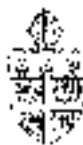


Christian Calling

**a short course
for exploration and action
(2nd edition)**



The Vocations Task Group
The Diocese of Newcastle

Christian Calling: a short course for exploration and action

COURSE INTRODUCTION

This material is designed for any group of Christians who want to think more deeply about, pray about, and respond to God's call in their life. It assumes a basic understanding of, and commitment to, the Christian Gospel – but certainly does not assume that the only Christian calling is to ordination.

By the end of the course it is intended that participants should have been enabled to consider their calling in terms of:

- Their relationship of love with God
- The responsibilities and privileges of Baptism
- Their everyday life
- Their membership of the Church
- Hearing God's call
- Where God might be leading next

Throughout the course there are suggestions to enable participants to become prayerfully open to the call of God in their lives. Different methods of praying are introduced for use between the sessions.

CONTENTS

Leader's Introduction	3
1: God's Love – our first calling	4
2: Our Baptismal Calling	7
3: Everyday God	11
4: Part of the Body of Christ – a member of the Church	16
5: Hearing God's Call - part one	19
6: Hearing God's Call - part two	22

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

This material supplies the bones of a 6-session course in exploring one's Christian vocation.

Much flexibility has been left to enable the leader(s) to decide how it is best tailored to the participants' needs & abilities.

- Bible passages – it is suggested they are read out to the group, but equally they could be studied by everyone, given in summary, or even acted out.
- Use can be made of classical or contemporary art to aid the exploration of biblical stories – the internet provides a wonderful resource. Pictures may be added to the text of the bookmarks or displayed during the session.
- Sharing can take place amongst the entire group, sub-groups or in pairs.
- “Real live people” could be interviewed as part of any of the sessions – drafting them in to speak of how they heard and see themselves living out (the relevant aspect of) God's call in their life.
- The elements of each session can be moved around to suit you and your group. (It would be good to include a devotional element each time, but singing won't be right for everyone!)

Group leaders will need to be skilled in drawing out from participants what they already know and believe, and also in enabling connections to be made.

Resources for further exploration are given at the end of each session – either to help the leader in preparation, or to enable individuals to continue their own exploration afterwards.

It is deliberate that no ‘handouts’ have been designed, so that people are free to engage in their own discussions and explorations during the sessions. If you feel that your group would benefit from written material, please feel free to construct your own from the leader's notes (for example in giving instructions for prayer during the intervening period).

Group leaders should feel free to adapt the course content and layout to best suit their particular group members. The course is not copyright.

Material from *Common Worship* and *New Patterns for Worship* is copyright © The Archbishop's Council 2002.

Christian Calling 1: God's love – our first calling

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine." (Isaiah 43.1).

▶▶ AIM:

To enable participants to recognise, and respond to, their primary calling as Christians – to a relationship of love with God.

In preparation for this session you will need:

- *pictures cut from magazines/newspapers (or from the internet) of parents with children, illustrating parental love*
- *a picture or model of the crucifixion*
- *the bible readings from Hosea and John*
- *information from your parish/deanery/diocese relating to opportunities to deepen one's devotional life*
- *resources for the worship*
- *prepared 'bookmarks' with the Isaiah 43.1 text*
- *if necessary, instructions for further prayer*

* INTRODUCTIONS:

Enable folk to get to know each other, and feel relaxed.

⚙ SHARING:

Allow folk 2 minutes to think about the following questions, and then to share in 2s/3s. (If it feels right the sharing could then be opened to the larger group).

- ? What do you remember as your first awareness of God and his love for you?
- ? What did it feel like?
- ? How did you know that God loved you?

📖 SCRIPTURE:

God's love in action (use both readings)

1. Display newspaper/magazine pictures of parents with children

Read Hosea 11.1-4 (&8?)

- ? What do these words tell us about the love of God?
- ? How do we feel as a result?

2. Keep the parent pictures on display, now add a picture or model of the crucifixion.

Read John 3.16

- ? What do these words tell us about God's love?
- ? How do we feel as a result?

🏰 EXPLORE:

Allow folks 2 minutes to think about the following, before sharing.

? What are the ways in which you are seeking to respond to God's love, to build up your relationship with God?

? Newly married couples are warned that their relationship will need to be worked at, no matter how much they love each other – in what sense(s) are you working at your relationship with God?

