

DATE: June 7, 2026

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 27

THEME: We are called to build up the body of Christ.

SUBJECT: Ordination

TITLE: The Common Good

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: Whom shall we serve?

Prayer: Gracious and loving Spirit, fill our minds with your Word and help us to be curious. Increase our love for one another, and inspire us with a commitment to create a transformed world, starting with ourselves. Amen.

Today is a special day. We're ordaining three people to "office," two deacons and one ruling elder. Deacons and elders have different roles— different functions —and as we just heard in 1st Corinthians, people such as these are all called by the Holy Spirit because ...

... they have different kinds of **gifts**. As the calls went out from the Nominating Committee a few months ago to find people to fill vacant seats on the deacon board and on Session (our church council), the callers listened to the Spirit through the voices of those they called who probably said things like, "I don't have strong finance skills but I do work well with people" or "I've got too much going on right now and am not able to serve, but you can ask another time." Through physical phone calls and prayer, the Spirit spoke; and out of the discernment process emerged the people we are ordaining and installing today, people who have skills or are willing to explore skills they may not realize they have.

The people we're ordaining and installing are also called to different kinds of **service**. There are three kinds of officers in the Presbyterian Church: deacons, ruling elders and teaching elders and they serve in different ways. The role of the deacon (per

the Book of Order, G-2.0201) “is one of compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, the friendless, the oppressed, those burdened by unjust policies or structures, or anyone in distress.” We have an amazing group of deacons at Southminster! They write notes to people, they serve coffee and goodies at fellowship time and at potlucks (AND they clean up afterward), they visit people, they make prayer shawls, they coordinate meals for people who may be recovering from an illness and - chances are - a deacon greeted you as you walked in the door this morning. They are a vital part of pastoral care at our church.

Ruling elders are the people who are elected to serve on Session (or any governing body of the Church). Now, we may know and love them by the visible things they do: making sure the building and grounds look spiffy, handling money and finances, organizing classes for adults and children, making sure you can hear me right now through our sound and streaming systems, coordinating all things having to do with worship. But their ultimate responsibility is also laid out in our constitution: “Ruling elders are so named not because they “lord it over” the congregation (Matt. 20:25), but because they are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure *its* fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture *its* faith and life” (G-2.0301). In short, they’re charged with ensuring the spiritual health and vitality of this congregation. And they’re my bosses. (Imagine having 15 bosses!)

For what it’s worth, I’ve got my own way of serving as a teaching elder. You may have noticed that I do a fair amount of preaching. I also preside at the communion table, “[interpreting] the mysteries of grace and [lifting] the people’s vision toward the

hope of God's new creation" (G-2.0501). Overall, I'm charged with teaching the faith and with equipping the saints for the work of ministry. I'm no more important nor less important than deacons or ruling elders.

All of these are elected positions. In early April at a congregational meeting, you all elected the people we're ordaining and installing today. Having discerned that the nominees for ruling elder were "persons of wisdom and maturity of faith [and had] demonstrated skills in leadership and [were] compassionate in spirit," this body affirmed their voice and vote on Session to lead this congregation. Similarly, those who are about to become deacons have been recognized as being "persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, sincere compassion, and sound judgment." Y'know, at my memorial service, I hope no one describes me that way because I wouldn't want people to get the wrong impression about me. 'Course, I've never been ordained as a deacon, so I've never actually had to live an exemplary life or be of sound judgment! But God isn't looking for perfect people. If that was the case, I suspect that we'd have a very small deacon board and Session! I want to note, however, that there is one common word in the list of elder and deacon qualifications that are listed in the Book of Order: compassion. Again, God isn't looking for perfect people. Dr. King once outlined God's qualifications for service: "You only need a heart full of grace [and] a soul generated by love" (Drum Major Instinct speech, 1968). That sounds like a pretty good definition of compassion to me. And I think that describes all of our ruling elders and deacons pretty well.

1 Corinthians adds a shocking (to us) addendum to the point about having different kinds of gifts and doing different kinds of service: "Now to each one the

manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” It’s great that some have the gift of administration and others have the gift of comforting people in distress, but ultimately the work of the Spirit isn’t about us individually. It’s about us collectively, and this is hard for us who have grown up in a culture that so highly prizes the individual. As I read this passage, gifts are ultimately given *for the good of the whole*. Extending that idea a little farther, if we use our gifts simply to serve ourselves (maybe to make ourselves rich or famous or powerful), we aren’t using our gifts as God intended and then no one is ultimately served well. But, if we use our gifts for the good of all — for the building up of the whole body and not merely for our own good — then we will begin to live into God’s vision of the Beloved Community where poverty, hunger, and hatred are replaced by inclusive economic and social justice.

Thanks to all who are being ordained and installed today for hearing and answering the call. May God bless us all through your service.