

'Have You Seen a Burning Bush' Course Facilitator Notes

Session 1 Debunking Vocation

Overview

How do you understand the word 'vocation' or calling? Within the Church it is often understood to be about getting ordained or entering a religious life or occupation.

We want to explore a much broader understanding of the idea of vocation that can apply to everyone and makes sense of our work and daily lives. We will share our experiences and explore some myths that need to be challenged. This should equip you to explore your vocation or calling and open up new possibilities and ways forward on your own journey.

This is your worksheet; for notes, ideas and question

Facilitator

Offer a quick overview of this session. You may be doing this session as an overview of the topic of Vocation, it may be part of series on exploring vocation or you may be using this as part of an introduction to After Sunday Thinking.

Remind people that the worksheet is for their use and notes only. Ensure introductions if there are new group members

Facilitator

Introduce the question below to begin to explore the ways the word vocation is understood in general usage.

Question

Where or how have you heard the word 'vocation' used?

Facilitator

Lead a discussion to explore the ways that members of the group understand the use of the term 'vocation'. Typically the term is used to mean: a call to some clerical / religious role in the church, non-academic, the kind of work that you do a service to others even though it is not well paid, about finding a suitable job –vocational guidance etc. Introduce the discussion of the 12 pictures. A full colour version of these pictures is available as a separate handout.

Discussion

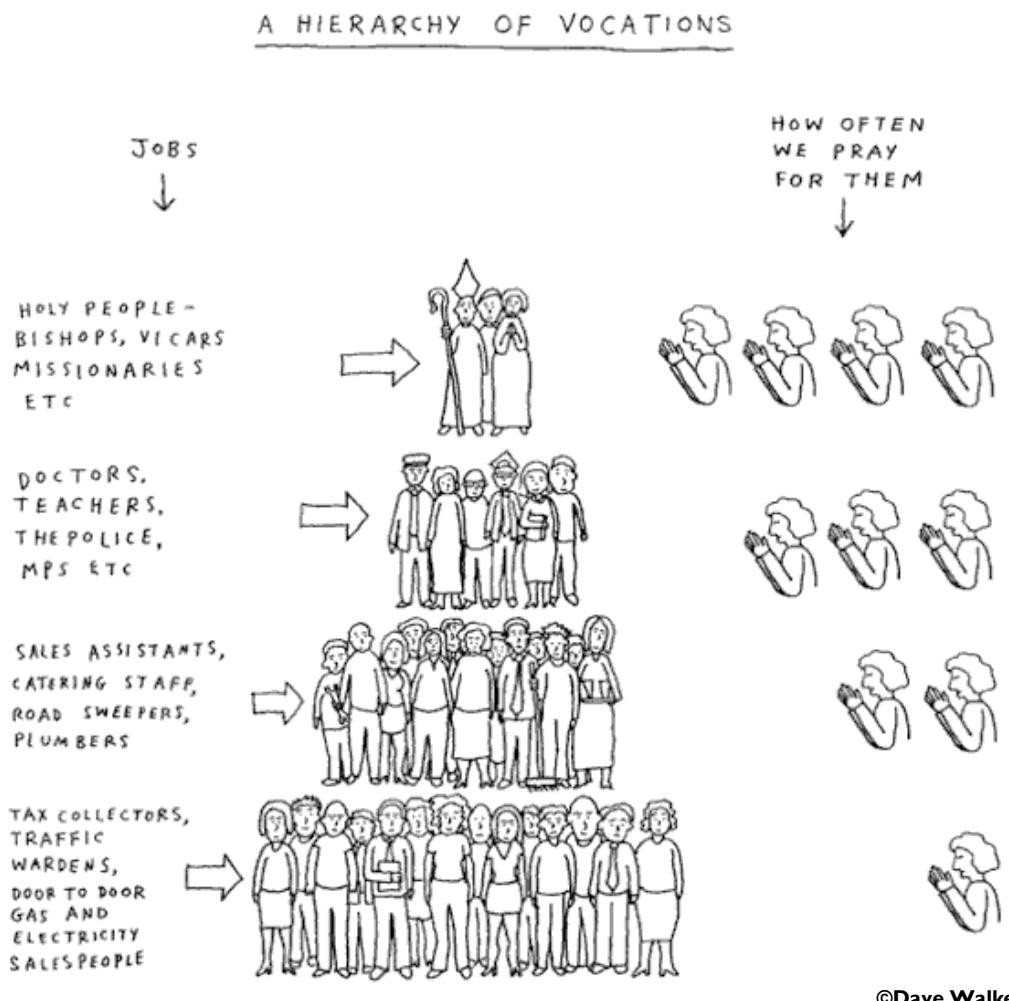
Which of these people traditionally are thought of as 'having a vocation'



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Facilitator

Introduce the cartoon as a humorous but serious comment on how the church typically views the subject of vocation and those in 'caring' professions. Ask the group to reflect on who typically gets prayed for in intercessions on a Sunday in their church and what impression that gives of who is valued and why.



Discussion

Does this view seem familiar? What does this imply about how we, as the gathered church, view the vocations of 'ordinary' people?

Facilitator

It seems that the term vocation has many meanings and is often used in a narrow way in the church. Francis Dewar, author of 'Live for a Change' (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1992) comments that "in ordinary use the word vocation has been drained of red blood, purged of passion and emptied of God. Even in the church it has become narrowed to mean the ordained ministry or religious life."

We need to now go on to establish a broader and more universally applicable idea of vocation. Ask the group to consider the question below.

Question

What does having a vocation / calling mean to you?



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Facilitator

Give members of the group a few moments to write down their own ideas in response to this question. When they have done so, ask them to share their responses one by one. Write down the different ideas as they are shared so you are able to compare with the list below. This list has been collected from a number of groups over the years. Ask the group to compare either response to this list and identify any items on the list they didn't have. Encourage discussion about various points

Comparison

Here are some responses from previous groups who have considered this question

1. Acknowledgement and deepening understanding of becoming the person that God has made me to be
2. A calling by God to a specific task
3. A burning desire to give of oneself to others and sharing talents
4. Reason you were made –what you are here to do
5. God's calling might not even be church based
6. Being called by God, others and yourself to be someone you might not be now
7. It takes time to discover it - a journey with God
8. A gift from God to be discovered and engaged with
9. Searching for that task / my song / situation / that makes me feel most fully alive
10. Having a calling to make a change and serve your community
11. Helping people to work with God
12. To show the presence of Christ in your life to the world - finding the way to go and the place to show it
13. Sense of purpose and direction
14. Allowing yourself and your skills to be used
15. Having a role in the ministry and mission of the church and in your life
16. Working together as the body of Christ – team work
17. To make a change in the world
18. Appreciation of God's purpose in my life
19. To give something of what God has given to me and to open that to others
20. A call to reveal God's love to the world

Facilitator

Ask the group to highlight any items from this list that feel most helpful to them and their understanding of vocation

Activity

Highlight those statements above that you feel are most like your understanding of vocation.

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Facilitator

Introduce the following perspective 'Vocation' from Barbara Brown Taylor. Read it through and invite the group to explore the questions at the end of the passage.