See also note in parenthesis over/

[This exploration may lead people to want to do something more about their prayer/devotional life. Be prepared to talk about the importance of prayer and ways of praying. Bring along details of options within the parish/deanery/diocese like prayer or fellowship groups, retreats, study days, Spiritual Direction, daily prayer resources, Bible reading notes etc. You could also have copies of books that could help (see below). It could be at this point that you introduce the 'To Pray Over' option below.]

☆ **WORSHIP OPTIONS:**

☆ Listen to a recording of 'For God so loved the world' (from Stainer's crucifixion)

☆ Sing/read 'Lord God, your love has called us here' (Ancient & Modern New Standard 489)

☆ Sing/listen to 'Abba, Father', 'Father we love you', 'Adoramus te, Domine', 'Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you'

☆ Prayers:

O Lord our God,
grant us grace to desire you with our whole heart;
that so desiring, we may seek and find you;
and so finding, may love you;
and so loving, may hate those sins
from which you have delivered us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(after Anselm)

Almighty God, you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you:
pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself,
until at last we shall see you face to face;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. (after the collect for Trinity 17)

Before next time

☞ **TO THINK ABOUT:**

Prepare bookmark-sized slips of paper with the text: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine." Isaiah 43.1.

Encourage people to use the text during the following week(s) to continue to think about/meditate on their primary calling (to God and his love).

☞ **TO PRAY OVER:**

"Transposing Scripture" is a way of praying which could be used to supplement the above. Transposing scripture may allow us to hear God's message for us as individuals more clearly. One or both of the following passages could be used, with these instructions:

1. Read **Isaiah 43.1-5**. Change the words 'Jacob' and 'Israel' to your own name. Try to imagine the Lord speaking these words directly to you. What is the Lord talking about when he tells you to 'fear not'? Try to imagine Jesus saying to you now, 'You are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you.'

2. Take the prayer in **Ephesians 3:14-21** and change the pronouns from ‘you’ to ‘me’. Write out the new prayer so that it is a prayer for you. Then read it aloud several times, savouring the words. Keep the prayer with you.

👏 **IN PREPARATION:**

If necessary, ask folks to bring baptismal photos/memories/stories with them next time.

Resources for further exploration:

Patterns not Padlocks, Angela Ashwin (Eagle, 1992)

Heaven in Ordinary, Angela Ashwin (McCrimmon, 1985)

God of Surprises, Gerard Hughes (Hodder & Stoughton, 1985)

God in all Things, Gerard Hughes (Hodder & Stoughton, 2003)

Building your Spiritual Life, Ed. Ian Paul (Zondervan, 2003)

The Gift of Prayer: Embracing the Sacred in the everyday, Margaret Silf (Loyola, 2005)

Landmarks, Margaret Silf (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998)

Christian Calling 2: Our Baptismal Calling

"Baptism marks the beginning of a journey with God which continues for the rest of our lives, the first step in response to God's love."

(Pastoral Introduction to the Baptism service, p.345 – page numbers refer to the main Common Worship prayer book)

▶▶ AIM:

To explore the significance of baptism, not as a single, isolated event - but as a life-time's calling.

In preparation for this session you will need:

- *copies of the service orders for baptism in your church*
- *the bible reading from Mark*
- *baptismal symbols (water, candle, oil, cross, picture of welcoming people) as appropriate*
- *resources for the worship*
- *prepared 'bookmarks' with the text "Baptism marks....."*
- *(if necessary) instructions for 'To Pray Over'.*

⚙ SHARING:

Allow people to reflect together on the prayer exercise if they wish.

Then either/or/and:

1. If you have asked people to bring photos of their own baptism:
 - ? What handed-down knowledge/memories do you have of the day?
 - ? How conscious are you of **being** a baptised person – what does this mean to you?
2. Think about the baptism services in your church:
 - ? What for you is the highlight of the service? – why?
 - (Have to hand the service orders you usually use – also for next section)*

📖 SCRIPTURE:

Having reminded folks of the way in which Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his earthly ministry (the fulfilment of his calling), read the account of his baptism from [Mark 1.9-15](#).

Ask folk simply to listen and be quiet for a short while, allowing the passage to speak to them. You could use the Ignatian contemplation described below in 'To Pray Over'.

🏹 EXPLORE:

(have on display throughout this session appropriate items as visual aids)

Enable folk to explore the symbolism of baptism and its implications for our calling (use only those symbols which are actually used in your services normally).

