

Session 10: The Laying On of Hands

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

If Christ instituted a ministry at the Supper and on Easter evening, we should be able to watch the New Testament hand it on. Tonight the group watches. From Acts and the Pastoral Letters they discover office language at the Church's very first business meeting (Judas' vacant "office" that another must take), elders appointed "in every church," a gift conferred "through the laying on of my hands," warnings not to lay hands on anyone hastily, and Paul's four-generation relay: what you heard from me, entrust to faithful men, who will teach others also. They also face the sharpest terminological objection in the whole debate, that the New Testament never calls Christian ministers "priests," and answer it honestly, with Paul's own priestly-service vocabulary for his ministry and with the earliest voices outside the New Testament. The aim: succession stops being a diagram from a tract and becomes something the group watched happen on the page.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism teaches that in order that the mission entrusted to the apostles might be continued after their death, they consigned, by will and testament as it were, to their immediate collaborators the duty of completing and consolidating the work they had begun, and that this apostolic ministry continues in the episcopal office (CCC 861 to 862), with priests as the bishops' co-workers (CCC 1562): as the office which the Lord confided to Peter and to the apostles is permanent, it is transmitted through episcopal consecration (CCC 861 to 862, drawing on *Lumen Gentium*). And no one has a RIGHT to ordination; like Aaron, like the Son himself in Hebrews 5, one is called and conferred, never self-appointed (CCC 1578).

What You Need to Know

Begin at the beginning, because the group will not expect the first exhibit to be Judas. In Acts 1:15 to 26, before Pentecost, the Church's first order of business is filling a vacancy. Peter quotes the Psalms: "His OFFICE let another take" (Acts 1:20; the Greek word is *episkope*, the overseership word, the root of "episcopal" and "bishop"). Weigh what is being assumed: Judas held not merely a personal relationship with Jesus but an OFFICE, and the office survives the man and must be refilled. The group met this logic in Session 7: Isaiah 22's stewardship passed from Shebna to Eliakim; offices in the King's house outlive their holders. (An analogy of pattern, not an equation Acts itself draws.) Matthias is chosen and "enrolled with the eleven." Apostleship, at the Church's own founding moment, behaves like an office with succession, not like a title that dies with its holder.

Then watch the pattern spread. Acts 6: the Seven are chosen, and the apostles "prayed and laid their hands upon them"; prayer plus hands becomes the Church's ordination grammar. Acts 14:23: Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders... in every church" on the first missionary journey; church planting includes officer installation, immediately, everywhere. Acts 20:17, 28: Paul summons "the elders (*presbyteroi*) of the church" of Ephesus and tells them "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopoi*), to care for (shepherd) the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son": elder and overseer applied to the same men, with shepherding as their task, appointed by the Spirit to guard the flock (Thread B, now an office); the settled later distinction of bishop, priest, and deacon took its crisp shape over the following decades. Then the Pastorals make the mechanism explicit. To Timothy: "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you" (1 Timothy 4:14), and, unmistakably

instrumental, "rekindle the gift of God that is within you THROUGH the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6): a gift, resident in the man, conferred through the gesture. "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (1 Timothy 5:22): the gesture is weighty precisely because it confers. Titus 1:5: "appoint elders in every town as I directed you": succession as standing instruction. And the relay of 2 Timothy 2:2, which the group counts live: "what you have heard from me before many witnesses (generation one: Paul) entrust to faithful men (generation two: Timothy... to generation three) who will be able to teach others also (generation four)." Four generations of transmission, commanded inside the New Testament itself. Whatever one calls this, it is not a church that expected ministry to end with the apostles.