Perspective

Vocation

"Earlier in my life, I thought there was one particular thing I was supposed to do with my life. I thought that God had a purpose for me and my main job was to discover what it was.....

Then one night when my whole heart was open to hearing from God what I was supposed to do with my life, God said, "anything that pleases you"

"What?" I said, resorting to words again "what kind of answer is that?"

"Do anything that pleases you," the voice in my head said again, "and belong to me".

At one level that answer was no help at all, the ball was back in my court again, where God had left me all kinds of room to lob it wherever I wanted. I could be a priest or a circus worker. God really did not care. Whatever I decided to do for a living, it was not **what** but **how** I did it that mattered. God had suggested an overall purpose but was not going to supply the particulars for me. If I wanted a life of meaning, I was going to have to apply the purpose for myself."

"Do anything that pleases you," the voice in my head said again, "and belong to me".

From 'An Altar in the Word' by Barbara Brown Taylor
(Canterbury Press 2009)

Question

What do you find that is helpful or unhelpful in this passage?

Facilitator

Encourage the group members to share their response to this perspective on vocation and to have a discussion about what it might mean to 'belong to God'. Also, see the perspective below

Facilitator

Introduce the following perspective from 'What Color is your Parachute?' by Richard Bolles. He uses the word mission. Mission is a vocation in action. He makes some very helpful points about the part that is uniquely ours.

Perspective

Our Mission

There are 3 stage in discovering our vocation / mission

Stage I

"Your first Mission here on Earth is one which you share with the rest of the human race, but it is no less your individual mission for the fact that it is shared: and that is, to seek to stand hour by hour in the conscious presence of God, the one from whom your mission



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is derived. *The Missioner before the Mission* is the rule. Your mission here is: to know God and enjoy Him forever, and to see His hand in all His works”

Stage 2

“Your second Mission on Earth is also one which you share with the rest of the human race, but it no less your individual mission for the fact that it is shared: and that is, to do what you can, moment by moment, day by day, step by step, to make the world a better place, following the leading and guidance of God’s Spirit within you and around you.”

Stage 3

“Your third Mission here on earth is one which is uniquely yours and that is:

- a. to exercise that talent which you particularly came to earth to use – your greatest gift, which you most delight to use
- b. in the place(s) or setting(s) which God has caused to appeal to you the most
- c. and for the purposes which God most needs to have done in the world”

*From ‘What Color is Your Parachute?’ by Richard Nelson Bolles,
(Ten Speed Press, 1993)*

Facilitator

The challenge for us is to work out these last three points in our own context. The rest of the Topics in the Vocation series are about enabling that to happen. This is called ‘Looking Inward’ (Topic VOC4) to discover and name our greatest gift, and ‘Turning Outward’ (Topic VOC5) to focus on the issues or needs that God has called us to attend to.

Facilitator

Finally, offer some thoughts about vocation that need to be de-bunked if we are to make real progress with exploring vocation in an open and discerning way. Use these points to summarise this session.

Perspective

10 Assumptions about Vocation to Ditch

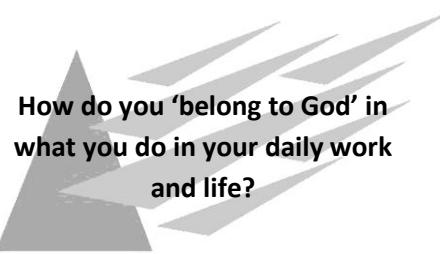
1. **It's about a job or role.** Vocation is less to do with a specific job or institutional role e.g. I am called to be a nurse or an accountant. Vocation is less about a specific role and more about a way of being who you are that is worked out in all the varied and different roles you perform in life eg. What kind of nurse, or accountant are you going to be?
2. **There is one thing I am meant to do.** There may well be a life’s work that you are called to do but that may take many twists and turns along the journey. It is more likely that your vocation will be a series of endings and new beginnings at different stage of life.
3. **It's all about my giftedness.** My vocation is about something that makes me happy and fulfilled but not necessarily conformable. It may be that God turns something that you are not very good at into a strength

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4. ***My vocation is an individual thing.*** Our vocations often involve others and may be connected to someone else. We are a body - the body of Christ – our vocation is part of being a member of a body
5. ***I can work this out for myself.*** In a Christian context we need other to help us to discern what God might be calling us to and testing out our calling. We can learn a great deal from listening to each other stories.
6. ***Vocation comes from the heart.*** Vocation has to be part of dialogue between our inward journey to find ourselves and our outward journey to engage with life. Both parts are equally important
7. ***God works out my vocation and I have no part in it.*** Vocations have to be worked out, and we have to be fully involved in that process. There is not a ready-made slot for us to slip into we have to work it out for ourselves.
8. ***Vocation has to be something that is essentially sacrificial.*** There used to be view that it was OK to tell someone they had a vocation so that they didn't need to be paid so much – earn less, work incessantly hard, deny yourself etc. All these aspects may be true but they need to be rooted in joy not duty.
9. ***Vocation is about a 'ministry' role in the institutional church.*** Vocation for most of us is about what it means to share in Christ's mission in the context of everyday life as the church dispersed in the world and work
10. ***Secular work is different.*** The truth is that many people put heart and soul into their daily work, and often feel more connected to God through this work than through work within the church.

Facilitator

During the week, you might like to reflect on :



Facilitator

Encourage people to spend few minutes pondering on what they feel they have learned from the session and ask them to share quickly 1 or 2 points.

Ponder

What did you learn from this session?



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Prayer

There are varieties of gifts,
but the same spirit.
there are varieties of service
but the same Lord.
there are different kinds of working,
but the same God is at work in all.

There is one body, one spirit, one hope in God's call;
one Lord, one faith, one baptism.
there is one God, father of all, over all and in all,
to whom Christ ascended on high.

And through his Spirit he gives us gifts:
some are apostles, some are his prophets;
evangelists, pastors and teachers he gives us,
so that we can minister together
to build up his body,
to be mature in the fullness of Christ.

*From 'Common Worship : Times and Seasons'
(Church House Publishing, 2006)*



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Session 2 Discerning Vocation

Overview

What is involved in exploring and working out our vocations as a calling from God? How can we know that a calling is of God and is not just us satisfying our own needs? People have been struggling with this issue for thousands of years so there is a lot of experience to draw upon. In this topic we suggest a structured approach that we can use to help us discern God's call in our lives.

This is your worksheet; for notes, ideas and questions

Facilitator

Offer a quick overview of this session. You may be doing this session as a one off topic or as part of a series on exploring vocation over a number of sessions with a group

Remind people that the worksheet is for their use and notes only. Ensure introductions if there are new group members

Facilitator

Introduce the question below to help the group to reflect on their experience of feeling sure about what they were doing.

Question

How do you sense when you are doing the right thing in life?

Facilitator

Ask the group to share their responses and see what themes emerge

Facilitator

Introduce the reading of the story of Moses and the Burning Bush. Ask group members to share in the reading. The reading is available on a separate handout. Ask the group to think about what they can learn from this story about being called by God.

Reading

Exodus 3 – 4 : 17

Facilitator

Ask the group to reflect and make a note of points of learning in response to the following question

Question

What do you learn from the story of Moses and the Burning Bush about being called, and living our vocation?

Facilitator

Invite the group members to share their insights and draw out any useful learning.

