Ask: If you did not grow up in a Presbyterian church, what kind of government structure did your church use?
3. If you have not spent time previously outlining the *Book of Order* and its structure, take this opportunity to highlight the four sections and overview their content. It is worth noting that the *Book of Order* is not intended to be a rule book, but a guideline for the church to follow as it conducts its life together.
4. Review the responsibilities of the various councils of the church as outlined in that section of the resource material and in F-3.0203 (**Slide 29**), noting that the structure of the councils underscores the foundation of our polity—shared leadership. Balance between clergy and laity is present at all levels. No one voice dominates over another.
5. What is the discipline of the church? The fourth section of the *Book of Order* lays out a process for church discipline that focuses on restoration and repentance, rather than punishment. Read the following section from D-1.0101 of the Principles of Church Discipline within the Rules of Discipline: (**Slide 30**)

... The purpose of discipline is to honor God by making clear the significance of membership in the body of Christ; to preserve the purity of the church by nourishing the individual within the life of the believing community; to achieve justice and compassion for all participants involved; to correct or restrain wrongdoing in order to bring members to repentance and restoration; to uphold the dignity of those who have been harmed by disciplinary offenses; to restore the unity of the church by removing the causes of discord and division; and to secure the just, speedy, and economical determination of proceedings. ...

Church discipline is always carried out by groups or councils of the church, from sessions to the General Assembly within a system of checks and balances, due process, and procedural safeguards.

6. The phrase, *a friend among your colleagues in ministry*, may seem unnecessary, but it is there to emphasize the relational and connectional nature of the Presbyterian church. To be a friend among colleagues is to develop relationships and be in community with others in ordered ministry, not only in the congregation in which they serve, but in other congregations through fellowship and serving on higher councils. It is important to be in worship, prayer, and study together as well, for that is how our relationships are nurtured.

REFLECT

1. How do you see the *Book of Order* as beneficial to your personal spiritual growth? To your growth as a spiritual leader?
2. **(Slide 31)** Reflect on each of these phrases, taken from F-1.0301. Ask: How do you see this congregation embodying these words?

The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.

The Church is to be a community of hope, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. ...

The Church is to be a community of love, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished, and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down.

The Church is to be a community of witness, pointing beyond itself through word and work to the good news of God's transforming grace in Christ Jesus its Lord.

RESPOND

In an effort to strengthen relationships between elders or deacons, do one of the following:

- Divide into small groups of no more than four people. Share prayer requests with one another and pray for one another.
- Place the names of all the members of your group in a container and invite each person to draw the name of a colleague in ministry for whom they will pray until you meet again, encouraging them to reach out in support to one another.
- Partner with another congregation in your presbytery and exchange names of elders or deacons with them, covenanting to pray for one another.

f. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?

REVIEW

1. If possible, arrange the seating in the room where you will meet to allow for two groups to be seated on opposite sides of the room, facing each other. This arrangement illustrates our separateness from God and from one another and our need for reconciliation. **(Slide 32)**
2. For a deeper look into The Confession of 1967 and The Confession of Belhar, consider reviewing the lesson on “A Call for Reconciliation in Society” in the *Race and Reconciliation Workbook* as a part of the *Being Reformed* series.
3. **(Slide 33)** For a basic review, present the background information on The Confession of 1967 and The Confession of Belhar in “The Confessions” section of the resource material.
4. If you have not already split into two groups, do so now. Give one group copies of The Confession of 1967 (9.44–9.47) and the other group copies of The Confession of Belhar. Ask each group to determine the understanding of reconciliation as defined in each confession and to share their discoveries with the larger group.

If you separated the seats at the beginning of the session, before you ask each group to share their understanding, instruct them to move their chairs closer together, mirroring reconciliation.

REFLECT

1. Reflect on a time in the life of your church where reconciliation was needed OR reflect on a time in your own life where reconciliation was needed. Did reconciliation occur? If so, how? If not, why not? What were the factors that prevented reconciliation?
2. If you altered your room set up to reflect separation, ask participants how it felt to come into the meeting space and if their feelings changed as they moved closer to one another.
3. How will you work specifically for reconciliation as a spiritual leader in this congregation? As a Christian in the world?

