“The Sacred Act of Holy Orders”

Acts 6:1-8

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In his TED talk, Drew Dudley tells of a time he was an unofficial leader.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It was registration day at his college and he was out promoting a student club.

Being an upperclassmen, he felt at home on his university campus.

But there were many anxious freshmen, ill at ease on that registration day.

Not sure whether or not they would survive this next step in life.

Dudley saw one girl who looked particularly frightened.

She was standing in line with her parents, waiting to check in.

She must have had a terrified look on her face.

Dudley, decided to have a little fun with her.

He turned to the guy next to her in line, gave him a lollipop and told him to give it to the girl.

The other guy did as he was told.

Immediately Dudley belted out “Look at that! First day away from home and you’re taking candy from a stranger?”

Everyone around them laughed and while the girl was somewhat embarrassed, it put her at ease.

She suddenly had the confidence she needed.

Dudley didn’t think too much about what he had done.

In fact he had completely forgotten about it until years later when she wrote to him about it.

She explained just how nervous she was that day.

She said she was on the verge of turning around and going home. Too scared to go through with her decision to attend college.

But then at that moment, Dudley came over, made her laugh and changed everything.

He made her feel welcomed. Like she belonged there.

Without knowing it, he changed the course of her life because she decided to stick it out and give school a try.

Not only that, she started to date the guy whom Dudley told to give her a lollipop. They would eventually get married and were sure to invite Dudley to the wedding.

It is remarkable to think how even our littlest actions can make a big impact on other people.

Dudley didn’t consider himself a leader.

It wasn’t like he was an RA, getting paid to make the freshmen feel welcomed.

He was just being himself, offering a bit of humor to a very anxious situation.

Looking back, Dudley realized that he was a leader in that moment.

He was a seasoned college student who knew the ropes of navigating school.

He was able to use his personality to help out a new student, helping her make the decision to stay at school.

During his TED Talk, Dudley emphasizes how we tend to place too much emphasis on defined leadership.

We tend to think that leaders need to have special titles and be given special tasks.

That leadership is set aside for special people.

But Dudley’s story reminds us that leadership takes various forms.

Whether in an official capacity or not, we are all given the task of leadership in our contexts.

This is especially true in the church.

Too often, we get to thinking that only certain people can be leaders in the church.

In the Catholic Church, leadership is considered a sacrament.

They view Holy Orders as a sacred thing, set apart for certain people.

Certain men, are called to the task of bishop, priest, or deacon.

They believe that the priest is infused with a special grace – giving him authority and virtue that is unavailable to the ordinary church goer.

They take very seriously the matter of being called by God to certain roles in the church.

But, it limits the nature of who God calls to service.

It is a limited understanding of leadership in the church and it prevents many very capable people from answering the call to serve.

We Protestants look at holy orders more broadly.

We acknowledge that God calls each of us to unique leadership roles.

We recognize that there are an array of gifts that are needed for leadership in the church.

Each of these gifts, bestowed by the Holy Spirit, help the church faithfully represent Jesus Christ in the world.

In our church, there is no hierarchy when it comes to leadership.

We don’t place certain roles on a pedestal and declare that they are more sacred than others.

We acknowledge that all roles are unique and special, but none more important than any other.

Leadership in the church comes in all forms.

Not just those big titles which tend to intimidate us.

One doesn’t need to have an official title to be called to the work of the church.

We call this the priesthood of all believers

We believe that folks who visit the sick and prepare food for funerals are just as important as Executive Presbyters who oversee dozens of churches.

We believe that ruling elders who help discern the needs of the church are just as important as teaching elders who deliver sermons.

This is why 8/9 of the questions asked at ordination are the same for Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders.

We view these roles with the same amount of respect.

We trust that each of these forms of leadership are holy orders.

And we believe that everyone has a calling to serve in some capacity.

This calling doesn’t need to be approved by a committee.

One isn’t elected to serve a term as a called Christian.

This calling comes from God and is initiated by our baptism.

When the water from the font touches our skin, we recognize that we are claimed by God and called to serve.

The water of our baptism launches us on a journey of holy orders.

I once heard a preacher declare that baptism should come with a strong warning label.

That once we are marked by the water, we are given a responsibility to serve.

We are called to use our gifts from God.

Put them to use in the Church and the world.

Obeying those holy orders that were given to us in our baptism and reminded of every time we participate in the Lord’s Supper..

Holy Orders can look like a lot of things.

It might mean using your outgoing personality to greet visitors at church.

Making them feel welcome and engaging them in conversation.

Letting them know what our Church is all about and how glad we are to have the visitor.

It might mean using you gift of cooking or baking to provide food for times of fellowship.

One of the most effective forms of hospitality is through food.

It is a gift and blessing to experience fellowship over a meal, and the person who provides the food plays a vital role.

Holy orders can mean using your artistic gifts to bring beauty to the worship space.

Perhaps through art pieces or banners.

We see the reflection of God’s creation in pieces of art created by church folks.

To obey holy orders might mean serving the community.

Volunteering at the Food Bank, or helping teach at Vacation Bible School.

Offering support to the local school district, or helping people find jobs.

Meeting the needs of the community is an extension of what the Church is all about.

One might put their holy orders to use in family life.

Grandparents helping raise grandchildren. Or adult children caring for their aging parents.

How we care for our families is directly related to how we are obeying our Holy Orders from God.

The roles we are called to aren’t limited to work within the church walls.

God calls us to serve wherever we are.

Like Drew Dudley on that college campus, we might not be aware when were are stepping up and following those orders.

We might be oblivious to the leadership role God puts us in.

But we can trust that no matter what our gifts are, no matter what titles the world has bestowed up on us, we are all given Holy Orders.

Called to serve.

Called to love.

Called to be leaders for God.

Amen.

1. **Dudley, Drew. (2010, September). Everyday Leadership [Video file]. Retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/drew\_dudley\_everyday\_leadership?language=en.** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)