Some points to note might include:

- Moses' previous experience now makes sense
- Moses is not a gifted speaker –God gives him Aaron to help him
- Moses' commitment to the Hebrews began a long time ago
- God values Moses' tenacity and willingness to struggle
- Burning bushes can happen anywhere
- God equips those he calls

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Facilitator

We now want to explore the process of discerning a calling from God.

Here are 10 ideas which show how God might call us. Invite the group to look at the different images, and express what that image says about how God communicates. What has been their experience of these and other ways in which God calls? What are some of the risks of interpreting these calls?

Activity

Look at the images below, which show different ways in which God might communicate. Which have you experienced? Are there any that you have not considered?



Through dreams that may need to be interpreted



A feeling of being prodded



Damascus road experience



A persistent curiosity



Prayer and reading scripture



Hearing a voice within



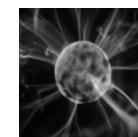
Some vision or fresh insight



A niggling feeling that will not go away



Through another who then pass a message to us



A sense of energy

Facilitator

Lead a discussion to draw out people's experiences of a sense of calling. The points need to be made that all these, and others, are valid experiences. God may already be calling people, but because it is not dramatic, they may not recognise it as such.

Facilitator

Ask the group to address the following question

Question

From our own experience and in light of scripture, in what ways does God communicate to his people?

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Facilitator

Ask the group to think about what they can do to make themselves more open to the possibility of hearing a call from God. Calling is based on a conviction that the God who brought the universe to birth speaks powerfully, mysteriously and instantly into our lives. Introduce and read through the following perspective stopping at whatever points any of the group want to make a comment or add a point from their own experience.

Perspective

Discernment – some guidelines

Our idea of what God is like may severely restrict the kinds of things that we expect God to call us to do. We need to be careful in listening for God's invitation to us, for it may not be God we are listening to but an inner policeman, or head-teacher, or critical parent, or religious authority figure. The true God is concerned with life and longing and will draw us out of ourselves in ways that we never imagined possible.

Discernment is a process that takes time, years even and cannot be forced. God's calling continues throughout our lives and is not a one off thing. Our previous experience may suddenly become meaningful and relevant in ways we had not expected. At the heart is the discipline of prayerful listening to God and waiting expectantly and silently. Reading scripture, especially the gospels, opens us up to the presence and life of God. We need to open ourselves up to God's action in the world where he is trying to grab our attention to engage with something on his agenda. We need to remember that our calling is to share in the life of the risen Christ who has come to bring God's kingdom to earth. Being open to the movement of the Spirit within the world means we also have to be open to the movement of the Spirit within ourselves. God speaks to us through the language of everyday events. Each new moment or situation holds a clue to God's call and we always find our call in the circumstances and experiences of daily life.

St Ignatius observed that when we choose a particular course of action we should try to discern how it makes us feel. Does it fill us with a sense of joy, peace and consolation or does it make us feel ill at ease, restless and disconsolate. Sometime we need to monitor our feelings over time since a decision which initially brings us peace can in time make us feel deeply uneasy. For the most part we will probably experience God's call in listening to his voice in the every day and trying to discern in each present moment what it is that God requires of us.

At other times we encounter what seems to be a maze with dead ends with no obvious way ahead. Even yet in the middle of such confusion we are prompted by some force which leads us on. This only seems to make sense in retrospect.

Some of us will affirm never to have heard the voice of God or felt any promptings but yet still remain committed to a journey because they know that God is with them even though no call has come to them.

Based on work by Stephen Ferns in 'This is our Calling', edited by Charles Richardson (2004, SPCK)



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Facilitator

Invite the group to think about the things they could do to help them to keep focused on God during this overall process of exploring vocation

Question

What can you do to ensure that you keep focused on God during this process of discernment?

Facilitator

Introduce the perspective from Francis Dewar about how to test a calling. We will come back to explore some of these issues later on if the group is completing the other sessions in his vocations series.

Perspective

Testing a Calling

Francis Dewar, author of *Live for a Change*, suggests the following criteria for testing whether a calling is of God. A calling should:

1. Be good news for the impoverished?
2. Release the imprisoned and oppressed?
3. Give sight to the blind
4. Put you on the side of the neglected, or the powerless, or those without a voice?
5. Be a generous giving of what you are and of your gifts?
6. Be a new departure, a fresh initiative, something not done before, or not in that way?
7. Feel risky?
8. Be beyond our unaided powers?
9. Be a step, however tiny, towards a more just and equitable world?

If your answer is 'yes' to the last five questions, and to at least one of the first four, that would seem to be pointing in the right direction.

Francis Dewar adds four further points to help with discernment.

1. It is likely that the call will be something that, basically you love to do, whatever risk, or even suffering it may bring.
2. It is more likely, statistically, to be in the 'secular' sphere than in the church, simply because there is more of it!
3. It is unlikely that it will be full time, at least in the early stages. Indeed what you do may be episodic, done in short bursts, like evenings or weekends.
4. You will be very fortunate if it is something that you are paid for

*From 'Live for a Change' by Francis Dewar
(Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988)*



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Facilitator

If the group are going on to explore the other sessions in this vocation series as a combined course then it is helpful to describe how the other sessions fit together and how they will provide a useful framework for exploring vocation now and at any point in the future.

The following topics will be explored:

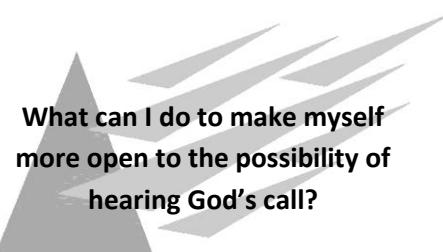
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|-------------|------------------------------|
| Topic VOC3 | My Story |
| Topic VOC4 | Looking Inward |
| Topic VOC5 | Turning Outward |
| Topic VOC 6 | Signposts and New Beginnings |
| Topic VOC 7 | Sustaining Vocation |

If Topic VOC1 Debunking Vocation has not yet been completed it would be helpful to work through it too.

Together these Topics offer a helpful structure. It is best to aim to work through them over a period of 6-8 weeks.

Facilitator

During the week, you might like to reflect on :



Facilitator

Encourage people to spend few minutes pondering on what they feel they have learned from the session and ask them to share quickly 1 or 2 points.

Ponder

What did you learn from this session?

Facilitator

The following prayers focus on each of the stages in the After Sunday process for Exploring Vocation. In a group ask different member to read a section in turn.