RESPOND

(Slide 34) If you are using the PowerPoint slides, read together the words from The Confession of 1967 or read 9.31 and 9.44 from the confession, pausing between sections to allow time for personal prayer. Close with these words: The Confession of 1967 assures us that God equips us for this important task, closing with these words from Scripture: “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Book of Confessions, 9.56).

g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?

REVIEW

1. **(Slide 35)** As you begin this session, reflect on the conversations from the last session about reconciliation. Invite participants to consider how the previous ordination question and the question in this session might relate to one another and inform one another.
2. **(Slide 36)** Using the “Biblical Background” material as well as your own resources, begin this session with a brief Bible study of Philippians 4:2–3, 1 Corinthians 1:10–13a, and Ephesians 4:1–6 noting the following:
 - a. What characteristics does Paul seem to equate with unity in the body of believers?
 - b. What is the role of the body in preserving unity?
 - c. Do the passages offer any guidance as to how we as leaders can further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?
3. Review the information on “The Local Congregation” from the resource material. **(Slide 37)** This is the only ordination question that asks leaders to make a promise. In saying, “I do” to this ordination question, leaders are committing to a three-fold task:
 - a. To work for peace-filled relationships that reflect the love of Christ;
 - b. To work for a congregation united in its ministry and mission;
 - c. To work for a church that lives out its understanding of the faith as described in the PC(USA) Constitution.
4. Where two or three are gathered ... there will eventually be conflict. Resolving conflict and seeking reconciliation when division happens is the role of a spiritual leader. Conflict resolution begins with ME. Review the four actions that can help achieve conflict resolution from that section of the resource material. **(Slide 38)**

The 204th General Assembly (2002) of the PC(USA) approved an excellent resource for sessions and congregational leaders as they address disagreements and conflicts in the church—*Seeking to Be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement*. The resource may be found at:

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/seeking-to-be-faithful-together-guidelines-for-presbyterians-in-times-of-disagreement/>.

REFLECT

1. Peace, unity, and purity is not placidness, quiet, and agreement. In addition to the question provided in the resource material related to the re-painting of the fellowship hall, create one or two other simple case studies that highlight a potential conflicted decision that might present itself in your context. Divide the group into two or three groups, depending on the overall size of the group. Ask each group to consider one of the case studies and answer the question, “How

would you work toward a decision and maintain the peace, unity, and purity in this situation?"

2. Using the four points of conflict resolution provided in the resource material and the *Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement*, invite the group to discuss the adult study classroom dilemma scenario presented in the resource material or a similar situation specific to your context where conflict is likely to occur. What strategy would they use to address the issues and to address the conflict?

RESPOND

Close the time together by using the benediction from 2 Corinthians 13:11,13.

h. Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?

REVIEW

1. **(Slide 39)** Discerning the Spirit of God and leading God's people accordingly requires energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. However, our energy can be easily depleted, we can question our intelligence, our imaginations can be dampened, and our love can be tested. So, what sustains us in this work?
2. **(Slide 40)** This ordination question begins by asking if you will pray for the people. Perhaps the most recognizable prayer is the Lord's Prayer. In that example of prayer, attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke, we find these words: "**When** you pray. ..." Prayer is what we do; a natural and enduring expression of the human hope that life makes sense. Prayer is a human inclination to express our need, our joy, our desires, our pain to God. Prayer is an attitude, a lifestyle of orientation toward God. Prayer is both individual and corporate; an act of obedience to God and an act of solidarity with the community of faith. John Calvin defined prayer as "none other than an expanding of our hearts in the presence of God."
3. **(Slide 41)** Using the resource material and this guide, briefly address each of the four areas: energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.