(Either explore all symbolism before implications, or each symbol & its implication one at a time – see table on next page).

SYMBOL	POINTING TO	OUR CALLING	LITURGICAL LINK (page numbers refer to CW black book)
WATER	Washing, new start, entering into Christ's death (dying to sin) and life (rising to Christ), cf. 'Christening' = making Christ-like	To live 'in Christ' - as Christ himself would live (Also comes from the putting on of new clothes which symbolises putting on Christ)	Decision p.353 p.357
CANDLE	God's light in a world of darkness	Out of darkness into God's marvellous light To shine as a light in the world	Decision intro p.353 Giving candle p.363
OIL, ANOINTING	The seal of the Spirit Our membership with the royal, priestly people of God	To live empowered & inspired by the Holy Spirit	Prayer 'daily be renewed by his anointing Spirit' p.357
CROSS, SIGNING	Jesus' death for us	To take up our own cross daily & to follow Christ	p.354 cf. Luke 9.23
WELCOME	the body of Christ	not as an individual, but as someone who belongs	p.352 and 361

☆ WORSHIP OPTIONS:

☆ Hymn/songs: sing/listen to any you often use at baptism services.
For example: 'As we are gathered, Jesus is here'

☆ Baptismal Collect: (CW p.350)

Heavenly Father, by the power of your Holy Spirit
you give to your faithful people new life in the water of baptism.
Guide and strengthen us by the same Spirit,
that we who are born again may serve you in faith and love,
and grow into the full stature of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen

☆ Baptismal Commitment: (CW p.359)

Those who are baptised are called to worship and serve God.
Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

With the help of God, I will.

Will you persevere in resisting evil,
and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

With the help of God, I will.

Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?

With the help of God, I will.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all people, loving your neighbour as yourself?

With the help of God, I will.

Will you acknowledge Christ's authority over human society,
by prayer for the world and its leaders, by defending the weak, and by seeking
peace and justice?

With the help of God, I will.

May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith,
that you may be rooted and grounded in love
and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. **Amen.**

Before next time

☞ TO THINK ABOUT:

Using prepared 'bookmarks' with the text: "Baptism marks the beginning of a journey with God which continues for the rest of our lives, the first step in response to God's love" - continue to be conscious of 'being' baptised, and of your calling as a baptised person. (The bookmark could also include an artistic representation (classic or contemporary) of Christ's baptism).

☞ TO PRAY OVER:

This could be done in the session if you have time. Otherwise the participants need to be given these instructions:

Entering into the Gospels – contemplating scripture (using Mark 1.9-15).

- Spend some time settling down, quietening yourself before God, perhaps by becoming conscious of your breathing; in and out.
- Ask for God's inspiration in this time of prayer.
- Read the passage slowly and carefully several times, noticing the details. Let any questions arise.
- Put the reading down and allow your imagination free-rein to bring the scene to life with you as a participant. Use all your senses to immerse yourself in the scene. What can you see, hear, touch, smell, sense?
- Let the drama unfold, allowing yourself to be affected by the words and actions of the story. If you can, allow yourself to identify with Jesus and all that he might have been feeling at this time. What might his baptism have meant for him and his life?

- Let yourself respond to the feelings evoked. You might feel drawn to express a feeling of thanks or to ask God for something in particular. How might God be inviting you, through your engagement with this story? How has this time of prayer affected your sense of how you might live out your baptismal calling?

✋ **IN PREPARATION:**

Ask folk next week to bring with them something which symbolises what the bulk of their Mon-Sat life is taken up with, or to be prepared to describe a ‘typical’ week.

Resources for further exploration:

The Seven Sacraments, Anselm Gruen (Continuum, 2003) – the chapter on baptism looks further at some of the symbols, and draws out the significance of living in awareness of our status as a baptised person.

God’s Pattern, David Stancliffe (SPCK, 2003)

Christian Calling: 3. Everyday God

"Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory."
(from post-communion prayer CW p.182)

▶▶ AIM:

To explore our calling to live and work as Christians in our everyday life.

In preparation for this session you will need:

- the bible reading from Luke
- sacred and secular pictures
- the Dave Walker cartoon or pictorial map of the parish
- resources for the worship
- prepared 'bookmarks' with the text
- instructions for 'To Pray Over'

⚙ SHARING:

Allow people to reflect together on the prayer exercise if they wish.