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Prayer

Vocation is from you

God, you call each of us individually and by name and you call me. I want to explore with you what you might have in mind for my life and how I might belong to you. I give thanks that my call is no less or more important than anyone else's and that you long for me to respond to you as only I can. **Amen**

Vocation is about being open to you

God, you speak to me in many different ways but I know it is sometimes hard to get my attention. Help me to stop and listen to what you have to say. Help me to make the time and space to explore bushes that are ablaze with your message of love for your world that we meet in Jesus Christ. **Amen**

My Story and my journey into you

God, you breathed life into me when you formed me from the dust of the earth. You have been with me, seen and unseen, during my growing and my grieving, my rejoicing and disappointments, my blossoming and my dying. Take the person I have become and shape me in the fire of your love to reflect your glory more each day. **Amen**

I am wonderfully made

God, you knit me to your pattern in my mother's womb. You planted gifts within me to grow for your delight. You gave me a voice to sing a song that only I can sing. You made me to be unique but not alone. Help me to discover who I am when seen through your eyes. Help me to know myself well so that I may give myself to others. **Amen**

You grab my attention

God, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. You call me, in the name of Jesus Christ, to play a part in your mission of love to the world. You help me to focus clearly on the work that you need to have done for your sake. You call me to engage with life in all its mess and confusion and you call me to service. **Amen**

You call me into new beginnings

God, you call me in the power of your Spirit to venture out, to take a risk for your sake, to transform my mind that your world might be transformed. You call me to let things go that are cluttering the channel of your grace that you call me to be. Help me to appreciate what to put down and what to pick up that I may more fully offer my whole self in your service. **Amen**

You call your church

You call us into community as you are a community of never ending love. Help us as members of the body of Christ to support and encourage each other as we exercise our calling in our daily work and life in your world. May your Church be ever renewed as we find ourselves in you. **Amen**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore . Amen

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Session 3 My Story

Overview

How do you make sense of your life story so far, all that has happened to you and all that you have chosen to do? In what ways do you see yourself as being on a journey and what might the next stage of it open up for you and others? Here is an opportunity to reflect on our story and how we have been shaped to be the people we are today. We will also consider how our relationship with God has been part of our story. This will open up for us the possibility to consider who we might yet become in God.

This is your worksheet; for notes, ideas and questions

Facilitator

Group members will need to have completed the Life Line exercise – see the separate ‘Exercise : Life Line’ sheet and distribute beforehand. Offer a quick overview of this session. You may be doing this session as a one off topic as part of an exploration of vocation or exploration of discipleship. It is a great way for a group to get to know one another although it can bring up some hard and sad memories as well as joyful.

Remind people that the worksheet is for their use and notes only. Ensure introductions if there are new group members

Facilitator

Invite the group members to share their lifeline story uninterrupted for at least 5 minutes whilst everyone listens. It is important to have a way to ration time. A large visible egg timer that lasts 5 minutes can be useful and individuals can manage themselves. Make sure everyone shares. It is not essential for the facilitator to share unless they feel the need to do so. Ask for a volunteer to start and let members of the group decide the order in which they want to share.

There is no need to comment at the end of an individual’s story unless something needs to be said. It might be worth exploring a little how individuals see the relationship between life events and their encounter with God. Thank each member for sharing their story.

Activity

‘Life must be lived forward, but can only be understood backward’

Soren Kierkegaard, Danish Philosopher and Theologian (1813-1845)

Share your stories from the Lifeline Exercise in turn

Facilitator

At the end of the sharing exercise, ask the group to comment on what they found helpful about listening to each others stories and hearing their own. Has anyone developed any new insights into themselves from listening to the experience of others?

Discussion

What have we valued from listening to each others stories?

Facilitator

Summarise any significant points from the discussion – don’t labour it.

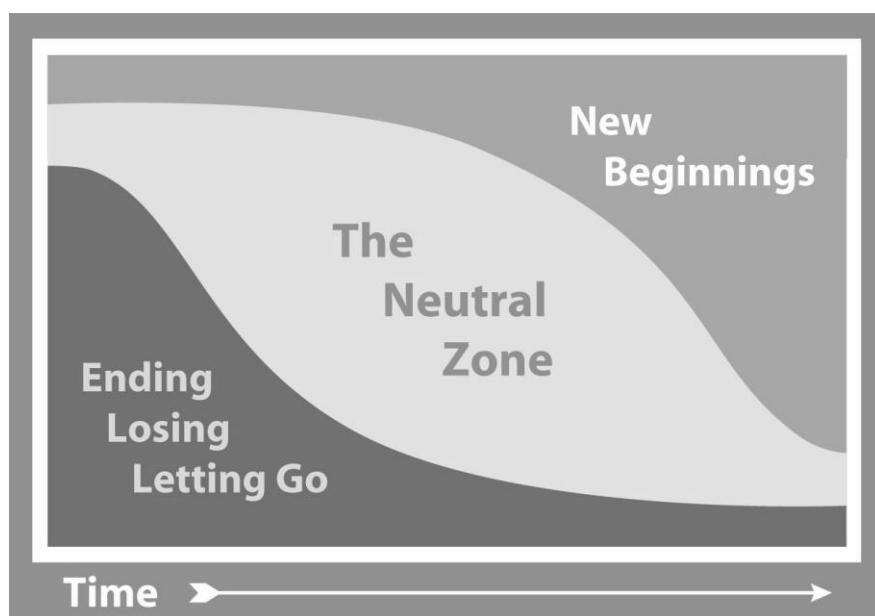
Facilitator

Introduce the perspective ‘Transitions’ briefly to the group as a way of exploring where people are now in their own journeys, and to what extent they feel that they are in stage of transition. We also address the subject of Transitions in ‘Signposts to New Beginnings’ (Topic VOC6)

Perspective

Transitions

Our whole life can be considered to be a series of transitions from one stage to another and transitions never come to end. Even death opens up yet another stage in our journey of faith. There are some obvious major transitions that mark the key stages of our lives. Then there are the transitions that come upon us like the loss of a job or a relationship or an event that hits us out of the blue. There are transitions that affect us because others are going through their own changes like the impact of children starting school or leaving home etc. Most transitions have a predictable pattern but because they are about how we feel and react, they are unique to each of us individually and no one is experiencing the process of change in quite the same way. Here is a model that suggests the broad structure of transitions. There are three phases.



*Model taken from 'Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change' by William Bridges,
(Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2009)*

The Structure of Transitions

Transition is the process of letting go of the way things used to be and taking hold of the way they will become.

In between letting go and taking hold again, there is a chaotic but potentially creative 'neutral zone' when things aren't the old way, but aren't really a new way either yet.

Ending / Letting Go

To enable us to move on to new beginning there invariably have to be some endings. In the ending phase we lose or let go of our old outlook, our old reality, our old attitudes, even our self-image. We may resist this ending for a while. We may try to talk ourselves out of what we are feeling and then we give in, we may be swept by feelings of sadness and anger.

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Neutral Zone

The neutral zone can either be a period of disorientation or a highly creative period of new possibilities. We can feel caught between old and new and can end up immobilised. Dangers of the neutral zone are that anxiety rises and motivation falls, we doubt ourselves, energy is drained into coping tactics and our effectiveness falls. This is also however a time ripe for creative opportunity.

Beginning Again

Finally, we take hold of and identify with some new outlook and some new reality as well as new attitudes and a new self-image. When we have done this, we feel that we are finally starting a new chapter in our lives. No matter how impossible it was to imagine a future earlier, life now feels as though it is back on its track again. We have a new sense of ourselves, a new outlook, a new sense of purpose and possibility.

Facilitator

Having briefly explained the model of transitions, ask the members of the group to comment about where they are now in the process of transition –are they coming into a transition in the middle, exploring options, starting new beginnings or not in any transition at all?

Discussion

Are you currently in a process of transition? If so, what stage are you at?

