

THE OTHER CALL

Ordination for sent-church vs local-church

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Romans 10:14-15

¹In the UK, many churches, bishops, and diocesan structures are doing a fantastic job of inspiring people into fulltime ministry. Their call is often 'to consider ordination as God's plan for your life.' This is a noble and necessary call.

However, confusion comes to those of us who are not aware that the call to ordination isn't always the call to run a local church. Biblically and historically, there have always been two distinct paths along which one can live out one's call to vocational ministry. These are separate, distinct, and designed to work in a complementary fashion, not a competitive one. Each is a call to do different things for the Kingdom of God and, consequently,

require different types of people, with different skill sets.

The confusion lies within the fact that the primary point of community for Christians, as we develop in our Christian maturity, is the local church—the leaders of which are often clearly called to local church leadership and local church values. Understandably, these leaders often have a local-church worldview, and so communicate the priority of people being called into ordination to lead other local churches.

This is fantastic for those of us with a clear calling to lead local churches. However, for those of us created and wired for Christian work of a different nature, this call often leads us into confusion rather than clarity. Sometimes it appears that the only way to serve God vocationally is to run a local church, and if I know that is not a good fit for me, I can give up thinking I'm called to vocational ministry.

¹ This document is not an apologetic for the two paths described. For that there are more robust readings available. The aim here is to as concisely as possible describe the two vocational calls in enough detail for the reader to gain enough clarity of calling and identity to move forward.

For gospel movements to occur, God has designed two distinct roles within the Church ... Pioneers and Settlers.

The purpose of this article is to articulate the two vocational paths, and help readers understand that God usually creates people for either one or the other. Hopefully this will result in a clearer understanding of who is best suited to each path.

If you're considering full time vocational ministry, herein lies some information that may help you understand more about what you are called to do, and, most importantly, ***what type of organisation, structure, or opportunity you should pursue to fulfil God's calling on your life.***

Alternatively, if you are involved in leading a local church or denominational structure, this may help you be even more effective in your evaluation and deployment of various leaders with whom you are working.

TWO PATHS FOR TWO FUNCTIONS

For gospel movements to occur, God has designed two distinct roles within the Church. Others have come up with a variety of terms to illustrate this point, but the one I'll use for now is the Settler vs the Pioneer.

What are the functions of Pioneers vs Settlers?

Generally speaking, Pioneers take new ground while Settlers conserve the fruit of the Pioneer and mature the land.

The work of the Settler is the work of the Church in its local form: local church. People called to this path often have a passion for the discipleship of Christians, creating opportunities for Christians to serve their community through avenues

like community development or community care.

Our local churches bring the goodness of the Christian life to Christians and help them mature and serve their communities.

When I have a family member or friend in the hospital, I call on the Settler type. When I need a good youth group for my kids, I look for a Settler-led outfit.

If this is the kind of work you would love to do, then perhaps you are called to lead a local church. Go for it!

We need Settlers. Settlers are the ones who anchor the Christian way of life after the Pioneer has established it in a new area.

The other path, however, is for a different kettle of fish. ***Pioneers are often much more concerned with what isn't being done by our 'Settler structures,' and who isn't yet reached by the Settlement.***

Pioneers are often called to work that may be in a very foreign place (e.g. another country or culture), or with a very different type of person (people from different backgrounds or subcultures); they get excited about new ways to solve problems; and they are passionate about groups of people who are not being served by the existing 'Settler' structures.

The work of both the Pioneer and the Settler can be exciting and creative, ***but they generally go about things very differently, have different skill sets, and require different types of organisational structure and community.***

TWO SKILLSETS FOR TWO FUNCTIONS

The distinction between Settlers and Pioneers is important because the different groups require different skillsets to fulfil their respective functions. A failure to properly understand these distinctions can—and too often does—result in Settlers trying to unsuccessfully do Pioneer work, and Pioneers doing the converse. This regularly leads to avoidable mistakes and painful consequences for those involved. It might also mean ministries are started that never had a fighting chance of succeeding with their intended purpose. Let me explain.

Pioneers are often specialists. Theirs is a calling that can be very specific and even, at times, sound exclusive. They are called to become experts at things like crossing culture, or solving a particular Kingdom problem such as bringing the gospel to a limited access or marginalised group of people. Or they may work in a very specific field of ministry such as helping university students or business people bring some aspect of the Kingdom of God into their contexts.

To do this work, Pioneers need a tribe of people who understand the particular challenges of their mission, along with the structures and resources to make it happen. Within an organisation that supports Pioneers, there is technology and expertise to do things that Settlers just do not have a need to do.

Settlers, by contrast, are often generalists. They are called to be a resource to a community that has a wide set of needs. Local churches, for instance, don't have the luxury of an exclusive

call, and delight in welcoming anyone who walks in the door who needs help.