Either/and/or:

1. If folk have brought a **symbolic item** – ask them to place it centrally and share what it represents – what 'work' they are involved in, the people they have contact with etc., how do they feel about it?
2. If folk have such a thing as a **typical week** – ask them to share what it looks like, what they are involved in doing, what groups of people do they meet?

📖 SCRIPTURE:

Ask folk to listen to the story of Zaccheus.

Read Luke 19.1-10. Be quiet for a short while, allowing the passage to speak to you. The passage can be understood as an example of the way in which a person's contact with Jesus can lead to the transformation of their way of living and working, or as an example of the ways in which we can discover God already at work in the world.

🏰 EXPLORE 1:

Sacred or secular? (finding God in the world)

Show folk a variety of pictures (from magazines, newspapers, internet etc) asking them to think about whether they consider them to be 'sacred' or 'secular' (for example: church building, shopping centre, factory, cross, wedding, family, Gateshead angel, tower block, graveyard, friends, candle, Examples can be found at:

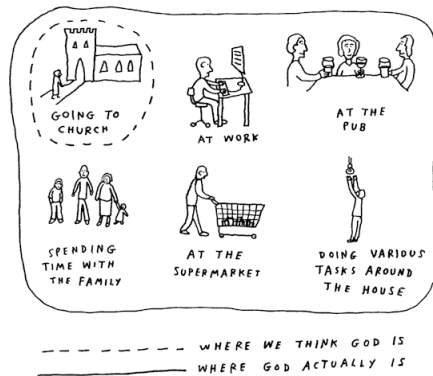
<http://www.aftersunday.org.uk/about/the-sacred-secular-divide>).

? How did you decide whether something should be regarded as sacred or secular?

? Was it always easy to answer?

? Would you say that your symbolic item (from Sharing 1) is sacred or secular?

? Do our answers say anything about our understanding of where God is in the world? *In exploring the answer to this question, it may be helpful to refer to Dave Walker's cartoon 'Where God actually is' (below), or to look at a pictorial map of the parish and to consider where God is.*



Cartoon © Dave Walker/www.cartoonchurch.com

This cartoon can be found at: <http://www.aftersunday.org.uk/about>

🏰 EXPLORE 2:

Being sent by God into the world

? How conscious are you of being sent by God into your Monday-Saturday life?
(cf. the ‘sending’ from the end of the Eucharist service:

‘...send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.....’
and ‘Go in peace to love and serve the Lord’)

? Would you ever have thought that this could be described as ‘mission’?

Explain that if you’re seeking to live out your baptismal calling, to live differently as a result of knowing Jesus, this is exactly what you will have been doing (whether conscious of it or not).

God is a ‘sending’ God (‘mission’ is from a Latin word which means ‘send’)

God sent **Jesus** – to live and die as a human being in order to restore relationships between God and his people (John 3.17, Romans 8.3, 1John 4.14)

God sends his **Holy Spirit** – involved in creation and re-creation, our life and new life in God (John 15.26, 16.7, Galatians 5.22-25)

God calls and sends **us** now in his name – to be part of God’s continuing work in this world (John 20.21)

In the Anglican Church, for some time we have understood ourselves to be sent by God in 5 ways (these are the 5 marks of mission as identified by the Anglican Consultative Council – see <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/fivemarks.cfm>):

1. to share the good news of our faith with those who don’t know about it
2. to help new believers to grow in their faith
3. to respond to people in need by offering help in love
4. to work towards peace and justice for all people
5. to be responsible in the ways in which we use and care for the world

? How might your attitude to your weekday activities be different as a result of exploring this?

? What else can you/we do?

☆ WORSHIP OPTIONS:

☆ Making use of the offertory at the Eucharist:

This is our chance to offer to God our everyday life (as we offer to God the everyday symbols of bread and wine – which will become transformed by his life).

How can we as individuals be more conscious of making use of this part of the service?

During the worship of the session, the symbols which people have brought could be placed centrally, and together the well-known prayer could be used:

**Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power,
the glory, the splendour, and the majesty;
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours.
All things come from you,
and of your own do we give you.**

☆ Hymn/songs – to be read, sung or listened to:

Teach me my God and King,

Make me a channel,

Fill thou my life,

Everyday God (Bernadette Farrell, in *'Restless is the Heart'*)

The Servant King (From heaven you came),

A touching place (Iona Community, in *'Love from Below'* p.66 – reminds us of the ways in which Christ can meet people in need through us),

Sent by the Lord am I (Iona Community, in *'Sent by the Lord'* p.32).