Facilitator

Encourage group members to state where they think that they are now. If you are doing this session as part of a process of exploring vocation, you might like to ask people what they hope to get out of this process of exploring vocation. You may have done that in an earlier session. Asking at this stage might also help people to clarify their aims in the light of this discussion on transitions

Question

What would you hope to get out of exploring your vocation at this time?

Facilitator

During the week you might like to reflect on:



Facilitator

Encourage people to spend few minutes pondering on what they feel they have learned from the session and ask them to share quickly 1 or 2 points.

Ponder

What did you learn from this session?



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Facilitator

The group should read Psalm 23 as a closing prayer

Prayer

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil; for you are with me;
Your rod and your staff — they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life,
And I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

Psalm 23 (NRSV)



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Session 4 Looking Inward

Overview

Who am I, what are my gifts, what am I passionate about and when do I feel most alive? These, and other such questions, are all important when exploring the issue of our own calling. God has made us uniquely and has planted in us particular gifts and purposes that he wants us to use as partners with him in his work. This topic helps us to explore and name our purpose and what we feel we are able to offer to others. Being clearer about that helps us to work with others more creatively.

This is your worksheet; for notes, ideas and questions

Facilitator

In this topic there are a number of exercises that group members need to complete beforehand. The time is in this session is divided between a short introduction to the main theme and time to review the exercises and to draw the insights together. Depending on the group, this may be too much for one session and you will need to judge the groups capacity and whether another session is needed

Remind people that the worksheet is for their use and notes only. Ensure introductions if there are new group members

Facilitator

Introduce these Bible readings (all from NRSV) and invite the group to consider their significance for exploring vocation.

Bible Perspective

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Romans 12:3-8

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?

Luke 9:23-25

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared for us in advance.

Ephesians 2:10

Facilitator

Invite the group to share responses to the following question;

Question

How do these readings suggest we should approach the task of looking inward?



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Facilitator	<i>Introduce the perspective 'Gifts and Grace', and invite the group to discuss any points that arise from it</i>
Perspective	Gifts and Grace Our gifts are not necessarily our talents, they are not the 'things that we are good at'. They are the attributes, the characteristics, the uniqueness of each one of us. Grace is the means by which each one of us becomes wholly and fully alive, where these gifts are brought to fullness, where some gifts will be exceptional and take centre stage of who we are, and where other gifts will form part of the background of who we are. God's grace enables each one of us to become the person he made us to be, and we are all on a journey towards becoming this person.
Facilitator	<i>Turn now to the exercises that the group have prepared beforehand</i>
Activity	Explore your responses and ideas to one or more of the accompanying exercises
	Exercise 1 Party Time <i>This is a straightforward exercise and a good one to begin with. It is in two parts. Firstly ask each member of the group to state their three chosen letters and comment on how easy or hard it was to decide. People can change their mind easily here and that is fine –it's not meant to be scientific. Sometime people might choose to talk to others at the imaginary party because there is something they admire in them rather than because they are like them. Don't get too bogged down. Secondly ask the group to choose, if they have not already done so, the words they most like when it comes to describing themselves. Ask them to write their favourite of these words on the left-hand side of the stick-person summary sheet.</i>
	Exercise 2 Who am I? <i>Depending on how much time you have, it is probably best to do this exercise in pairs – you may need to take part too if there are odd numbers. Invite people to take about 5 minutes each to share their answers. Some people will just have answered a few questions that interest them. You might want to get everyone to share their answers to the question about which aspect of Jesus they most admire to bring the group back together. It's interesting to see how we all see different aspects. Again invite people to add any thoughts to their summary sheet – words that might describe them and thoughts about what they might bring or offer to others.</i>
	Exercise 3 Know your Gifts <i>Hopefully people will have prepared some ideas about times they feel most alive. A bit of quick thinking can be done in the session if not. Best to split the group into 3's for this exercise. The guidelines on the exercise sheet are self explanatory. Suggest each person has about 5 minutes to talk. Encourage the other to listen and to feedback feelings and insight which they have picked up. Again, at the end, invite group members to add to their summary sheet.</i>

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Facilitator

Having worked through the exercises, invite the group to spend a little time to reflect on what they have said and heard about themselves. Ask each group member the write down on the left-hand side words that best describe the core of who they are, words that have come out of the exercises. On the right-hand side, write down words that describe what they want to give or offer to others.

Activity

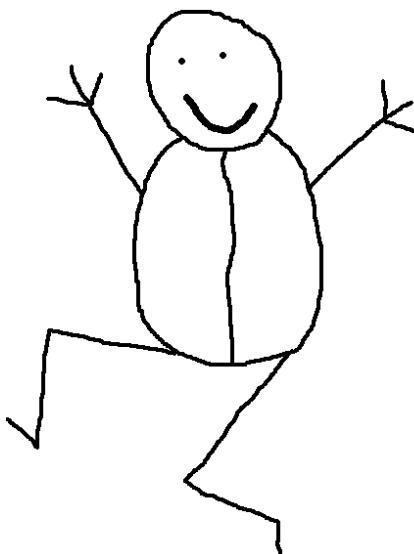
Summarising your Purpose

Words that describe the core of who I am

(eg. encouraging, practical, warm, energetic, stirring)

Words that describe what I want to give or offer

(eg. problem solving, bringing clarity through listening, revealing the truth, resolving differences)



Facilitator

Having spent a little time on the summary sheet, ask the group to have a go at the activity 'Naming our Purpose' which tries to come up with a phrase that encapsulates their sense of purpose. Suggest people pair up and have a go using words or phrases from each side, to come up with a statement of purpose. Suggest that they read the words or phrases out loud. It is often when we hear phrases spoken out loud that we know whether they are a good description of ourselves. Point out the features of a purpose statement. This activity doesn't have to be completed here and now, it can be work in progress.

Activity

Naming our Purpose

Now, using words or phrases from each side, try to come up with a statement of your purpose (eg. I am the kind of person who is..... and wants to offer.....). Pair up with someone else in the group and share your statement with them out loud. Does the statement make sense to you and to them?

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Some features of your purpose

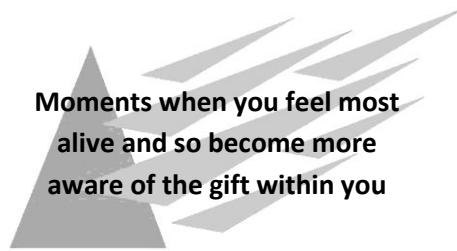
- When all other parts of you are stripped away, this is left and is distinctively you
- You can't stop yourself being this
- It is life giving to you and others
- It is not specific to any one situation and applies to all the contexts you find yourself in
- It's not something that you have learned – you may have polished and refined it but it is part of who you are
- Those who are close to you will affirm it in you and encourage you to exercise it
- It's going with the grain of who we are and is much more effortless than other things we do
- It's not always what we want or wish for ourselves but it is who we are

Facilitator

Point out that this activity can be continued to be worked on in the coming weeks. Suggest the group members continue to experiment with different combinations of words as something may click and seem a really good fit.

Facilitator

During the week, you might like to reflect on :



"That is why I now remind you to stir into flame the gift of God which is within you through the laying on of my hands"

2 Timothy 1:6 (NRSV)

Facilitator

Encourage people to spend few minutes pondering on what they feel they have learned from the session and ask them to share quickly 1 or 2 points.