Now the steelman, and it is the strongest terminological argument against the Catholic priesthood, so build it with respect: the New Testament calls these men elders (presbyteroi) and overseers (episkopoi), and NEVER ONCE calls a Christian minister hierous, the Greek word for a sacrificing priest. In the New Testament, hierous names cultic priests, Jewish and even pagan (Acts 14:13), and Melchizedek; it is applied to Christ; and, tellingly, its collective, hierateuma, priesthood, names the whole believing people (1 Peter 2), while Revelation calls believers hierois. So, the argument runs, "priest" was imported later, when the Church paganized or re-Levitized; the original ministry was preaching and administration, not sacerdotal. The answer has four honest layers. First, concede the word count; it is correct, and pretending otherwise costs credibility. Second, offer the plausible historical explanation, a scholarly account rather than a motive the texts state: through much of the period these documents were written, hierois in the plain sense were still offering lambs in a standing Temple, and the word-family's first Christian uses went to Christ (Hebrews) and the whole Church (1 Peter); the vocabulary was occupied. Third, and decisively: watch what the presbyteroi DO rather than what they are called. They are ordained by hands; they shepherd and guard; they teach with authority; they anoint and pray for forgiveness (James 5:14 to 16); and they preside where "do this" is done. And Paul reaches for explicitly cultic vocabulary for New Covenant ministry when it suits him, which the group discovers live: "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the PRIESTLY SERVICE of the gospel of God, so that the OFFERING of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:16; the verb is hierourgeo, to work as a priest). The reality is present and priestly; the noun waited. Fourth, the timeline of the noun's arrival is not what the objection needs it to be: in the generation or two after the apostles, the Didache calls the Eucharist a sacrifice (the group read it in Session 5); traditionally around the year 96, St. Clement of Rome describes the apostles appointing ministers and providing that on their death "other approved men should succeed to their ministry"; traditionally around 107, St. Ignatius makes the bishop the center of the Eucharist; and one small etymological delight for the room: the English word "priest" itself descends, through Old English, from presbyteros. The New Testament's own word for these men grew up into ours.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Two roots resurface tonight: Isaiah 22's transferable stewardship (Session 7) behind the "office" of Acts 1:20, and the conferral principle of Numbers 16 to 17 and Hebrews 5:4 (Session 4), now visible as the Church's actual practice: no one takes this honor on himself; hands are laid, or nothing happens. Moses commissioning Joshua by the laying on of hands (Numbers 27:18 to 23, Deuteronomy 34:9, "Joshua... was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him") is the Old Testament grammar the apostles inherited; use it as leader background or a Dig Deeper.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Clement of Rome

Writing from Rome to Corinth, traditionally dated around the year 96, St. Clement teaches in substance: Christ was sent from God, the apostles from Christ; the apostles, preaching through countryside and city, appointed their first converts as bishops and deacons for future believers; and, knowing there would be

strife over the title of bishop, they provided that when these men died, OTHER APPROVED MEN SHOULD SUCCEED TO THEIR MINISTRY. The first generation after the apostles describes succession as the apostles' own arrangement. (A faithful summary of his letter.)

Letter to the Corinthians (1 Clement), chapters 42 and 44

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Ignatius of Antioch

Around the year 107, on the road to his martyrdom, St. Ignatius wrote: "Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is under the bishop or one to whom he has entrusted it... where the bishop is, there let the people be." For Ignatius, ordered ministry and the Eucharist are one fabric: the offering of the Church happens through the man the Church has ordered to it. He is not inventing this on a prison march; he writes as one of our earliest witnesses to the pattern.

Letter to the Smyrnaeans

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Irenaeus of Lyons

St. Irenaeus, taught by St. Polycarp, who had known the apostles, teaches in substance that against the Gnostics' secret traditions the Church's answer is public and checkable: we can enumerate the men appointed bishops by the apostles, and their successors, down to our own day, church by church. Succession was the second century's receipt: proof that what the Church taught was what the apostles delivered. (A summary from his work against the heresies.)

Against Heresies, Book 3

Catechism Connection

- CCC 861 to 862: the apostles consigned their mission to immediate collaborators and provided for its continuation; as the office entrusted to Peter and the apostles is permanent, it is transmitted in the Church through ordination.
- CCC 1578: no one has a right to ordination; one is called by God and conferred by the Church, as Hebrews 5:4 taught and Session 4 discovered.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD B (serve and guard): strong development: Acts 20:28, "care for the church of God"; the guarding of Eden, of the tabernacle, of the flock, now an ordained charge. Name it once.
- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): the officers exist inside and for the priestly people; keep last week's balance explicit if the room tilts clerical.
- THREAD C (the firstborn): resting after last week's harvest.
- THREAD A (resolved): available; the succession question is "who may say Do This," so the Supper image is naturally nearby.

Session Goals

1. The group discovers the office language of Acts 1:20 and connects it, unprompted if possible, to Isaiah 22's stewardship.