☆ Prayers:

Eternal God and Father,

you create and redeem us by the power of your love:

guide and strengthen us by your Spirit,

that we may give ourselves in love and service

to one another and to you;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Common Worship Daily prayer preliminary edition, p.142)

God of grace and goodness,
who made us body and spirit
that our work and faith
may be one.

May we through our life
and our worship,

join in your labour

to bring forth a new creation

in justice, love and truth;

through Jesus, our redeemer

(from the 'After Sunday' website www.aftersunday.org.uk)

Reveal in us your glory, Lord;
stir in us your power.
Renew in us your kingdom, Lord;
strengthen in us your hope.
Work in us your miracles, Lord;
abide in us yourself.

(From Daily prayer: Diocese of Durham)

☆ Everyday-life prayers:

The Celtic tradition gave rise to prayers centred around simple daily activities (like lighting the fire or milking the cow – see David Adam’s books)

– can we write our own?

[Eg: “In my journey to work today, O God, may I be aware of my journey with you.”

or: “As I open up my computer, so may I be open to your Spirit.

As I click on these icons, so may I picture Christ in my heart.

As the screen reveals my work, so almighty God may you be revealed in my life.”

or: “As Christ met people in the market place and the town square, so may he meet people through me in the streets and shops today.”]

Before next time:

⚡ TO THINK ABOUT:

Bookmark slips: “Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory” (also with 5 marks of mission on?). Continue to be conscious of the 5 marks of mission, and of opportunities you have of being used by God in these ways.

🕒 TO PRAY OVER:

Reviewing the day:

We sometimes find ourselves thinking over the events of the day as evening approaches, and this prayer technique taps into that inclination. We ask God to show us how he has been at work in us, and through the people and situations we have met. The key things we are asking God to show us are these:

‘What today has drawn me closer to God?’ and

‘What today has taken me away from God?’

- 1) Take time to be still in a comfortable position, to relax, and simply pay attention to your breathing.
- 2) Allow the events of the day to play back in your mind’s eye. Don’t try to force this, or to remember every detail of the day: whatever is brought to our consciousness is what we are invited to engage with.
- 3) Allow yourself to re-visit the feelings these events bring up in you.
- 4) Let the day play back again, asking God to enlighten you about the various moods and feelings. The key questions to ask are: ‘What today has drawn me closer to God?’ and ‘What today has taken me away from God?’ or alternatively, ‘Where have I felt energised today?’ and ‘Where today have I felt that energy has been sapped from me?’
- 5) You might want to give thanks to God for various things as a result of this, or to ask his forgiveness, or to pray for something in particular.
- 6) From all that has surfaced, what do I want to take forward to tomorrow?

✋ IN PREPARATION:

If group members represent a variety of churches, ask them to bring their church's/parish's mission statement with them next week.

Resources for further exploration:

After Sunday www.aftersunday.org.uk – website dedicated to strengthening the connection between faith, work and the world

The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity – see www.licc.org.uk

Thank God it's Monday, Mark Greene (Scripture Union, 2001)

Sleeping with Bread, by Dennis, Sheila, and Matthew Linn (Paulist Press, 1995) – reviewing the day in prayer.

Where is God on Monday? Mackenzie & Kirkland (Navpress, 2003)

Church that works, Oliver and Thwaites (Authentic Lifestyle, 2003)

Christian Calling 4: Part of the body of Christ – a member of the Church.

"We are the body of Christ. In the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body."

(Introduction to the Peace CW p.290)

▶▶ AIM:

To explore what it means to live out our calling within the body of the Church.

In preparation for this session you will need:

- the bible readings from *1 Corinthians* or *Romans*
- a large sheet of paper and a few differently-coloured felt pens (per church represented)
- resources for the worship
- prepared 'bookmarks' with the text
- instructions for 'To Pray Over'

SCRIPTURE:

Read I Corinthians 12.12,13,27 and/or Romans 12.4-6a.

Ask folks simply to listen and be quiet for a short while, allowing the passage to speak to them.

EXPLORE 1:

On a large sheet of paper (have) draw(n) a simple outline of your church building (leaving space outside it).