Ponder

What did you learn from this session?



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Reflection

Listen to 'O God you search me and you know me' together, thinking about the person God made you to be, the living flame that God put inside you.

The song can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKsB9NcYSBg>

(Or say the words together if no internet access is available)

O God, you search me and you know me.
All my ways lie open to your gaze.
When I walk or lie down, you go before me:
Ever the maker and keeper of my days.

You know my resting and my rising.
You discern my purpose from afar,
You are with me beyond my understanding:
In ev'ry moment of life and death, you are.

For you created me and shaped me,
gave me life within my mother's womb.
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you:
God of my present, my past and future too.

Although I feel your hand upon me,
still I search for shelter from your light.
There is nowhere on earth I can escape you:
Even the darkness is radiant in your sight.

O God, you search me and you know me.
All my ways lie open to your gaze.
When I walk or lie down, you go before me:
Ever the maker and keeper of my days.

©Bernadette Farrell, based on Psalm 139

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Session 5 Turning Outwards

Overview

What do I currently give my attention to in my daily work and life? What might God be calling me to give more or fresh attention to? How might that affect how I spend my time and what I get actively involved with? God calls us to participate in his kingdom building work as partners in creation. In this session we will think about what God is calling our attention towards and what we engage with now, and might do in the future.

This is your worksheet; for notes, ideas and questions

Facilitator

In this topic there are two exercises that group members need to complete beforehand; 'Read All About It' and 'Stop, Look and Listen'. The time is in this session divided between a short introduction to the main theme and time to review the exercises and to draw the insights together.

Remind people that the worksheet is for their use and notes only. Ensure introductions if there are new group members

Facilitator

Introduce the activity. This is a way of helping people to identify the kind of issues, priorities and concerns that they currently choose to give their attention to. Encourage the group to get under the surface of the activity to explore why they have chosen to give their attention to this area.

Activity

On one side, list all the areas of your life. On the other side, list what you choose to give specific attention to in these areas.



Facilitator

Invite the group members to reflect on the range of issues where they currently focus their attention. Sometimes people feel they spread themselves too thinly; working 'mile wide –inch deep'. Sometime people feel there is too little variety or they have too little control or discretion over the use of their own time. We all make choices about where we give our attention.

Question

What does this activity tell you about how you see your current priorities?

Facilitator

Lead a discussion to explore the groups reflections on their choices.

Facilitator

Introduce the exercise 'Read All About It'. Invite each group member to say what has caught their attention in the news or newspapers that they have looked at. Ask them to dig a bit to get underneath the news item itself and to explore what exactly it is about the story that has attracted their attention. People often pick different news items that have a common theme that may need to be drawn out from the discussion. Manage the time so that everyone has a chance to share



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Activity Share newspapers, magazines, news stories and new experiences from 'Read All About It'

Question What has caught your attention and why?

Facilitator Ask the group members to share any insights they have gained if they have been able to do the 'Stop, Look and Listen' exercise - some may not. In this exercise we are looking for ways in which God might already be active and drawing our attention to come and look – like the burning bush.

Activity Share your experiences from 'Stop, Look and Listen'

Question What has caught your attention and why?

Facilitator In this next stage, we want to explore whether there are any new areas that people are being called to attend to, or if people are being called to give renewed attention to something already part of their life. We suggest there are four broad kinds of ways in which our attention is attracted. Offer these to the group as a framework for their thinking. We raised some of these ideas already in Discerning Vocation (Topic VOC2).

Perspective The Four Ps

Pending A sense or an idea or thought that has been with you for some time that you haven't done anything about yet. 'If I had time, I would.....'.

Prodding A definite niggle, or tug. These may happen frequently or infrequently and can be from many different sources – conversations, media, relationships. The 'prod' draws you towards something or somewhere.

Possibility An opening or opportunity, which makes it possible for you to move forward and do something.

Passion A long term deep desire, which doesn't change through time and experience but may grow in intensity

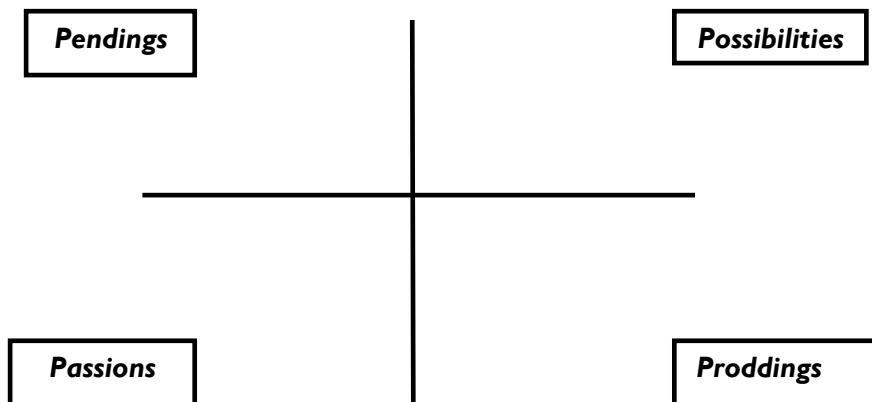
Facilitator Invite the members of the group make some notes as appropriate under each of these four headings.



'Have You Seen a Burning Bush' Course Facilitator Notes

Activity

What are your Pendings, Proddings, Possibilities and Passions?



Facilitator

Invite members of the group to share one thing from their sheet that has struck them. Introduce the perspective 'This is our Call'

Perspective

This is our Call

"Our calling as Christians is to continue God's work of reconciling the world to himself, our mission in Christ is to continue the work of the incarnation. St Teresa of Avila expressed this in characteristic, down-to-earth, style when she wrote:

"Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which is to look out. Christ's compassion to the world, yours the feet with which he is to go about doing good, and yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now."

Suddenly our vocation to be Christ's takes on a sharper focus. We are the co-workers of God, doing what we can to discern the movement of the Spirit in the world around us trying to cooperate with the Spirit in the fulfilment of God's will.

Our vocation is less about our role within the life of the Church. It is more to do with the Kingdom of God – that time and space where God is God and everyone and everything is in union with God. It is ensuring that we ourselves are signs of the Kingdom and that we give our lives to working for supporting the values of the Kingdom. This vocation is lived out in the world.... The world is where we encounter God and where we have opportunities to discern God's will and co-operate with his Spirit....Being alive to God's presence within the world also has the effect of making us sensitive to people or situations where there is suffering or exploitation or wickedness. We sense God's suffering in the midst of his creation and we recognise our own calling to bring light into dark places, to bring hope where there is despair, to bring life where there is death. Our ongoing vocation is to struggle for peace and justice within the world whether it be situations we ourselves encounter, or situations we read about in our newspapers and watch on television...they become channels by which God calls us to action in working for the Kingdom.

From 'The Call to Continue' by Stephen Ferns, in 'This is our Calling' edited by Charles Richardson (SPCK, 2004)



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Facilitator

Ask the group to discuss what they think is meant by the kingdom of God in this Perspective. There is a resource sheet with some extra ideas about this if you need more guidance and feel the group would find it helpful.
Invite the group to reflect on the following question

Question

How do you connect your attention, both now and in the future, to God's kingdom building work?

