Fall 2011, Vol. 12, No. 2

Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology

Baptism into Christian vocation

Editorial

Rebecca Slough

The theme for this *Vision* issue emerged from a conversation with Muriel Bechtel, area church minister for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, during her 2009 sabbatical at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Indiana), where I serve as academic dean. As we discussed her sabbatical project on discerning call, we talked about the interrelationship of baptism, vocation, and ministry in Christian life. We discovered that we share a dissatisfaction with parts of Mennonite church practice that reflect these assumptions: (1) baptism is only about being saved and joining the church, (2) God only calls pastors, and (3) only pastors do ministry.

In baptism we say yes! to being beloved, to being forgiven, to being inspired and transformed, to being members of Christ's body, to being part of a faith tradition, to being loyal disciples, and to being ministers in God's kingdom.

Our discussion was energetic, evocative, and generative. We kept circling around how the dance of baptism, vocation, and ministry gives shape to a way of life for all Christians. Our dismay about the current diminished, functional understandings of baptism, vocation, and ministry gave us the impetus to propose that we collaborate to edit an issue of *Vision* devoted to the subject.

In July 2011, I led a seminar at the Mennonite Church USA youth convention in Pittsburgh, with this title: "Whose We Are: Baptism, Identity, and Vocation." Rising above my terror, I explored the claim that in baptism we say yes! to being beloved; to being forgiven; to being inspired and transformed; to being members of Christ's body; to being part of a faith tradition with a past, a present, and a future hope; to being loyal disciples; and to being ministers in God's kingdom.

The seminar discussion was reasonably lively, for an after-lunch time slot (blessedly, it was the first full day of convention). It

became immediately clear that baptism seen as a public yes! to all these ways of being a Christian was a new idea for most of the youth, even those who had been baptized. Certainly, they knew the forgiveness part and the part about becoming a member of Christ's body. But the thought that being inspired by the Holy Spirit is part of baptism was new to some. Perhaps most surprising to these youth was the idea that through baptism we say yes! to ministry for the sake of God's kingdom, for the sake of God's mission in the world. It is my prayer that those who attended left the seminar with an enlarged sense of baptism's meaning: it's about more than getting wet.

In their recent book *Worship and Mission after Christendom*, Alan and Eleanor Kreider argue that baptismal catechesis is essential if new believers are to learn the practices of faithfulness necessary to our participation in God's redemptive mission.[1] They point out that we are all baptized into a holy priestly vocation, called into the obedient service of God's redemptive mission. The rite of baptism marks a key moment in each person's rich and complex experience of saying yes! to God, of claiming God's orientation for her or his life and entering into the priestly life of service and blessing.

Our commitments to be a missional church, to develop a culture of discerning call in our congregations, and to ensure the cultivation of strong leadership will flounder, if not fail, if we do not attend holistically to baptism, vocation, and ministry as facets of faith for everyone.

All the themes I claimed as parts of the yes! we make in baptism dance through this *Vision* issue: belovedness and blessedness; being a blessing to others; listening for God's call(s) to service over the course of a lifetime; discerning the shape of ministry for a particular time, place, and season; expressions of Christian ministry lived beside or outside the organizational patterns of the church; pastoral ministry as one vital form—among many—of service for the sake of the kingdom. The entire issue bears witness to but does not exhaust the breadth and depth of our baptismal yes!

At the conclusion of my seminar at the convention, three adults came to me, asking for names of Mennonite congregations that have developed a strong and coherent process of catechesis that embodies these (and other) dimensions of our baptismal yes!

I was speechless and promised to take their question on as a research project.

I am grateful to Muriel for being faithful to the questions that arose from her work and for being a wise and generous collaborator in editing this issue. With her, I am convinced that our commitments to be a missional church, to develop a culture of discerning call in our congregations, and to ensure the cultivation of strong leadership for Anabaptist-Mennonite congregations will flounder, if not fail, if we do not attend holistically to baptism, vocation, and ministry as facets of faith for everyone.

Note

[1] Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom* (Scottdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2011), 161.