ENERGY: The energy given by spiritual leaders to their work should not be demanding but should be life-giving. There are many things that demand our energy on a daily basis. Unlike the cultural norms of productivity and efficiency, the church values wholeness and healing. The energy of leadership is rooted in countercultural values, such as sabbath. Sabbath teaches us that we must not continually pour ourselves out for others, but that we also need times of refreshment and times to be replenished. We must keep one another accountable for the levels of energy we are able to bring to the tasks of leadership and for ensuring we are engaging in restorative practices. The promise to serve with energy is a promise to give your energy and a promise to take time to replenish your energy.

INTELLIGENCE: As Presbyterians, we are deeply invested in the rigor of intellectual thought. There are, however, different kinds of intelligence. Howard Gardner, a professor of education at Harvard University and developmental psychologist, outlined nine types of intelligence: music smart, body smart, people smart, logic smart, word smart, nature smart, self smart, picture smart, and body smart. **(Slide 42)** Each way of knowing contributes to our corporate knowledge. "There are many gifts, but the same Spirit." The promise to serve with intelligence is a promise to use your unique way of knowing the world in service to the Kingdom of God.

(Slide 44) IMAGINATION: The Reverend Dr. Rodger Nishioka, senior associate and director of adult educational ministries at Village Presbyterian Church in Prairie Village, Kansas, discusses the theological value of imagination in this YouTube video. The title of the video is *Imagination—Dr. Rodger Nishioka*.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9_EXaFj2lc

The promise to serve with imagination is a promise to encourage creativity and creative problem solving.

LOVE: "They will know we are Christians by our love." This familiar song reflects the simple truth that love is at the heart of our identity as the church of Jesus Christ. To love one another, we must know and be known by one another. Taking time to share the joys and sorrows of life and praying for one another allows us to know one another more deeply. To promise to serve with love is a promise to work on building relationships with other leaders, to demonstrate love in our interactions, and to be open to sharing our lives with one another.

REFLECT

1. Brainstorm ways the leaders can engage in meaningful practices of prayer for the people of your congregation. Perhaps you could pray for several members at each meeting, divide up the congregation among the officers, pray for those with particular needs, pray for groups of people such as Sunday school teachers, food pantry volunteers, etc.
2. Do the energy inventory with your group as described at the end of the "Energy" section of the resource material.
3. Where do you see imagination at work in this congregation? What are the hindrances to imagination?
4. Tell a story about a time you gave or received love in community. How did you open yourself to receiving love and care? Was it easy or difficult?

RESPOND

Close by leading the group in one of the Prayer and Spiritual Practice activities included in the appendix to this session.

i. (1) Will you be a faithful ruling elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in councils of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

REVIEW

1. **(Slide 44)** There are four specific tasks of ruling elders highlighted by this question:
 - a. Be faithful in your role as shepherd to the people.
 - b. Provide for the worship, nurture, and service of the people.
 - c. Share in responsibilities of government and discipline, serving in councils of the church.
 - d. Show the love and justice of Jesus Christ.

Ask ruling elders to turn to G-2.0301 in the *Book of Order* or provide a copy for them to use. Ask them to underline phrases that describe the functions, role, and qualities of ruling elders.

2. **(Slide 45)** Remind ruling elders of the three points in the section “Will you be a ruling elder,” emphasizing the parity or equality in our Presbyterian polity and that they do not carry the responsibility alone. Those whom God calls, God also empowers.
3. You may wish to copy the resource material for this question and distribute to the elders prior to the session. If so, use the reflection questions to engage in conversation about the material.
4. Review the responsibilities of responsibility the session carries for worship as presented in the resource material referencing the Directory for Worship in the *Book of Order*. Highlight the difference in responsibilities for worship between ruling elders and ministers of Word and Sacrament. **(Slide 46)**
5. Review the last part of the question, which focuses on shared responsibilities of governance, discipline, and participation in the wider church. If possible, share the structure of your presbytery with the ruling elders, showing opportunities for serving the larger church. In addition, point out the opportunity to serve in higher councils.