Facilitator

Encourage the group to see the connection between what they feel drawn to and God's kingdom building work. This helps us to sense a greater purpose for our calling and work. Our work becomes interwoven with God's work.

Facilitator

During the week, you might like to reflect on :

**What do you notice especially this week
about the world around you? Where do
you feel most drawn?**

Facilitator

Encourage people to spend few minutes pondering on what they feel they have learned from the session and ask them to share quickly 1 or 2 points.

Ponder

What did you learn from this session?

Prayer

In this crowd of common people
Once unknown, whom we revere
God calls us to share his purpose
Starting now and starting here.
So we celebrate his calling
So we prize and praise his choice
And we pray that through this company
God will act and raise his voice

From the hymn 'God it Was' © The Iona Community



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Session 6 Signposts to New Beginnings

Overview

As disciples of Christ, we invited to become caught up in His work of renewal and transformation - change is part of the Christian life. Starting something new can be both exciting and daunting at the same time. For some, this may involve a significant change in their life and work. For others, it can be something apparently very small. However, we never quite know what the long term impact will be, of even something small. In this topic we will explore how God might be pointing us to something new and consider how we might respond.

This is your worksheet; for notes, ideas and questions

Facilitator

In this topic there is an exercise called 'People with a Mission' that group members need to complete beforehand.

Remind people that the worksheet is for their use and notes only. Ensure introductions if there are new group members

Facilitator

Invite the group to reflect on the 4 biblical stories about calling. These readings are available as a separate handout, or the group can use their own bibles. Take each in turn and briefly draw out any observations from the group about what was involved for each of the people involved and their close relationships in these stories.

Activity

Take a look at these bible stories of new beginnings.

The Call of Abraham Genesis 12

The Call of Jeremiah Jeremiah 1:4-10

The Call of Mary Luke 1:26-38

The Call of Peter John 21:15-19

Discussion

What was involved for each of these people as they embarked on their new beginning?

Facilitator

Encourage the group to make any connections between their experience and the experience of these four people.

Facilitator

Introduce the 'People with a Mission' exercise and ask the group to share their chosen people in turn. See if there are any themes that connect the different people that each person has chosen. What does the choice say about the group member and their interest?

Activity

Talk about your heroes /heroines and what you have learned about them and what it means to engage with a mission.

Facilitator

Having heard from each member of the group about their heroes or heroines, summarise any general conclusions and invite the group to draw together any themes that have emerged.

Facilitator

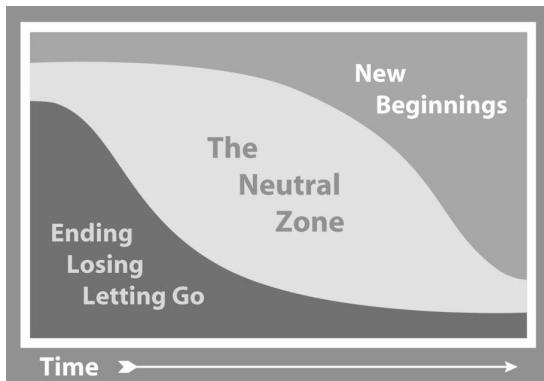
Re-introduce the theme of Transition that was discussed in 'My Story' (Topic VOC3) assuming the group has used that session. When we looked at the model of transitions previously, we asked the group to consider where they were in the model at the present time. Now we want to

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explore some of the issues relating to starting new beginning. Talk through the main elements of transition briefly again. There are a number of points to note about new beginning e.g. they may have been there dormant for some time, you have to let go sufficient to enable them to begin, the neutral zone is a creative period in which we explore possible new beginnings – sometime fruitlessly.

Perspective

Exploring New Beginnings



From 'Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change' by William Bridges, (2009 Nicholas Brealey Publishing)

Transition is the process of letting go of the way things used to be and taking hold of the way they will become. In between letting go and taking hold again, there is a chaotic but potentially creative 'neutral zone' when things aren't the old way, but aren't really a new way either yet.

Ending / Letting Go

To enable us to move on to new beginning there invariably have to be some endings. In the ending phase we lose or let go of our old outlook, our old reality, our old attitudes, even our self-image. We may resist this ending for a while. We may try to talk ourselves out of what we are feeling and then we give in, we may be swept by feelings of sadness and anger.

Neutral Zone

The neutral zone can either be a period of disorientation or a highly creative period of new possibilities. We can feel caught between old and new and can end up immobilised. Dangers of the neutral zone are that anxiety rises and motivation falls, we doubt ourselves, energy is drained into coping tactics and our effectiveness falls. This is also however a time ripe for creative opportunity.

New Beginnings

Finally, we take hold of and identify with some new outlook and some new reality as well as new attitudes and a new self-image. When we have done this, we feel that we are finally starting a new chapter in our lives. No matter how impossible it was to imagine a

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future earlier, life now feels as though it is back on its track again. We have a new sense of ourselves, a new outlook, a new sense of purpose and possibility.

Facilitator

Introduce the following question and invite the group to consider their experience for a moment..

Question

What is your experience of new beginnings? How does it feel to start something new?

Facilitator

Ask the group to share their responses. Introduce the perspective 'New Actions' from Francis Dewar at a suitable point in the discussion.

Perspective

New Actions

Francis Dewar suggests that any 'new actions' might also be 'of God' if they are

- A generous giving of who and what we are
- A new departure, fresh initiative or doing the same thing but in a different way
- Risky
- Beyond our unaided powers
- A step, however small, to a more just and equitable world

From 'Live for a Change: Discovering and Using Your Gifts' by Francis Dewar (1999, Darton, Longman and Todd)

Facilitator

Introduce the following checklist about False Assumptions about Mission by Laurie Beth Jones. We have not used the term mission much before now. Mission is the sense of being sent out to engage with the world in a purposeful way. This clearly relates to the sense of new beginnings that we are exploring here. These assumptions are helpful challenges to some of the limitations we might impose on ourselves.

Perspective

False Assumptions about Mission

1. My job is my mission

Your job may be and ideally should be part of your mission but your mission is always larger than your job

Career and jobs change. Danger of losing your sense of identity when your job changes.

2. My role is my mission

Being a mother, father, husband, wife etc

3. My To-Do list is my mission

Can be a list of busyness which is urgent but not important

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4. I am not currently living my mission

It is highly probable that you are already living your mission at some level. You are standing on holy ground

5. I am not important enough to have a mission

Don't underestimate the impact of small actions - butterfly effect

6. My mission has to be grand one to help a lot of people

Raise or teach or heal one creature and your life can be considered a success

7. A mission must be full of suffering

Common assumption that a mission must be hard - My yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:29-30). Don't take on a mission that fits someone else's needs

8. My mission has to be the same as that of my peers

Be prepared to be different and stand out from the crowd

9. Geography is destiny

Look beyond the borders or boundaries that geography might seem to impose on you

10. What I am doing is as close as I can get to my real mission

Living in the shadow of your real dream. Go for what you want directly. Beware of parallel imitations that look like but are not the 'real thing.'