2. The group assembles the ordination grammar from the Pastorals: a gift conferred through the laying on of hands, guarded by warnings against haste.
3. The group counts the four generations of 2 Timothy 2:2 with the text open.
4. The hierous steelman is stated at full strength, its word-count conceded honestly, and answered from what the ministers DO, from Romans 15:16, and from the immediate post-apostolic witnesses.
5. No one leaves thinking succession is a medieval diagram; they watched it happen in the text.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: The vacant office, Acts 1 (15 min)
- 0:30 Build II: Hands and elders, Acts and the Pastorals (25 min)
- 0:55 Build III: But never called priests, the steelman (25 min)
- 1:20 Send (5 min)
- 1:25 Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: drop the Dig Deeper (Moses and Joshua), and in Build II read Acts 6:6 and 14:23 yourself in one sentence each, keeping the group work for the Pastorals. Never cut the Romans 15:16 discovery; the steelman answer turns on it.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you chose apostles, breathed on them, and told them to make disciples to the close of the age. Tonight, show us how you kept that promise across the deaths of the very men you chose. Give us eyes for what is actually on the page. Amen.

Win

1. Have you ever received something that had been deliberately handed down: a trade, a recipe, a family business, a position? What did the handing-down add that the thing alone would not have had?
2. When a beloved leader leaves an organization, what determines whether the thing they built survives them?

Build I: The Vacant Office

Set the scene: after the Ascension, before Pentecost, one hundred twenty believers in an upper room. The Church's first item of business is in Acts 1:15 to 26. Read it aloud.

Q1. Focus on verse 20, Peter quoting the Psalms about Judas: "His _____ let another take." What is the word? And what is being assumed about what Judas held, if it can be TAKEN by another?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"His OFFICE let another take" (the Greek word is episkope, overseership, the root of episcopal and bishop). The assumption is enormous and easy to miss: Judas held not just a friendship with Jesus but an office, and the office survives the man and must be refilled; Matthias is chosen and enrolled with the eleven. You have met this logic before: Isaiah 22, where the steward's key passed from Shebna to Eliakim, an office in the King's house that outlives its holders. At the Church's founding meeting, apostleship behaves exactly that way. (Let someone in the group make the Isaiah connection before you do; many will.)

Build II: Hands and Elders

Read Acts 6:5 to 6, then Acts 14:23, then Acts 20:17 and 20:28, divided around the room.

Q2. Collect the pattern across these three scenes: what GESTURE keeps appearing, who performs it, and what are the appointed men told they are appointed to DO in Acts 20:28?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Prayer and the laying on of hands, performed by the apostles (and later by their delegates); elders appointed "in every church," immediately, as part of planting; and in Acts 20:28 the job description: "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for (shepherd) the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son." Elder and overseer, applied to the same men, with shepherding as the task; and its heart is the study's oldest verb pair: to serve and to guard. The guarding of Eden and of the tabernacle has become the pastoral office.

Read 1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6, and 1 Timothy 5:22 aloud.

Q3. Assemble the ordination grammar from these three verses: what is given, how is it given, and why the warning about haste?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A GIFT (charisma), resident in the man ("within you"), given THROUGH the laying on of hands, by the council of elders and by Paul. The instrumental language is unembarrassed: through the hands. And "do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" only makes sense if the gesture does something weighty; nobody warns against hastily giving a certificate. This is why the Church treats ordination as a sacrament: a sign that confers what it signifies, instituted by Christ, exercised and handed on from the apostolic generation.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "Now read 2 Timothy 2:2 and COUNT. How many distinct generations of handing-on does this single verse contain? Name them."

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Four: (1) Paul ("what you have heard from me"); (2) Timothy ("entrust"); (3) "faithful men"; (4) "others also," whom the faithful men will teach. Four generations of transmission, commanded as strategy, inside the New Testament. Paul did not expect the ministry to die with the apostles; he wrote its relay instructions.

DIG DEEPER

The apostles did not invent the gesture. Numbers 27:18 to 23: Moses, at God's command, lays his hands on Joshua before the priest and congregation, investing him with authority; and Deuteronomy 34:9: "Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, FOR Moses had laid his hands upon him." Israel already knew commissioning through the laying on of hands: an important biblical precedent. The apostles reached for the grammar they had been raised in.

Build III: But They Are Never Called Priests

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Full strength, and grant its scholarship: "Your sharpest friend says: I concede your offices, your hands, your succession. But notice the word that never appears. The New Testament calls these men presbyteroi, elders, and episkopoi, overseers, and NEVER, not once, calls a Christian minister hierous, a sacrificing priest. It applies hierous to Christ, and, ironically for you, the collective PRIESTHOOD word, hierateuma, to the whole believing people in 1 Peter 2, while Revelation calls believers hierais, priests. Sacrificing priesthood was imported later, when the Church re-Levitized. The original ministry was preaching and oversight, not altars. The word count is not close, and word counts do not lie."