Consequently, Settlers need a structure that offers a wide range of services; this often means their interest and expertise in any one service remains entry level. Effective Settlers know how to refer more complicated cases over to specialists who are more equipped to handle them (which may often be a Pioneer).

Settlers and Pioneers can get into trouble when they fail to understand the other's role and calling, and try to do the other's work instead of working cooperatively. Settlers can try to do work they don't have the expertise to do well (e.g. send people from their community as Pioneers without first designing the structure that will allow them to thrive), and Pioneers may try to do work better handled by a Settler (e.g. long-term discipleship, which they aren't around long enough to do well). Or they try to do so many things, they never become specialised enough to be competent in one specific area.

WHEN IT GOES WRONG: CONFLICT BETWEEN SETTLERS AND PIONEERS

Lack of understanding of this distinction can go beyond poorly designed ministries; it can also lead to misunderstanding in the harvest field, resulting in unnecessary conflict and harm to Kingdom work.

Unfortunately, history is littered with examples of conflict between Settler types and Pioneer types. Settlers can often feel offended by the Pioneer

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rhetoric that the Settlement isn't doing all that needs to be done for the Kingdom.

Pioneers often undervalue the role of Settlers due to their lack of expertise as generalists, and—especially when they've been wounded by the Settlers—try to create systems that circumvent Settler work. An example might be when Pioneers reach a limited access or unreached group in a city and, instead of referring them to existing churches, try to create new churches that may not serve the newly reached community as effectively.²

This can be compounded by the issue of resources for the Kingdom. As their names imply, and the analogy holds true, Settlers—having worked and nurtured the land discovered by the Pioneer—usually have the lion's share of the resources, be it people, finances, or property. Pioneers are often making a lot happen with very little, and rely on the Settlement to provide resources for the next Pioneering mission.

When this goes well, Settlers resource the Pioneers with people and finances, and the Pioneers correspondingly bless the Settlers with new discoveries, new skills, and new ways to serve that the Settler can add into their expanding generalist skillset. An example might be a sending church that funds missionary work elsewhere. The church may learn some new outreach

² Of course, some contexts require Pioneers to create new structures for a newly reached people group when the existing Settler structures cannot meet the needs of this new group. However, the example given here is when the existing structures would meet the needs of the newly reached groups much better than the Pioneer structures and yet Pioneers still insist on circumventing them.

skills from the missionaries, and then use those skills to reach people within the church's surrounding community.

When it goes badly, Settlers cut off pioneers from resources, and assume they can do the work of Pioneers without them. Or they leverage their provision of resources to burden the Pioneer to do their work more like a Settler.

Examples of this are when local or denominational structures prevent new expressions of church occurring because they have some issue with the propriety of the sacraments or service.

These avoidable issues often result from a poor level of communication between Pioneers and Settlers—often because of their different types of leadership structures. Nonetheless, it is incumbent on leaders from both groups to promote healthy cooperation and dialogue leading to an understanding of how God intends the wider Church to work. The Church is most effective when each group can humbly support each another to work within each of their respective areas of calling.

KINGDOM COME: SETTLERS AND PIONEERS WORKING TOGETHER

The Church's efficacy is maximised when these two groups, created and called by God to do different things for Him, respect and honour one another, and work together. They need each other.

The New Testament offers clear examples of these two types of people and their respective calls. Peter the Settler

and Paul the Pioneer, for instance.³

When they work together they understand that each has a role in the Kingdom, and neither is subordinate to the other. It is in unity and humility that they fulfil God's respective calling:

The Pioneers take the new ground with their specialised skillset; the Settlers resource them to do that, and then move in after them to nurture and grow the land taken. Pioneers, for their part, affirm the role and growth of the Settler, teaching them new skills and sharing the celebration of the hard-won Pioneering victories with the Settlers as partners in the Kingdom.

Each group of Settlers and each group of Pioneers recognises and respects that the other group is different. They do things differently, they have a different set of values, and they are called to different things. Rather than feeling threatened or discontented with how the other group does things, they bless them, honour the distinction, and maintain a healthy separation. Pioneers refer new Settlers to the Settler group, and Settlers encourage those with emerging Pioneering desires to join the Pioneer group.

An easy to understand example of this would be the Catholic Church's historical structuring of the orders vs the parish priests. Each had their own hierarchy and structure; each was built to do very different things. The orders were specialists in certain fields, and the parish churches met the general needs of the population.

³ There is some good reading on Petrine vs Pauline calling; see the resource list.

One was not subordinate to the other; rather (when healthy), they recognised their respective roles and cooperated in order to see the Kingdom come to the communities they served.

PIONEER OR SETTLER?

While many Christians may not have a developed understanding of the Pioneer, most of us who have grown up in local churches understand what Settlers do. Settlers often feel very called to a local group of people and want to put energy into caring for the existing flock and giving them ways to live out their calling.