Encourage people to suggest aspects of church life which are ways in which this particular part of Christ's body seeks to respond to God's love, and to be part of God's continuing work (drawing on what learnt from last 3 sessions).

Write or draw these contributions on the sheet

- should they be placed inside or outside the building?
- should arrows or other symbols be included?

[If group members are from different churches, perhaps they could do this exercise in smaller sub-groups with those from their own church – or 'the church' could be that of the deanery or diocese.]

Now encourage members to identify where **they** fit in &/or make a contribution to the life and work of the church (initials representing individuals could be added to the sheet in a different colour ink).

? How conscious are people of being part of a body within which different members, working towards a common end, have to be co-operative and inter-dependent?

? Might this awareness lead to a different approach to their involvement? (Eg. praying for other aspects of church life, for other people's work, making sure communication is improved, making a conscious effort to get to know what is happening in other parts of the body.....).

EXPLORE 2:

Compare the aspects of church life represented on the sheet with the mission statement of the church/parish.

(The mission statement represents that church's understanding of God's calling to them for this particular period of time).

? How well does the church seem to be living out its stated mission? Are there any obvious gaps between aims and actions? Are things lop-sided in any way?

? If there is any disparity between what is being done and what is voiced in the mission statement – which needs to be changed?

? Are all five marks of mission being attended to? Is this a conscious or unconscious decision?

[If group members are from different churches, they could work in smaller sub-groups with members of their own church – or encouraging working in twos or threes so that each person can learn from one other situation.]

☆ WORSHIP OPTIONS:

☆ Responsive prayer: (New Patterns for Worship p.206)

We pray that Christ may be seen in the life of the Church.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us.

You have called us into the family of those
who are the children of God.
May our love for our brothers and sisters
be strengthened by your grace.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us.

You have called us to be a temple where the Holy Spirit can dwell.
Give us clean hands and pure hearts, so that our lives will reflect
your holiness.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us.

You have called us to be a light to the world,
so that those in darkness come to you.
May our lives shine as a witness to the saving grace
you have given for all.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us.

You have called us to be members of your body,
so that when one suffers, all suffer together.
We ask for your comfort and healing power
to bring hope to those in distress.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us.

You have called us to be the Bride, where you, Lord, are the
Bridegroom.
Prepare us for the wedding feast, where we will be united with you
for ever.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us. Amen.

☆ Prayer:

God, the giver of life, may your Holy Spirit well up within your Church:
by the Spirit may we be equipped to live the gospel of Christ,
and made eager to do your will,
so that we may share with the whole of creation the joys of eternal life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. (after Collect Trinity 20)

☞ TO THINK ABOUT:

Bookmark: “We are the body of Christ. In the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body.”

☞ TO PRAY OVER:

Review your life:

Using the same technique as last week in reviewing the day, but instead seek to review across the years of your life. These ideas are based on those of Margaret Silf. You may not feel able to do this entire exercise, pray through it as much as you feel comfortable.

- Use your usual method for stilling yourself before God
- Imagine your life as a river or a path. Prayerfully reflect on the course of this river/path.
- Ask for God’s grace in being able to remember the fragments of your life in a way that will reveal to you the patterns that are leading to your wholeness in Him.
- As you remember the exterior events in your life, remember also your reactions to them. Then notice the gifts that you have received; skills and talents, the gifts of personality, gifts of people who have come your way and become significant to you.
- Notice how God has been present in your life and the times He has seemed to be absent. How has He made Himself known to you at special moments?
- Become aware of how God touches your unique personality and brings you to life; how He speaks to you through your personality, your gifts and your decisions.

(This method of reviewing one’s life is explained in more detail in pp. 47-51 in *Landmarks* by Margaret Silf).

☞ IN PREPARATION:

If you are not using the prayer exercise above, then ask folks to prepare for the next session this way:

Invite people to reflect on their life so far, and on the times they have heard God’s calling, and on the nature of their response. This will help them at the beginning of the next session. In case people feel daunted by this prospect, point out that they must have heard and responded at least once – otherwise they wouldn’t be part of the group!