About the issue editor

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Biblical perspectives on call

Wilma Ann Bailey

Biblical scholar Martin Buss defines call in the context of ministry in this way: "A call summons a person to a specialized role."[1] We might add that the call may be to a specific type of ministry or to a specific place of ministry.

Mennonites have started to use the language of call, as in a "call to ministry," only fairly recently. In the past, ministers were chosen by lot without reference to whether they had a sense of call. The process followed a biblical model described in Acts 1 for choosing a leader to take the place of Judas. The disciples selected two who had been with them all along and therefore had known Jesus, heard his teachings, and with the other disciples had risked their lives when the Roman authorities turned on them. Because Jesus was no longer with them in the flesh, they prayed, asking for God's guidance. Then they cast lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. The theology behind the lot method was that God would choose the person in the context of a community gathering. In the lot, as Mennonites practiced it, eligible men (not women) were asked to choose one of several Bibles, one of which had a paper with a scripture quotation inside. The one who selected the Bible containing the paper was deemed to be God's choice.

In the canonical order of the Bible, Moses is perhaps the first person who is explicitly called. He offers excuses, but in the end he does what God wants him to do. Reluctance is a characteristic of some but not all call narratives.

When people today say that they are called, they mean they have a sense that God is calling them to ministry, or they have had an experience they interpret to be a call from God. Like Samuel, they may have heard God calling them by name (1 Sam. 3:2–18). Some people speak about resisting the call at first and finally yielding when, like Jeremiah, they felt "something like a burning fire shut up in [their] bones" (Jer.

20:9).[2] The call in this sense is an individual experience which the person then conveys to the community. In many denominations, the individual's sense of call is tested and confirmed by the community.

This article will examine the language used in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the New Testament for individuals summoned for a task or ministry. We will also examine the role of God and the community in the call, and how individuals respond. My goal is to determine whether we can identify patterns that might be of use to communities of faith as they seek leaders today.

The reader should keep in mind that the parts of the Bible were not written in the order in which they appear in our Bibles. We can guess at which texts might have been earlier or later; in a few cases we can be quite certain, but not always. As a result, it is difficult to trace the language and context of call from early forms to later ones. This study will note cases where a text is clearly earlier or later, but we will examine many without regard to date.

Call in the Hebrew Bible

In one story in Genesis (chaps. 6–9), God addresses Noah and tells him to build an ark in order to save human and animal life from the flood. In the language of the text, God first educates Noah about why God is acting against all living things. Then God "said" to Noah that all flesh is to be destroyed except for Noah and his family and some animals. God instructs (actually orders) Noah to build an ark. Noah complies. He successfully completes his mission, and that is the end of his specific ministry.

In Genesis 12 God speaks to Abram (whose name is later changed to Abraham) and instructs him to leave his country, kin, and father's house to go where God will send him. The language here is "said," not "called." Abram gives no verbal response in the story. But he does what God tells him to do. Abraham spends the rest of his life fulfilling the mission to father descendants, be a blessing, and acquire land in Canaan. In the cases of Noah and Abraham, their acceptance of the charge is indicated by their behavior rather than their words. They do what God instructs them to do.

In some of the Genesis stories, such as those about Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Hagar, Jacob, and Joseph, people fulfill a mission

without a specific reference to being called or God having appointed them to a specific ministry or task. For example, only after the fact does Joseph realize that God has used him to save his family. He was not called ahead of time for such a purpose. In fact, at first Joseph was only looking after his own interests (Gen. 50:19–21), but his pursuit of his own interests results in his being in a position to be used by God to save his family.

In the canonical order of the Bible, Moses is perhaps the first person who is explicitly called. According to Exodus 3:4, "God called to him from the middle of the bush,"[3] using his name, Moses. Moses responds to the call. God informs him that he will send him to pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses never says that he will accept God's call and perform the mission God has assigned to him. He offers excuses, protesting that he is unsuited to the task, but in the end he returns to Egypt and does what God wants him to do. Reluctance is a characteristic of some but not all call narratives.

Isaiah 6:8 is believed to be Isaiah's "call" to ministry. Here the call is not to a specific individual. The call is for a volunteer. Isaiah volunteers to bring the word of God to the people of Israel.