11. Life is random

Don't get too obsessed with planning life - prepare to be surprised

From 'The Path : Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and Life' by Laurie Beth Jones, (1998, Hyperion)

Facilitator

Invite the members of the group to indicate which of these assumptions they think might apply to themselves and have a discussion about what to do to avoid the pitfalls of false assumptions.

Discussion

Which of these assumptions about mission might apply to you and how might you avoid the pitfalls of false assumptions?

Facilitator

Encourage group members to set some specific steps for the new beginnings that they feel may be appropriate at this time. It would be helpful to use the SMART framework and to suggest that the group comes back next week with some ideas worked out. If you have time and feel it is worth beginning this exercise this week then please do so. People may need time to reflect. Explain the SMART idea and emphasise the value of small steps and prevent people from falling into some of the traps as listed in the false assumptions.

Perspective

SMART Steps

When setting goals or deciding on a new course of action, it can be helpful to think about what you might do under 5 broad areas. This is a useful framework to think through to help to clarify where you want to go, how you will know when you have got there and what the next practical steps might be



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- S** - specific
- M** - measurable
- A** - attainable
- R** - relevant
- T** - time-bound



Activity

Take a look back at the activities in 'Turning Outward' (Topic VOC5). Is there anything in your Four Ps that you could develop a 'SMART' step towards?

S pecific ' T	What specifically might I do now, to respond to God's call? If you feel comfortable doing so, work collaboratively either with the group or with a partner.
M easurable K in g	How would I measure , or know that, progress is being made?
A ttainable o f	What can be realistically attained ?
R	How is this relevant to God, me and others?
T	What is my time frame? When, where, who....



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Facilitator

During the week, you might like to reflect on :

**Where do you sense that new
beginnings may be emerging for
you and for others?**

Facilitator

Encourage people to spend few minutes pondering on what they feel they have learned from the session and ask them to share quickly 1 or 2 points.

Ponder

What did you learn from this session?

Prayer

God of the guiding star, the bush that blazes.
Show us your way.
God of the stormy seas, the bread that nourishes us.
Teach us your truth.
God of the still small voice, the wind that blows where it chooses.
Fill us with life
God of the elements of our inward and outward journeys
Set our feet on your road today.
May God bless us with a safe journey
May the angels and saints travel with us
May we live this day in justice and joy.
Amen

*From 'This is the Day : Readings and mediations from the Iona Community'
(2002, Wild Goose)*



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Session 7 Sustaining Vocation

Overview

Our vocation in God is something that needs regular attention to be sustained. Through God it changes and develops over time. We have to be open to new promptings and surprises as God reveals more of his purposes for our lives and for those he calls us to engage with for his sake. Vocation is a shared activity. We are members together of the body of Christ and we need each other for encouragement, support and as partners in God's work. What do we need to do to support each other on our journey and sustain the clarity of our calling?

This is your worksheet; for notes, ideas and questions

Facilitator

In this session it is important to share the signs of new beginnings that we began to discuss in the previous session (topic VOC6) if they have been completed. The other main focus for this session is to explore how the local church can positively support, encourage and sustain people in their vocations given that these will invariably be expressed in daily work and life.

Remind people that the worksheet is for their use and notes only. Ensure introductions if there are new group members

Facilitator

Invite the group members in turn to talk about the SMART exercise they started last time they met and to share some ideas about new beginnings and next practical steps.

Activity

Share your thoughts about the possibilities and plans for new beginnings, and some of the actions you will take.

Facilitator

Encourage members of the group in whatever they have identified as a new beginning no matter how apparently small. Ensure everyone is invited to contribute without being put too much on the spot. When everyone has contributed ask the group members to consider the following question on their own for a few moments

Question

What have you learned from these sessions about exploring vocation?

Facilitator

Invite the group to share their responses individually. It will probably be worth writing these comments down. It is likely that a number of the comments will reinforce how much people have appreciated doing this activity in a group and listening to and sharing in each others stories and perspectives - there is a great value in listening to others experiences. Try to draw out the useful lessons for sustaining vocation in the longer term.

Facilitator

Turn the focus of attention in this last section to explore how, as a member of the local church, we can help to sustain each other vocation. Ask the group to consider the following question.

Question

What do you think the challenges might be as you move forward from here?



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Facilitator

Share the responses. Likely responses might be:

- Having to decide what to stop or let go
- What if I have got it wrong and my new beginning doesn't work out
- Dealing with the pressures and challenges of everyday work and life –how do I best respond
- Its too much for me on my own – I need to team up with someone else
- Persuading others that this is the right path
- Working out the next few steps
- Keeping in tune with God and going with the flow

Facilitator

Introduce a discussion around this extract from Paul's letter to the Ephesians and explore ways we can overcome some of the challenges together. How might we support and encourage each other and those in the church community who are exploring their vocation too?

Discussion

'Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work'

Ephesians 4:11-16 (NRSV)

What do you think are the implications for the Church, and for our vocations, of St Paul's statement?

Facilitator

Lead a discussion to explore the following question. Help the group to identify positive actions that could be taken to encourage others to explore their vocations.

Question

How can we as a Church be a community that takes our individual and collective vocation seriously?

Facilitator

Encourage a member of the group to read the final reflection ('The Heart of the Matter') aloud. Once it has been read, ask the group what they will take from this reading, which parts spoke to them particularly.

Final Reflection

The Heart of the Matter

The Lord God said:

I myself will dream a dream within you.

Good dreams come from Me, you know;

My dreams seem impossible, not too practical,

Not for the cautious man or woman;

A little risky too sometimes, a trifle brash perhaps;

Some of my friends prefer to rest more comfortably in sounder sleep
with visionless eye.

But for those who share my dreams I ask a little patience,

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A little humour, some small courage,
And a listening heart – I will do the rest.
Then they will risk and wonder at their daring,
Run and marvel at their speed,
Build and stand in awe at the beauty of their building.

You will meet me often as you work -
In your companions who share your risk,
In your friends who believe in you enough
To lend their own dreams, their own hands, their own hearts to your building,
In the people who will find your doorway, stay a while
and walk away knowing that they too can find a dream.
There will be sun-filled days and sometimes it will rain -
A little variety.....
Both come from Me – so, come, be content;
It is my dream you dream,
It is my house you build,
My caring you witness,
My love you share – and this is the heart of the matter.

Author unknown – cited in 'Live for a Change: Discovering and Using Your Gifts' by Francis Dewar (1999, Darton, Longman and Todd)

Facilitator

During the week, you might like to reflect on :



**Who might you encourage to join a group
to help to explore vocations in this way?**

Facilitator

Encourage people to spend few minutes pondering on what they feel they have learned from the session and ask them to share quickly 1 or 2 points.

Ponder

What did you learn from this session?

Facilitator

Lead this final prayer, encouraging the group to join in with the words in bold.



'Have You Seen a Burning Bush' Course Facilitator Notes

Final Prayer

In the beginning, before time, before people

Before the world began,

God was

Here and now, among us, beside us,

Enlisting the people of earth for the purposes of heaven,

God is

In the future, when we have turned to dust

And all that we know has found its fulfilment,

God will be

Not denying the world, but delighting in it

Not condemning the world, but redeeming it,

Through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit,

God was, God is, God will be.

Listen, Christ has promised to be with us

in the world, as in our worship.

Amen. We go to serve him

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