Resources for further exploration:

Building Missionary Congregations, Robert Warren (Church House Publishing, 1995)
Being Human, Being Church, Robert Warren (Marshall Pickering, 1995)
Healthy Churches Handbook, Robert Warren (Church House Publishing, 2004)
Mission-shaped Church, General Synod Report (Church House Publishing, 2004)

Christian Calling: 5. Hearing God's call – Part 1

"Speak, Lord, your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3.10)

▶▶ AIM:

To enable participants to recognise how God has called them in the past, and to prayerfully consider what God might be calling them to at present.

In preparation for this session you will need:

- the bible readings from John and/or 1 Samuel
- enough sheets of paper and pens for participants
- tape of CD of quiet music for 'explore'
- paper to list ways of hearing God's call
- someone to be interviewed – careful preparation so that they understand what will be asked of them, and are ready to tell their story
- resources for the worship
- instructions for 'To Pray Over'

SCRIPTURE:

The first session used a verse from Isaiah with God's assurance that he has called us by name, we are His.

Ask folks to listen to 1 (or 2) accounts of people hearing God calling their name.

Read either John 20.1, 11-18 (Mary Magdalene) and/or 1 Samuel 3.1-18 (Samuel).

Be quiet for a short while, allowing the passages to speak to you.

EXPLORE: *(give a significant amount of time to this exercise)*

Do not invite sharing from last week's exercise yet.

Following on from the prayer exercise or the preparation of last week:

Ask members to reflect on the times in their life when they have heard God's call (the call of God's love, calling in baptism, calling in every-day life, calling within the church).

Ask them to draw a 'time-line' of their life (perhaps as a river or a path), marking their sense of calling and response with appropriate symbols or words along the line of their life. (N.B. do stress that the 'call' does not necessarily need to have been audible, or in 'neon lights'). Quiet music could be played during this exercise.

SHARING:

Share in pairs as much as you are comfortable of your time-line.

Sense whether people might want to share as a group.

Then consider as a group how God's call can be heard.

? How did you 'hear' God call **your** name?

(Perhaps draw up a list of all the different ways cited).

(Perhaps consider the ways in which these parallel, or differ from, the calls of Biblical characters).

A "real live person" could be drafted in to be interviewed at this point about their journey of being called.

☆ WORSHIP:

☆ Song/hymns – to be read, sung or listened to:

'Take my life', 'Lord for the years' or 'Here I am, Lord' (I, the Lord of sea and sky)

'Will you come and follow me' (Iona Community – in many recent hymn books)

'God it was' (Iona Community, in '*Love from Below*' p.48 – traces the calls of various people in the Bible – and leaves us thinking of our own calling.)

'God the creator' (Iona Community, in '*Love from Below*' p.84 – a song of commitment)

☆ Psalm 139:

Read by someone, perhaps with quiet music in the background, or listen to a setting of the Psalm by Bernadette Farrell (from the CD 'Christ be our light').

☆ Prayers:

Heavenly Father,
as we acknowledge that to be a member of Christ's body
is to be called by you into love and service;
so we pray
for discernment to know your call,
for courage to respond,
and for your Holy Spirit to equip us for the task.
So may your will be done in our lives,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God of illumination,
you call us beyond our imagining to tasks beyond our powers.
Empower our service and enlighten our worship
that we may know and proclaim the light of the world.

(Joy Tetley, *Prayers encircling the World*, (SPCK, 1998) with permission)

Before next time

☪ TO PRAY OVER and ✋ IN PREPARATION:

Moving on from recognising the past, to thinking about the present for the future.
How might we become more open to God's call? How might we see where God is calling us?

Here are options of two biblical passages which may, through prayerful meditation, help us:

Luke 24.13-35: The Road to Emmaus

Still yourself for prayer, and read the passage a few times.

Ask God to direct your thoughts and prayers.

Place yourself in your imagination walking with the two disciples.

Allow the stranger to come alongside. Tell him how it has been for you in your life, how you are feeling about the course of your life so far, your hopes, your fears, your expectations. When you reach the crossroads, what happens next?

OR *over*/

Luke 4.16-30: Jesus' sermon

Still yourself for prayer, and read the passage a few times.

Ask God to direct your thoughts and prayers.

In today's world, in your locality, in your experience, who are the impoverished.... the imprisoned the blind the oppressed?

As you reflect on this, who are the particular people whose condition touches your heart most? What might they be praying for from God? What might it mean for *you* to hear their prayer?



Christian Calling: 6. Hearing God's Call - Part 2

"What does the Lord require of you.....?" (from Micah 6.8)

▶▶ AIM:

To enable participants to consider prayerfully what God might be calling them to at present, and to continue to be open to God's call.