In the book of Judges, God is said to have "raised up" judges to deliver various tribes of Israel from their enemies. They typically save the tribe or tribes that are endangered and then retire to a civil position. In the case of one of the judges, God uses a woman, Deborah, to "order" Barak to lead a battle (Judg. 4:5–6). Ruth performs an important function in ancient Israel when—like other women, such as Rebekah, Hagar, Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, Zilpah—she gives birth to a special child; this one becomes an ancestor of David, the king. But she is not "called" to do so. Because she lived her life in the presence of God, she could be used by God.

God calls Samuel by name while he is still a child, according to the call narrative in 1 Samuel 3. Samuel does not recognize the voice of God. But his mentor, Eli, does. Eli tells him how to respond. Samuel follows Eli's instructions and responds: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." But what follows is not a call to ministry; it is a statement about what will happen to the house of Eli. Eli himself affirms that God has indeed spoken to Samuel. The call in this case is to provide insight and understanding to

Samuel, some of which is conveyed to the people of Israel. Samuel's visions and auditions continue during his time at Shiloh.

Saul is told that God has anointed him to be king over Israel (1 Sam. 10:1). No response from Saul appears in the text. David is also anointed (1 Sam. 16:12–13). Neither of these kings is said to have been called. But in both cases the people affirm their role after they have demonstrated and confirmed their leadership abilities (1 Sam. 11; 2 Sam. 5).

Some of the prophets have what scholars refer to as "call narratives." The question and answer dialogue in Isaiah 6:8 is believed to be Isaiah's "call" to ministry. "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' I said, 'Here am I; send me!' " Here the call is not to a specific individual. The call is for a volunteer. Isaiah volunteers to bring the word of God to the people of Israel.

Cyrus, a Persian king, is "anointed" for a specific task: to "subdue nations" and "build my city." The Jews were developing an expansive notion of who God is and whom God can work with.

Isaiah has a choice; not so Jeremiah. Jeremiah is told by God, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). Jeremiah is not happy about his prophetic vocation, but he accepts it.

According to his call narrative, Amos had a vocation that he followed prior to being called to ministry. One day "the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel' " (Amos 7:15). Amos does so. It is not clear whether this becomes a lifelong vocation or simply a call for a time in his life.

Perhaps the most unexpected reference to what we would label a call is found in the story of Cyrus, a Persian king. This non-Israelite leader is "anointed" for a specific task: to "subdue nations" (Isa. 45:1) and "build my city" (Isa. 45:13). In Isaiah 45:4, Cyrus is told in direct address that the God of Israel has called him, even "though you do not know me" (45:3–4). According to 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 and Ezra 1:1–4, Cyrus responded to God's call. This section of the book of Isaiah was written during the period of exile. It demonstrates that at that point in history, the Jews were developing an expansive notion of who God is and

whom God can work with. God can use even people believers might see as pagans to do God's work in the world. God can call anyone who is up to the task and in a position to do what God wills.

The Bible sometimes reflects on the call of a whole community, such as Israel (Isa. 44), who is to be a witness to God as creator, ruler, and redeemer, or the Rechabites (Jer. 35), who serve as a model of faithfulness to the people of Jerusalem and Judah.

In the cited examples, most often God instructs people to do something. They usually cooperate, whether or not they really want to do it. Typically they consent by their actions, not their words. At times God uses other people to convey the call. In some cases the process has two steps: a person is chosen by God and then affirmed by another person or a community. Sometimes people are used by God and only afterward become aware that they have done God's work. Sometimes an individual responds to a general call for someone to fulfill a task. Sometimes a person is not given a choice.

Call in the New Testament

According to the earliest Gospel, Mark, Jesus said to particular individuals, "Follow me" (Mark 1:17). He calls the Zebedee brothers, who signal their willingness to follow not by saying they will follow but by doing so (Mark 1:20). At other times, Jesus gives a general invitation to a crowd to follow him. Some take him up on it, and some do not (Mark 8:34). Jesus encounters many people as he travels from place to place, but he does not instruct everyone to follow him. In Mark 3:13, the text says that he "called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him." Out of those who came, "he appointed twelve" (Mark 3:14) who are given the task of preaching and casting out demons. Jesus also calls people to be instructed rather than for ministry (Mark 3:23). Some people who are willing to follow him are told to turn back because their ministry is elsewhere (Mark 5).

