

Christian Vocation Sunday

September 4, 2011

While occupation may only be a portion of our call as disciples, the PC(USA) programmatic emphasis for the Sunday before Labor Day is appropriately, Christian Vocation Sunday. Resources are provided by the Office of Christian Vocation for the purpose of cultivating a culture of call in congregations by claiming our theological perspective of the priesthood of all believers.

Use these resources for worship planning on September 4, 2011 or another worship experience. Adjust them for use in a study or a particular class. Additional resources such as a bulletin insert, skit, and a reader's theatre script are also available on the Christian Vocation website at www.pcusa.org/christianvocation. In addition, a Minute for Mission for Christian Vocation Sunday is available in the *2011 Mission Yearbook for Prayer & Study*.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *Book of Order*, W – 5.6000

Christian Vocation

God calls a people

- a. to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- b. to follow Jesus Christ in obedient discipleship;
- c. to use the gifts and abilities God has given, honoring and serving God
 - (1) in personal life,
 - (2) in household and families,
 - (3) in daily occupations,
 - (4) in community, nation, and the world.

A person responds to God's call to faith in Jesus Christ through Baptism and through life and worship in the community of faith.

Persons respond to God's call to discipleship through the ministries of God's people in and for the world.

Persons respond to God's call to honor and serve God in every aspect of human life

- a. in their work and in their play,
- b. in their thought and in their action,
- c. in their private and in their public relationships.

God hallows daily life, and daily life provides opportunity for holy living. As Christians honor and serve God in daily life, they worship God. For Christians, work and worship cannot be separated.

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Christian Vocation Sunday

An Introduction or Bulletin Announcement

Introducing Christian Vocation Sunday to the Congregation

“My father is a minister” declares the son of the new minister in town to a neighbor boy.
“Ordained!” his older sister adds.

When the neighbor boy is asked about his father’s occupation he informs them, “My father is in the hardware business.” “Ordained?” inquires the minister’s daughter. “Naturally.” he responds, with great pride.

This scene from the 1968 movie “Angel in My Pocket” while entertaining, does raise an important question. Is it possible to be called and ordained to the hardware business, or any other occupation for that matter?

At issue is the concept of vocation. “Vocation” comes from the Latin *vocare* and simply means “to call.” Outside the church, “vocation” has become almost synonymous with “occupation” or “career.” Inside the church, “vocation” most often refers to people who occupy roles in ecclesiastical structures like pastors, elders, and deacons. The term is sometimes extended to those working in helping professions or promoting justice. But the idea that a hardware store owner has a vocation is foreign to many. It isn’t “full-time Christian ministry.” Both of these perspectives on vocation are inconsistent with Reformed tradition. Vocation is more than our occupation. Vocation is more than our service within ecclesiastical settings.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognizes the Sunday before Labor Day as Christian Vocation Sunday, an opportunity to reflect upon our call to carry on the redemptive work of Christ in all parts of life.

Christian Vocation Sunday

Worship Notes

Suggested Hymns from the Presbyterian Hymnal

Here I am, Lord – PH #525
How Clear is Our Vocation Lord – PH #419
I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me – PH #369
Take My Life and Let it Be – PH #391
Today We All Are Called to Be Disciples – PH #434

Scripture Passages might include

Genesis 1: 26-28
Genesis 2: 15
Psalm 8
I Corinthians 15: 20-28
Hebrews 2: 5-9
Revelation 21: 1-5

Notes for Christian Vocation Sunday

As we look at Scripture we find little direction for how to discern our particular response to vocation. Here we must recognize the unique context we live in as citizens of prosperous early 21st Century societies. For people of the biblical era, there were comparatively few occupational options. You were largely born into the status you occupied. Scripture takes for granted the presence and the adherence to the vocation but due to the fixity of occupational life, little is offered concerning personal discernment about vocation. Today we have people who are overwhelmed and paralyzed by too many choices.

Those considering vocation often turn to a Frederick Buechner quote of the term which states that, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet" (*Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*). There is doubtlessly some important truth here as we consider occupations. The opportunity to exercise abilities and our innate gifts in meaningful ways often brings us joy. Some of us have a passion to pursue a specific type of work. Discerning which context might have greater impact on the world can also figure into our assessment.

Still, over application of this definition can become counterproductive. Not all personal calls are necessarily happy ones. Sometimes we are called to persevere in difficult circumstances.

Sometimes we need to sacrifice dream jobs, at least for a time, for the sake of spouses, children, or other commitments. Our stage in life sets limitations. We must resist the temptation to seek ultimate meaning in our work rather than in God and in our service to God. Failing to find deep gladness in our work at any given time is not necessarily an indication of having missed God's will. Whatever work we do, regardless of the satisfaction it brings us at any given time, can be ministry if done in response to God's call. Essentially, ministry is less about what we do and more about who we serve. Deciding who we will serve is certainly more critical than deciding on a particular career.

Transformation of matter, energy, and data from less useful forms to more useful forms in sustainable ways, whether for personal use or for exchange, is ministry if done in service to God. It is a key element of vocation. But it is incomplete. Vocation encompasses more than our economic labor. It encompasses all aspects of our lives. When we marry, we are answering a call to be in a covenant relationship with another. Some are called to the ministry of parenting. Other calls lay hold on our lives. Rather than thinking in terms of one vocation as our singular response to vocation, it is healthier to think in terms of vocations.