REFLECT

1. Ask participants to describe their understanding of *faithfulness* as it relates to their role as ruling elders. Be sure to point out that faithfulness is described as having a pastoral aspect in this context. “Those elected to be ruling elders and the pastor(s) of the congregation are to serve as a pastoral care team.” What are the reactions to this understanding?
2. Discuss the questions provided in the resource material. Fulfilling the responsibilities of ruling elder begins with individual practices and corporate practices as ruling elders gather together for worship and business. Being a ruling

elder is about the spiritual health of the congregation, not primarily about the business of the church.

3. The last part of this question asks ruling elders if they will try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ. Ask elders to share how they seek to fulfill this promise in their personal lives, as well as through their service to the church.

RESPOND

As the final lesson, invite the participants to share their story about call and discernment with one another in pairs.

(Slide 47) Read Colossians 3:12–17. Close with prayer for the ruling elders, for the shared ministry, and for the members of the congregation.

i. (2) Will you be a faithful deacon, teaching charity, urging concern, and directing the people's help to the friendless and those in need, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

REVIEW

1. Begin this session with a study of Acts 6:1–7 and the term “deacon,” as noted in the resource material.
2. **(Slide 48)** There are five specific tasks of deacons highlighted by this question:
 - a. Be faithful in your role as servant among the people.
 - b. Teach charity.
 - c. Urge concern.
 - d. Direct people's energy and help toward those in need.
 - e. Show the love and justice of Jesus Christ.
3. **(Slide 49)** Using resource materials, review each of the five tasks outlined in the ordination question.
 - a. Faithfulness—Emphasize that the commitment to serve as a deacon is a commitment to keep ministries of compassion alive in the midst of challenges and resistance. Faithfulness also requires a commitment to care for our spiritual lives, so we can continue to care for others.
 - b. Teach charity—Explain the understanding of the word “charity” as simply “love of persons.” Note the admonition from Luke 10:1–11 to serve in pairs. Invite comments on the advantages of partnering in ministry. Describe the concept of “toxic charity” and how it differs from true charity.

See:
<https://www.inphilanthropy.org/sites/default/files/files/pages/Toxic%20Charity%20Synopsis.pdf>.
 - c. Urge concern—Review the various areas of ministry that are undertaken by the deacons in your context that urge concern for the friendless and those in need. Ask participants to identify which ministries show love for those within the congregation and which ministries show love for those beyond the congregation.
 - d. Direct help to those in need—This task requires deacons to be attentive to the actual needs of the community and of the congregation, and to match needs with the resources of the congregation.
 - e. Show the love and justice of Jesus Christ—Read Mark 2:1–12 and 8:1–9 as illustrative of the love and justice of Jesus Christ. Read G-2.0201 from the *Book of Order*. What similarities do you hear between the gospel of Mark and the instructions to deacons in the *Book of Order*?

REFLECT

1. Ask participants:
 - a. Where do you experience the greatest joy and satisfaction in your ministry as a deacon? Where do you experience the greatest challenge?
 - b. How do you care for your own spiritual life and spiritual growth so that you can continue to care for others?
 - c. How might we work to avoid engaging in “toxic charity?”
 - d. How will you seek to fulfill the promise to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ in your personal life, as well as through your ministry as a deacon?

RESPOND

As the final lesson, invite the participants to share why they answered the call to serve as a deacon with one another in pairs.

(Slide 50) Read Colossians 3:12–17. Close with prayer for the deacons and for their ministry with the congregation and the community.

Retreat Leader Guide for Coming Alive in Christ: Training for PC(USA) Ruling Elders and Deacons Based on the Constitutional Questions

Suggestions for Use in Preparation for Ordination/Installation

Session One

REVIEW—Use the **Review** sections found in the monthly leader guide for the lessons on:

INTRODUCTION—Baptism, Call, and Membership

- a. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?**
- b. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?**
- c. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?**

REFLECT

1. What gifts have you identified in yourself? How have your gifts been nurtured and affirmed by this community? How are you using your gifts for the common good?
2. What responsibilities do we carry as people and as leaders who have received the salvation of God?
3. At baptism, we affirm that each person is a gift from God, chosen for salvation and for service, endowed by God with gifts to be used in obedience to Christ and for the building up of the Kingdom. An additional tenet of the Reformed tradition is that we, as members of Christ's body, have a particular calling in the world and to discern our calling we look to Christ.
 - a. To what have you been called?
 - b. Are there particular tasks that you believe God is calling you to carry out to deliver the message of the free grace of God in Jesus Christ?