Q4. First: is the word count correct? Say so. Then think historically: WHILE the New Testament was being written, who were the hierais everybody knew, and what were they doing? What had the word hierous already been assigned to in Christian usage?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The word count is correct; concede it cleanly, because it is true and because honesty is this study's house style. Historically: while many of these letters were written, priests in the plain sense were still slaughtering lambs in a standing Temple in Jerusalem; hierous meant THAT. And Christian usage had already committed the word-family elsewhere: hierous to Christ, the one high priest (Hebrews), and the

collective hierarchy, priesthood, to the whole baptized people (1 Peter 2; Revelation even calls believers hierarchs). The vocabulary was occupied at both ends. Calling the local elder a hierarch in the year 60 would plausibly have invited exactly those confusions; offer this as historical explanation, not as a motive Scripture records. The question is whether the REALITY was present under other names, so: watch what the presbyters do.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "One verse settles whether Paul was allergic to priestly vocabulary for New Covenant ministry. Romans 15:16: Paul describes his own ministry to the Gentiles. Find the two cultic words in the verse: what does Paul call his service, and what does he call its result?"

Q5. What does Paul call his gospel ministry in Romans 15:16? Assemble the full answer to the steelman.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Paul calls himself "a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the PRIESTLY SERVICE of the gospel of God, so that the OFFERING of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." The verb is hierourgeo, to work as a priest; the noun is prosphora, offering. Paul reaches for altar vocabulary to describe apostolic ministry, on purpose, in his most careful letter.

So the full answer: (1) the word count is real, and explained by a standing Temple and a vocabulary already assigned to Christ and to the whole Church; (2) the ministers DO the work under other names: ordained by hands, guarding the flock, the elders anointing the sick and praying over them (James 5:14 to 15, with mutual confession alongside in 5:16), and, in the Church's earliest memory from the Didache to Ignatius, presiding where "do this" is done (a witness of tradition rather than a single proof text); (3) Paul himself uses priestly-work vocabulary for the ministry; (4) and the surrounding testimony arrived early, not centuries late: the Didache calling the Eucharist a sacrifice (late first or early second century), Clement of Rome describing succession (traditionally around 96), Ignatius binding Eucharist to bishop (traditionally around 107): the generation or two just after the apostles. One last delight: the English word "priest" is not derived from hierarch at all. It comes down, through Old English, from PRESBYTEROS, the New Testament's own word for these men. The objection's favorite word grew up into ours.

Send

1. Somebody laid hands on somebody who laid hands on somebody, an unbroken chain of ordinations, until a priest absolved you or placed the Eucharist in your hand. What does it do to you to be personally downstream of Acts 1?
2. "Entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also": the relay is not only for clergy. What have you been taught that you have not yet handed to anyone? Who is your Timothy?

Live It This Week

- Pray daily for your pastor and your bishop by name this week. The men in the relay carry what Paul told Timothy to guard; they need what Paul told Timothy to rekindle.
- Take one deliberate step in your own relay: teach one thing you have received (a prayer, a truth from this study, a way of reading) to one specific person.
- If you have ever felt a pull toward priesthood or religious life, or love someone who might, say one honest prayer about it this week. Hands are still being laid on.

Memory Verse

"Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands."

2 Timothy 1:6 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, you did not let the mission die with the men who first carried it. Thank you for every link in the chain of hands between that upper room and this one. Guard your shepherds, raise up faithful men, and make each of us a good relay of everything we have received. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 10

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- Acts 1:15 to 26 (Build I, read aloud; office language at 1:20)
- Isaiah 22:20 to 22 (Build I, recalled from Session 7)
- Acts 6:5 to 6; Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17, 28 (Build II, read aloud)
- 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; 1 Timothy 5:22 (Build II, read aloud; memory verse source at 2 Timothy 1:6)
- 2 Timothy 2:2 (Build II, live discovery: count the generations)
- Titus 1:5 (leader reference)
- Numbers 27:18 to 23; Deuteronomy 34:9 (Dig Deeper)
- Romans 15:16 (Build III, live discovery)
- James 5:14 to 16 (Build III, in the ANSWER)