"Don't you just want to love and serve this group of people for the rest of your life?" would be something a Settler might say.

Settlers are intrinsically drawn to new Christians to help them be disciplined. Some of them are the guardians of tradition, while some of them want to find new ways of doing what we always do. When it comes to outreach, they usually are most effective at reaching people like themselves (and the rest of the Settlers). They often have a deep love for pre-existing things like the church building itself, the regular ways of doing worship, or the traditional way of doing the sacraments. They may be very interested in excellence as it pertains to keeping standards up and in line with how things have been done in the past—and they can be creative in how they do that. They love caring for people and get excited at new opportunities to do so, sometimes doing so for long periods of time.

Pioneers, on the other hand, might

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find the Settler way of life restricting, or even boring. They want to do what isn't being done right now. They are dreaming up new ways of gathering as church, new ways of helping people who aren't being helped enough, and creative ways of solving unsolved problems. Pioneers are usually energised by creative ideas promoting different ways of approaching a problem. They may be interested in how technology can be used to meet a need. (Like the ministry that records the Gospel/Bible onto hand crank tape players in local languages to bring to people groups living in remote areas of the world.) They might be focused on new ways of presenting an old idea in an exciting format. 'New' is the operative word here, because Pioneers are always looking outside the Settlement to see what can be done that isn't currently being addressed.

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Pioneers have a strong need to be among other Pioneers. They need people who can understand the Holy discontent that drives them to want to do things differently. Unfortunately, many Pioneers find themselves in Settlements, and get into trouble by operating as a Pioneer within the Settlement rather than exercising their calling outside of it. Even when Pioneers are self-aware, Settlers can sometimes hear Pioneering talk as complaining, or dissatisfaction with the status quo. This can be alarming to Settlers because it threatens the very thing they hold dear—the way things are or the way things have

always been.

Since there seem to be many more Settlers than Pioneers out in the world, it's not uncommon to find Pioneers wounded by Settlers who don't understand them; and Settlers wounded by what sounds like criticism by the Pioneer. The best resolution of these scenarios is for the Settler and Pioneer to recognise their respective callings and wiring, and for them to delineate themselves from one another and be encouraged to find their own tribe. Since the Pioneers are a minority in the Church, I'll address them specifically.

IF YOU'RE A PIONEER . . .

If you resonate with the description of a Pioneer above, you're not alone. You may *feel* alone, though, as there are only about 10-15% of you in any church population.

The key thing to understand is that God made you to do things differently than Settlers. You're probably not called to lead a local church as the focus of your work, but you may well be called to work in ministry vocationally. The Kingdom needs you.

Pioneering vision requires pioneering structure. Or to put it in biblical terms: Apostolic vision requires apostolic structure. There are countless stories of fruitless apostolic ideas that never go anywhere because the visionary couldn't/wouldn't/didn't find an apostolic structure through which the vision could be realised.

You will need a tribe of people who think like you, share your values, and have the experience and ability to equip, enable, and especially

to develop you to be as fruitful as possible, in the intimacy of the love of God.

Find that tribe. The best one I know of is the little-known one I joined: CRM (Church Resource Ministries). However, don't stop there; look for the people with whom you resonate and who will enable and equip you to pioneer the Kingdom work that excites you.

The work of pioneering parts of the Church, or the Church in its sent form, is critical to expansion of the Kingdom of God. One Christian leader put it this way: 'How do you spell Faith? R-I-S-K.'

If you're a Pioneer, you need to jump at the chance to risk for Jesus. Go and find your tribe!

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In most societies and cultures today, where the church has been present for a number of generations (and especially across the Western world),

there is an increasingly urgent missional imperative. We have a unique opportunity to reshuffle the existing order of things, to recognise the respective roles of Pioneers and Settlers, and to launch a cooperative mission that impacts the world for God dramatically and effectively.

The call to ordination does not always look the same. For many, the call to ordination is exactly what most would expect—to lead a local church. A worthy and noble cause.

However, there is a smaller, often misunderstood group, that has an equally valuable role in the wider Church. For the Kingdom of God to come in its fullness, both Settlers and Pioneers have a duty to recognise those individuals with callings that are more apostolic in nature, and enable them to join the Pioneering tribes that will nurture and develop them. All this to see new ground taken for the sake of the whole Church, and for the Kingdom of God it represents.

RESOURCES

Many resources give biblical, theological, and ecclesiological data to support the positions expressed in this article. For further reading on this subject, I recommend the following:

Beyond the Local Church by Sam Metcalf

The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission by Ralph D Winter

Permanent Revolution... by Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim

The Shaping of Things to Come by Frost and Hirsch

The Celtic Way of Evangelism... by George G Hunter III

What Jesus Started... by Steve Addison