

ORDINATION/INSTALLATION OF A MINISTER

The Public Service

By The Rev. Dr. Lloyd M. Hall Jr.

A contemporary public service for ordination or installation will not vary much in outline from the form suggested by H.M. Dexter's *Hand-Book*, p 154. More contemporary examples can be found in Gray, *Worshipbook*, p 705ff; in Abercrombie, *How to Gather and Order...*, p 65f.:

Brief preliminary statement from the Moderator, followed by the reading of the Result of Council by its Scribe.

Invocation, and reading of a few passages of appropriate scripture.

Singing

Sermon

Prayer of Ordination, with laying on of hands (or of Installation, without the laying on of hands, if the candidate have [*Sic.*] been ordained before).

Singing

Charge to the Pastor

Right Hand of Fellowship

Singing

Concluding Prayer

Benediction, by the Pastor

The 'Address to the People,' which was for a time considered well, it is thought better to omit; as apt to repeat, for substance, much contained in other parts, and unduly to prolong the service.

This last disclaimer by Dexter is an important caution though not a rule for the order. If the service is to include a sermon, a charge to the minister, and a charge to the people there needs to be clear communication among those delivering the respective parts.

They need to have at least enough knowledge of what the others are doing so that they are not redundant, and they need to be given - and adhere to - strict time limits for the presentations. A twelve minute sermon followed by two four-minute charges will

probably not “unduly prolong the service” and may be useful. If those limitations seem unreasonable, it would be wise, as Dexter suggests, to eliminate one or more of them.

Contemporary congregations seem to expect a service to last an hour, accept a special service that runs to an hour and fifteen minutes, and think by ninety minutes “this should have already ended.”

This service belongs to the Church and is a service of worship. While the candidate for ordination is very much at the center of what occurs here, we are primarily engaged in recognizing what God is doing and giving thanks. We are lifting up this consecration so that it will not only attest to the personal accomplishments but also will engage and submit to the divine power as we “set apart” this person for ministry. And it is a service of celebration, and the glory is God's.

The liturgical traditions of the ordaining Church should be honored. The order of worship should not be markedly different from the order normally followed. To be sure, more attention will be paid to the scope of music, the number of participants will be greater, and there will be somewhat more “pomp and circumstance.” That is as it should be. Leaving this service we should all know that something unusual and wonderful has happened; but we shouldn't have felt lost while it was happening.

Just as there is a temptation to become too personally emotional in the presentation of the paper, there can be a temptation to “Barnumize” the ordination service. Determine the order and then identify the participants, the music, etc. Let each element serve its appropriate function in worship. No matter how spectacular the choir and organ might be, they will be most effective if what they do enhances the worship experience and helps to lift us toward God. This is one of those celebratory services when we can legitimately “pull out all the stops” - provided that every stop serves our purpose in gathering and is not merely for show.

There is often some question as to the appropriate garb for the clergy. Tradition usually provides for a processional of all the clergy in attendance, whether participating in the service or not. “Customary pulpit attire” is normally the order of the day. The use of academic hoods is equally appropriate as we worship in a context of also honoring a “learned ministry.” Some clergy will almost always opt for the use of stoles. For their benefit, it is helpful to define the color that the Church will be using for this occasion (if the Church utilizes liturgical colors in any way).

Another issue of usual concern is the question of who will participate in the laying on of hands. The ancient tradition certainly leans toward the participation of only those previously ordained clergy who are in attendance. This would seem to preserve some sort of clerical continuity though it has a fairly rough fit into contemporary Congregational polity. The tradition is to be commended for the spiritual power that is concentrated by the laying on of hands by those who have previously been set apart.

However, honoring the fact that it is not the gathered clergy but the Church, acting at Christ's directive that is ordaining, it seems orderly for the Church to be a participant. The Church's Moderator and Diaconate Chairperson often join the clergy in this crowning moment. The laying-on-of-hands is no longer observed in services of installation, ordination having taken on a lifetime characteristic.

Because the service will be slightly unusual and the number of participants greater than normal, it is important to plot and "choreograph" the service. "Walk through" the service. How did the participants (and non-participating clergy) get into place? Where did they assemble and upon whose directive did they begin to process? As the service moves forward, who has to cross what to get to where? How should the participants be arranged for the greatest smoothness of operation? Who will recess? When? How will they know when to go?

Plan to assemble all of these folks before the service so that instructions can be given and questions answered. The processional should begin to assemble about thirty minutes before the service unless instructions have been given at some previous time.

* Excerpt, *From Call to Settlement*, Oak Creek: Congregational Press, Lloyd M Hall Jr., © 1999, used by permission

Dedications

Early on our Congregational ancestors made the decision that they wanted no part of the 'Romish' custom of 'holy days' or holy anything else, for that matter. They had a profound appreciation for the sacredness of all reality and thus saw no need for a "setting apart" or dedication, since all things came from and returned to God. Over the years our understanding of the dedicatory act, like our understanding of various approaches to worship, has changed. It is not at all uncommon for Churches of our Way to dedicate or 'bless' a building, an organ, or anything else involved with the service of God. We do this not because we believe our actions make the thing holy or sacred. We do it to remind ourselves that we are setting apart this item for the service of God and God's people. Henry David Gray's *Congregational Worship Book* has a number of specific dedications and orders of worship. It is appropriate to do acts of dedication either within the principal worship service on Sunday morning or within the context of a special service of worship, e.g. evening prayer. In keeping with the Reformed emphasis in worship, the action which takes the form of a prayer should follow the reading and preaching of God's Word. What follows is a sample, generic, prayer of dedication that can be applied rather widely. It can also provide a model for the composition or 'free prayer' of dedication by the Minister.

After having read and preached on Colossians 1:9b-14 or Romans 8:24-28, the Minister calls the congregation to prayer.

Minister: Blessed be God the fountain of all goodness, the source of all life.

***People:* May God's name be praised for evermore. Amen!**

Minister: All that God has created, God sustains. God guides all that is and directs all human works that are good and that are undertaken for a good purpose. God's goodness prompts those who believe to praise and bless the Lord with heart and voice. God is the source of all blessing, the origin of all that is good and beautiful and true. We celebrate our belief in God's goodness and love toward us as we set apart [e.g. this chapel, etc.] for/as [e.g. a place of prayer and worship, etc.].
Let us pray.

Minister: God loves all that God has made and God's goodness sustains the universe. May God bestow blessing upon us as we gather here and on all those who will use [e.g. this chapel, etc.]. We ask you:

***People:* Lord, send us your blessing.**

Minister: You have poured forth in our hearts your Son's Spirit, in whom we cry out, Abba, Father; hear your children as we acclaim your goodness and praise your holy name. Renew your love within us that we may love you more dearly, see you more clearly, and follow you more nearly through [e.g. our worship in this place of prayer]; we ask you:

***People:* Lord, hear our prayer.**

Minister: Blessed are you, Lord God, Creator of all that is, giver of life, and source of all that is good. You have given us all good things even our desire to praise you is your gift. Grant that we may use all created thing gratefully, sharing your abundant gifts with all who are in need. Receive our prayers and grant that what we set apart this day may be a continual reminder of your presence and goodness. We ask through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.