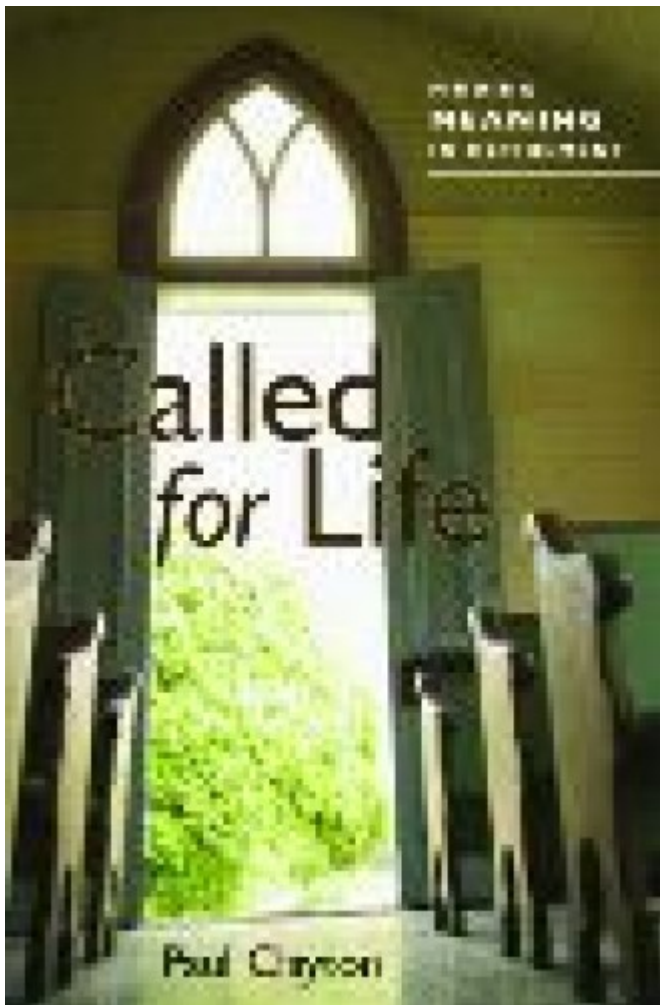


Called for Life: Finding Meaning in Retirement

reviewed by [John Esau](#) in the [December 16, 2008](#) issue

In Review



Called for Life: Finding Meaning in Retirement

Paul C. Clayton
Alban Institute

Titles with ambiguity are invitational. They encourage us to ponder possibilities. They invite us into the pages of a book in the search for resolution.

Such is the case with Paul C. Clayton's *Called for Life*. Because this is a book about ministerial retirement, we might read the title as an imperative, as though ministers are sentenced to the vocation of active ministry until they die. But that is not what Clayton intends.

What he does intend is to remind us that our life, our identity and our ministry do not end with retirement. Rather, retirement offers an opportunity to explore again the meaning of our calling. We are called to lifelong growth and contribution to our community.

Since retiring as a minister of the United Church of Christ, Clayton has written two books, served as a special assistant to a seminary president, worked in a volunteer role for his conference, researched family history with his wife and taught Bible courses in his congregation. He sees life as having three phases: preparation, production and retirement. Retirement also has three phases, as Clayton learned from Robert G. Kemper's *Planning for Ministerial Retirement*: footloose, or go-go; settled, or slow-go; and sheltered, or no-go. And Clayton presents three basic human needs, gleaned from the work of David McClelland: the need for affiliation, the need for power and the need for achievement—all of which are significant throughout life.

Clayton's key triad is one that informs his definition of the central biblical concept of calling. Calling has to do with identity (Who am I?), with gifts (those talents, abilities and aptitudes with which we are born or that we develop) and with occupation (the place in which we exercise our ministry). He contends that these three issues still matter in retirement, that one should not set them aside simply because one is no longer employed. Furthermore, Clayton insists that this understanding of calling is not just for those who have been engaged in the vocation of pastoral ministry. These categories are equally applicable to every Christian, regardless of vocation.

Retirement should be life-affirming and life-giving, Clayton argues. In this third phase of life we can discover new forms of identity, we can continue to use the gifts we have been using or even discover new gifts, and we can practice our occupation in new places, enhancing both our own life and the life of our community. Clayton's thoughtful interpretation of what it means to be called for life invites us to fulfill our calling to the end.