RESPOND

Invite those gathered to say these words from the *Book of Common Worship* to reaffirm their baptism and their call to leadership.

*"In baptism God claims us,
and seals us to show that we belong to God.
God frees us from sin and death,
uniting us with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection.
By water and the Holy Spirit,
we are made members of the church, the body of Christ,
and joined to Christ's ministry of love, peace, and justice."*

(Book of Common Worship, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, p. 408.)

Session Two

REVIEW—Use the **Review** sections found in the monthly leader guide for the lessons on:

- d. Will you fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?**
- e. Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?**
- f. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?**
- g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?**

REFLECT

2. Invite participants to reflect on the context of the entire congregation by exploring the content and question provided in the resource material in the "Called to lead: But, where?! How?!" section of question (d) within the resource material.
 - What experiences have you had as a congregation that have led you to look at ministry in a transformative, creative way?

Invite them to reflect on their history as a congregation and any challenges (economic, theological, staffing, facility, cultural) they have faced that have caused them to innovate and be transformed in their approach to ministry.

3. How do you see the *Book of Order* as beneficial to your personal spiritual growth? To your growth as a spiritual leader?
4. How will you work specifically for reconciliation as a spiritual leader in this congregation? As a Christian in the world?

RESPOND

In an effort to strengthen the relationships between church leaders, do one of the following:

- Divide into small groups of no more than four people. Share prayer requests with one another and pray for one another.
- Place the names of all the members of your group in a container and invite each person to draw the name of a colleague in ministry for whom they will pray, encouraging them to reach out in support to one another.
- Partner with another congregation in your presbytery and exchange names of ruling elders or deacons with them, covenanting to pray for one another.

Session Three

REVIEW—Use the **Review** sections found in the monthly leader guide for the lessons on:

- h. Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?**
- i. Will you be a faithful ruling elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in councils of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?**
- j. Will you be a faithful deacon, teaching charity, urging concern, and directing the people's help to the friendless and those in need, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?**

REFLECT

1. Brainstorm the ways the leaders can engage in meaningful practices of prayer for the people of the congregation. Perhaps you could pray for several members at each meeting, divide up the congregation among the officers, pray for those with particular needs, pray for groups of people such as Sunday school teachers, food pantry volunteers, etc.

Consider separating the group into the office to which they have been called—ruling elders and deacons.

2. For ruling elders: In order to serve the people of God, session members need to be able to work and serve effectively together, knowing and trusting each other, and learning to appreciate the particular calling each one has, with their own gifts and skills, to serve in this council.
 - What are some ways the session can encourage community and trust-building among its members?
 - How can the session foster healthy relationships and safe, productive working environments?

Faithful leaders lead by example. They are called to model for the people of God a holistic approach to living the faith in which body, mind, and spirit are nurtured and replenished. Living a life of prayer and personal spiritual discipline is therefore of great importance in the ministry of discernment and governance.

- How do you model self-care and spiritual care for yourself and others?

Ruling elders might also discuss more about the specific responsibilities of serving as a ruling elder in this particular congregation.

3. For deacons:

- Where do you experience the greatest joy and satisfaction in your ministry as a deacon? Where do you experience the greatest challenge?
- How do you care for your own spiritual life and spiritual growth so that you can continue to care for others?
- How might we work to avoid engaging in “toxic charity”?
- How will you seek to fulfill the promise to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ in your personal life, as well as through your ministry as a deacon?

Deacons might also discuss more about the specific responsibilities of serving as a ruling elder in this particular congregation.

RESPOND

Invite the participants to divide into groups of two or three and share with one another about the reasons they answered the call to serve as a ruling elder or deacon.