

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.

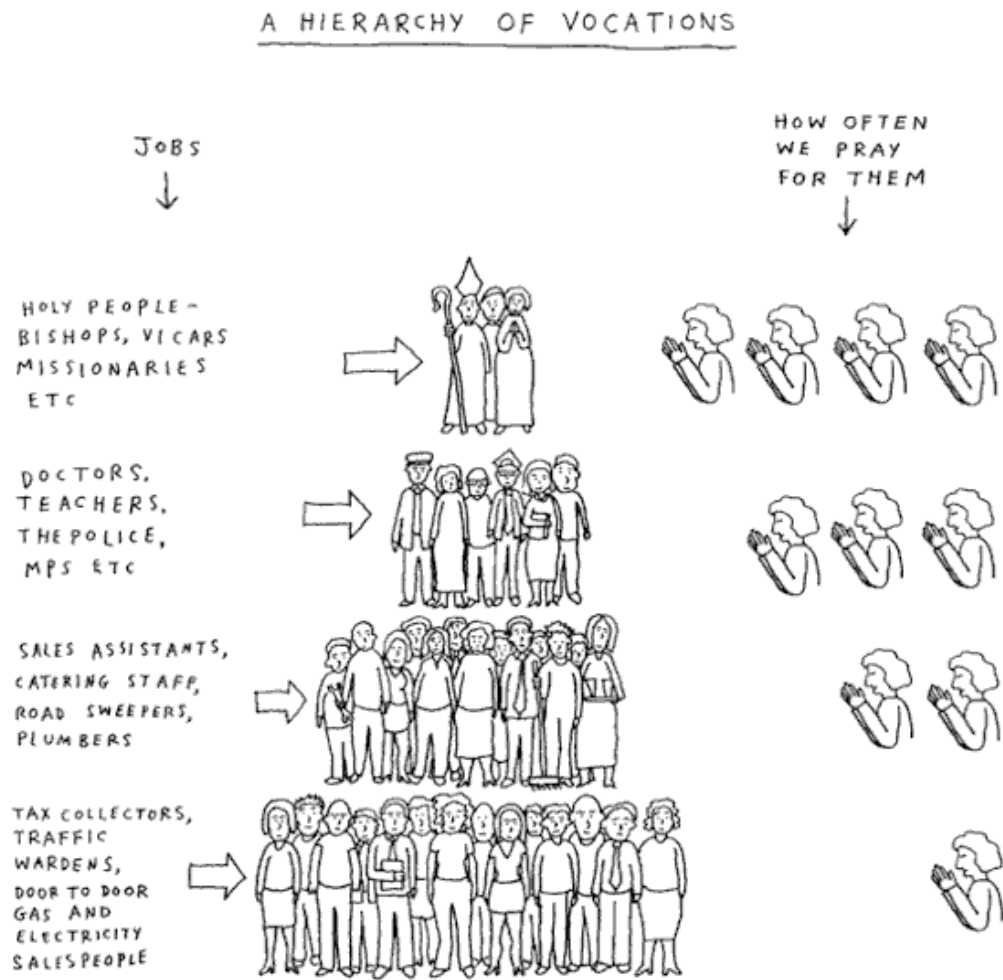
Discussion

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



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.



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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?

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.

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 if 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

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

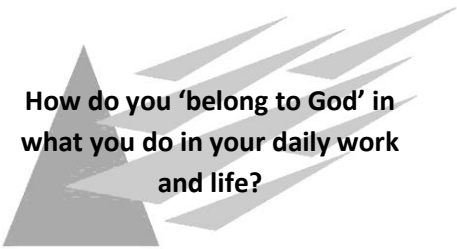
10 Assumptions about Vocation to Ditch

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

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 :



How do you 'belong to God' in
what you do in your daily work
and life?

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

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)*