As we learn from the biblical narrative, sin and human rebellion have entered the world. Humanity has become corrupt and by extension our efforts to live out vocation have become corrupt as well. God's response is the good news of Jesus Christ. We are called into the covenant community of the church to give witness to Christ's shalom-filled reign. At baptism we are called to participate in the reconciling work established by Christ in his earthly ministry, telling the good news, healing the sick, freeing the captives, pursuing justice, and seeking shalom for the world. This is our Christian vocation.

See the Christian Vocation Sunday Commissioning Service as a response to the Word

Christian Vocation Sunday

Commissioning Service

Vocation involves much more than our occupation. Yet for many, our occupation is a significant on-going expression of vocation that fills our days. The commissioning service gives public recognition of a call an individual has answered and sends that individual with the support of the worshiping community to fulfill that call.

It might be desirable to spend a season preparing the congregation for such an event before inviting people to be commissioned. (It is possible that much of the congregation will want to be commissioned the first time this is done. Adjustments need to be made to the liturgy accordingly.) Once such a service has been held, it might be appropriate to schedule an annual (or more frequent) service in which previously noncommissioned people may participate or those who have changed jobs in the intervening period may be re-commissioned.

Commissioning is typically done within the context of the service for the Lord's Day, although the liturgy may be used alone. When done as part of the Lord's Day service, commissioning should follow the sermon and precede the Lord's Supper with the emphasis on seeing all of work as part of God's mission. While it is certainly appropriate to lift examples from the "helping professions" (ex. education, social service, health care) as part of God's work in the world, it is important to lift examples of laborers, service workers, businesspeople and professionals. Ideally, illustrations will emphasize how specific work connects with directly with God's mission in the world.

Invite the minister, the people to be commissioned, and any others invited to be a part of the ceremony to gather at the front of the sanctuary, possibly at the baptismal font.

Commissioning for Ministry throughout God's Worldⁱ

Sentences of Scripture (Romans 12: 1-2, Genesis 1: 26-29)

Leader: I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

People: **Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.**

Leader: Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

People: **So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.**

All: **God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."**

Hymn

Psalm 8 (Unison)

Call to Service

Leader: We are called by God
to be the church of Jesus Christ,
a sign in the world today
of what God intends for all humankind

People: **The great ends of the church are
the proclamation of the gospel
for the salvation of humankind;
the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship
of the children of God;
the maintenance of divine worship;
the preservation of the truth;
the promotion of social righteousness;
And the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven
to the world.**

Leader: We are created in the image of God.
We have been called by God,
to serve as stewards of God's resources
and to live as tenants upon God's land.
We have been called to bring all creation and humanity
to flourishing fullness.
We have been gathered by Christ
into communities of discipleship,
and sent in mission,
praying and working for the reconciliation
of all things and all people
to God through Christ by the power of the Spirit.

The minister or other appropriate person relates the form(s) of service to which persons are being commissioned.

Those being commissioned may express their hope in accepting the call and commission, and give testimony as to how they came to their call.

The minister addresses those being commissioned:

The grace bestowed upon you in baptism
is sufficient for your calling
because it is God's grace.
By God's grace we are saved,
and enabled to grow in the faith
and to commit our lives in ways that serve Christ.

God has called you to particular service.
Show your purpose by answering these questions.

Do you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

Do you sincerely embrace the teaching that that the triune God was in the beginning creating the world, that God is at work sustaining the created order, that God is Lord over all creation and that we are called to be stewards of God's resources and tenants upon God's land?

Will you as God's image-bearer, answer the call to exercise godly dominion over creation and to pursue the *shalom* of the world, bringing all creation and all humanity to flourishing fullness?

Will you bring the reconciling and redemptive work of Christ into your occupation, seeking the transformation of your particular sphere of work into that which gives honor to Christ and witness to his coming reign?

Will you encourage, support, and pray for your sisters and brothers in Christ as they undertake this mission in their own lives?

Will you, in all your work, serve with energy, intelligence, imagination and love, not as one working for human favor, but as one offering daily worship to God?

The minister addresses all present:

Do you the people of [Name] Church,
confirm the call of God to our brothers/sisters
in service to Jesus Christ?

Will you support and encourage them in this ministry?

Commissioning Prayer

Faithful God,
in baptism you claimed us;
And by your Holy Spirit you are working in our lives,
empowering us to live a life worthy of our callings.
We thank you for leading these servants to this time and place.
Establish them in your truth,
and guide them by your Holy Spirit,
that in your service they may grow,
as faithful agents exercising stewardship over all creation
pursing the reconciliation of all things and all people.
To the Father, the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
be all honor and glory,
both in the creation that is now
and in the new creation that is to come.

Charge

You are now commissioned to service.
Whatever you do, in word or deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God through Him.

Blessing

May the God of Peace
make you holy in every way,
and keep your whole being,
spirit, soul, and body,
free from every fault
at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

Hymn

ⁱ Adapted from and reprinted by permission from the *Book of Occasional Services* © 1999 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), a Corporation for Congregational Ministries Division, Office of Theology and Worship