

MAKING LIFE DISCIPLES COMMISSIONING SERVICE OPTIONS

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Introduction and Rationale

It's difficult to promote or get a congregation to embrace certain values without institutionalizing them. For example, in order to become a more life-affirming congregation, one mega-church recently hired a Director of Life Initiatives.

Institutionalizing a value is difficult, if not impossible, for most smaller congregations or parishes. All good churches of all sizes, however, have good pastors. And good pastors are crucial when it comes to giving public support for what a church values and stands for.

We have all heard the phrase, "speed of the leader, speed of the team." If the pastor doesn't feel something's important enough to talk about from the pulpit, that sends out a strong message, and vice versa.

Some pastors have a policy against commissioning services. Their concern is that there are too many church ministries that may want to do this and, if we do it for one, we must do it for all.

This perspective is understandable; however, there are few target audiences that need more intentional focus and public support than those facing unplanned or unwanted pregnancies. The reason is that this issue is so private and hidden. Further, people often hide their "crisis" pregnancy, or the sin that may have led to it, with an abortion and then leave. No one ever knows. How does church leadership let its congregation know there are "Life Disciples" trained to which the abortion-vulnerable might turn? Yes, brochures offering confidential help can be placed in the restrooms or appropriate messaging placed on the church's website. There's no better way, however, to get the word out initially and underscore the importance of this ministry than a pastoral commissioning service.

Here are two options for *how* to hold a *Making Life Disciples* Commissioning Service:

THE SHORTER, LESS FORMAL VERSION

The pastor calls the team up after or during worship and introduces them, gives information about the goal/focus of the ministry and how they can be contacted for services. The pastor then invites other key leaders up and together they lay hands on and pray for the team, asking for God's wisdom, discernment, anointing, and success.

The pastor then concludes the service by asking the church to stand and say this together (have it printed ahead of time on the overhead or bulletin): "At our church, [insert name of church], there is never a need for abortion. If one of our members makes a choice or experiences a difficult situation that leads to pregnancy, they don't need to hide or run. There is no judgement at [insert name of church]. There is only love, forgiveness, compassion, hope, support, and confidential help. We will do our best to come alongside anyone facing an unplanned, unwanted, unexpected, or unexpectedly complicated pregnancy in any way possible to insure mother, father, and baby experience the abundant life that Jesus offers."

THE LONGER, MORE FORMAL VERSION¹

PRESENTATION

Leader: Dear brothers and sisters, you have been equipped to serve as Life Disciples at [congregation]. Listen now to the words we find in Scripture.

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“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.” (Psa. 103:13, ESV)

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you...” (Jer. 1:5a, ESV)

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (Matt. 28: 18-20, NIV)

REQUESTS

Leader: Brothers and sisters, each of you has been shown compassion, hope, and help in the good news of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. We ask you now to join in serving the Lord and men and women facing unplanned pregnancies in our congregation and community who need compassion, hope, and help.

As the Father has shown you love in Christ, we ask you to be conduits of His love to others.

As the Lord Jesus has responded to your needs, we ask you to strive to be responsive to the needs of others.

As the Holy Spirit has shown you grace, we ask that you extend grace to others.

VOWS

Leader: Are you prepared to nurture the skills you have learned and use them in service to others—to support, encourage, build up, and support people in need?

Answer: Yes, with the help of God.

Leader: (addressing congregation) Now, we ask you, members of [name of congregation], to open your hearts to the ministry of these men and women and pray for them, that they may be effective servants of Christ. Are you prepared to meet this request? If so, answer, “Yes, with the help of God.”

Then ask the church to stand and say this together (have it printed ahead of time on the overhead or bulletin):
"At our church, [insert name of church], there is never a need for abortion. If one of our members makes a choice or experiences a difficult situation that leads to pregnancy, they don't need to hide or run. There is no judgement at [insert name of church]. There is only love, forgiveness, compassion, hope, support, and confidential help. We will do our best to come alongside anyone facing an unplanned, unwanted, unexpected, or unexpectedly complicated pregnancy in any way possible to insure mother, father, and baby experience the abundant life that Jesus offers."

Congregation: Yes, with the help of God.

Leader: (again addressing the *Making Life Disciples* graduates) Are you prepared to serve as Life Disciples at [name of congregation]?

Answer: Yes, with the help of God.

BLESSING AND COMMENDATION

Leader: Now, please repeat this prayer after me (break the following down into short phrases): “Holy Spirit, work through me. Help me to express Your Word to these men and women so they can make a life-affirming decision.”

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Leader: Come forward now and receive a blessing. (The Leader may direct the graduates to stand near the altar or some equally appropriate place.)

May God make this prayer so in your life. As you move forward to serve your church and others, always remember your own ongoing and daily need for the compassion, hope, and help you will be offering. The gospel refreshes, motivates, and gives us joy to serve with grace and patience rather than shame, guilt, manipulation, and frustration.

May God richly bless you so that you may be a blessing to others.

May the Lord Jesus be present with you in every place as you carry his name and serve him.

PRAYER

Leader: O God, we ask you to take our sisters [insert first names] and our brothers [insert first names] into your care. You have blessed them with gifts and talents and have provided them with an opportunity to learn more about helping people. May they serve you with the power of the Holy Spirit. May they be quick to serve, patient in listening, and willing to share themselves with others. Give us thankful hearts for them, and show them in times of stress and satisfaction a special measure of your mercy and joy. Keep them strong in the faith you have given them for the sake of Jesus, who cares for all of us in every way forever. Amen.

DISMISSAL

Leader: Go now in peace to love and serve the Lord!

¹This version borrows adapts uses language from the Commissioning Service used by Stephen Ministries. Additionally, for churches that have a Stephen Ministry, MLD fits well as a specialization under that ministry umbrella.