In preparation for this session you will need:

- *the bible reading from Luke*
- *A4 sheets with the John Powell text at the top*
- *Tape or CD of soft music for 'To think about'*
- *resources for the worship*

📖 SCRIPTURE:

Ask people to listen again to the biblical text which was used in the exercise since the last session.

(Luke 24.13-35 or Luke 4.16-30).

Allow a short time for personal reflection.

⚙️ SHARING:

Gauge the feeling of the group.

Ask people to share in 2s or 3s, or in the whole group, as much as they feel able of what last week's exercise has (or the 5 weeks together have) opened up for them.

🌊 TO THINK ABOUT

Give each person a copy of the following text printed at the top of a piece of A4 paper (leaving a fair amount of empty paper).

"There is an old Christian tradition
that God sends each person into this world
with a special message to deliver,
with a special song to sing for others,
with a special act of love to bestow.
No one else can speak my message,
or sing my song,
or offer my act of love.
These are entrusted only to me."

From John Powell, *Through Seasons of the Heart* (Collins 1988).

Invite people, on their own, to reflect on last week's exercise and the words of this reading, and to write down anything they feel prompted to do, to say, to explore, to be, in response to God's call.

- ❓ What might be the first step(s) you need to take?
- ❓ What response might you want to make to God at this stage?
- ❓ What help might you need from Him?

Allow a significant length of time for this – perhaps playing some quiet music whilst this is happening. At the end of the time, invite people to fold up the paper like a letter, and to put their name on the outside.

☆ WORSHIP:

☆ Invite people to place their 'letter' in front of themselves (on the floor/their lap/the table....) – this symbolises their offering of themselves to God.

Read Isaiah 41.8-10 and 13 allowing people to listen and pray.
(Each person is then able to take their 'letter' with them at the end – as a reminder).

☆ Song/hymns – to be read, sung or listened to:
'Take my life'
'Here I am, Lord' (I, the Lord of sea and sky)
and other songs from previous weeks.

☆ Challenge:
Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no feet but yours, no hands but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which the compassion
of Christ is to look out on a hurting world.
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good.
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless all now.
St Teresa of Avila

☆ Prayer of commitment
My Father, I abandon myself to you.
Do with me as you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you.
I am prepared for anything, I accept everything.
Provided your will is fulfilled in me and in all creatures
I ask for nothing more, my God.
I place my soul in your hands.
I give it you, my God, with all the love of my heart because I love you.
And for me it is a necessity of love, this gift of myself,
this placing of myself into your hands
without reserve
in boundless confidence
because you are my Father.
(Charles de Foucauld)

⇒ TO CONTINUE:

Commit to pray for each other as you seek to live out God's calling in your lives.

Perhaps the leader also needs to offer to see any people individually to talk through anything which has been raised for them – and then pass on to a vocations adviser if appropriate.

If the group wants to continue along this theme of their calling as lay people, perhaps the resources below might be useful.

Resources for further exploration:

Fit for the Purpose (St John's Extension Studies, Bramcote, Nottingham NG9 3RL, or via their website www.stjohns-nottm.ac.uk) – a workbook for individuals or groups.
Yes..... Minister? Patterns of Christian Service, Jim Cotter (Cairns publications, 1992)
This is our Calling, Ed. Charles Richardson (SPCK, 2004) – with questions to think about.

God's Pattern, David Stancliffe (SPCK, 2003)

Material from 'After Sunday' website (see session 3) – including further courses (eg. "Have you seen a Burning Bush" www.aftersunday.org.uk/learning/after-sunday-courses/have-you-seen-a-burning-bush).

Newcastle Diocesan Vocations Advisers:

Sue Faulkner (0191) 271 1866 RevSueFaulkner@aol.com

Ian Flintoft (0191) 236 2280 ianflintoft@hotmail.com

Judith Grieve (01670) 817 220 church_point@hotmail.com

John Park (01670) 511 662 j.park@sky.com

- are available to help anyone within the Diocese to explore their calling further.

Further copies of "Christian Calling" can be obtained from
Deanery Vocations Representatives, or from the DDO
(a.elkington@newcastle.anglican.org , 0191 2852220).

Hard copies cost £2, electronic copies are free, also to be available on
the Diocesan website.