In Luke, those who are called are given power and authority to cast out demons and to heal (Luke 9:1). The healing ministry is also a "called" vocation. Luke counts women among those who follow Jesus (8:1–3). The women who had come with Jesus from

Galilee to Jerusalem become witnesses to the empty tomb, and they inform the disciples that the resurrection has taken place (Luke 24:1–12).

In the Gospel of John (20:16–18), Mary Magdalene is chosen to inform the disciples that Jesus is alive. In John, the men who will become disciples take a more active role in their calling. They tell their friends about Jesus and then follow him. They had been following John earlier, before transferring their allegiance to Jesus.

In Acts, Paul (then Saul) receives his call not directly from God but through another person, Ananias (Acts 9:1–18 and 22:14–15). Paul is told that he has been chosen "to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard." Paul objects that he cannot be an effective witness, because he has been a known persecutor of those who follow the way of Jesus. While in a trance Jesus informs him that he will go primarily to Gentiles rather than to the Jewish communities who knew him as a persecutor. Paul's call places him in a context where he can be effective rather than in one where he will fail.

In the Bible, sometimes people receive a direct order from God. Sometimes a call comes through another person. Sometimes awareness of a call comes only after the ministry has been performed.

Calls are not restricted to leaders in the New Testament. First Corinthians 1:2 and 1:26 indicate that all followers of Jesus have received a call. They are called to be saints. That call should be uppermost in their minds, so they live in ways that reflect this vocation.

Conclusion

Reading through a variety of texts, one sees that the Bible in both testaments models a variety of ways people experience a summons to ministry. Sometimes they receive a direct order from God. Sometimes a general call is sent out for a volunteer. Sometimes a call comes through another human being. Sometimes awareness of a call comes only after the ministry has been performed. One does not have to be a Christian to receive a call. Even a "pagan" like Cyrus can serve God's purposes. People may be called for tempo-

rary service or a lifelong vocation. The Bible also notes that people may be called to many types of ministry: preaching, witnessing, healing, teaching, learning, among others.

Today it is not unusual for an individual to speak about a personal call that he or she received. Sometimes this call comes through a particular experience the person has had; sometimes it arises through a feeling or a conviction; and sometimes it is a result of hearing the voice of God, seeing a vision, or becoming aware of God's prompting in everyday life.

Speaking to the question of prophetic ministry, the book of Deuteronomy (chapter 13) suggests caution. A vocational call should be tested. The test in essence examines whether the words of the prophet are consistent with the teachings received from God. If the word of the prophet directs people away from God, if it is soul destroying, that call is not authentic and the person is obviously not a prophet sent by God. From this counsel we may extrapolate the idea that one's calling must be confirmed by a community of believers, and when it has been confirmed the community must support it. When God calls, the result should promote life and blessing. It should draw others closer to the divine spirit.

Notes

[1] Martin J. Buss, "An Anthropological Perspective on Prophetic Call Narratives," *Semeia* 21 (1981): 11.
[2] All scripture quotations are taken from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.
[3] My translation.

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Love and power
Jesus' baptism and ours

Mary H. Schertz

None of the baptisms I have attended lately replicated the drama of Jesus' baptism. I heard no voice from heaven calling out anything. A few robins scuttled around, but I saw no sign of a descending dove. Nor did any of those baptized set out to camp for forty days—though I grant you, it's at least a day's journey from northern Indiana to anything resembling wilderness. We did enjoy communal warmth and verbal assurances of the Spirit's presence. Those baptized spoke words of commitment and ruminated about vocational direction. And the next day, all of us—baptizers, baptized, and witnesses—returned to ordinary time and ordinary work and ordinary relationships, almost but not quite the same people who had entered into this ritual.

For Jesus, baptism marks the end of his primary identity as the son of Joseph and Mary, citizen of Nazareth, carpenter. Now what he is about, clearly and conclusively, is the mission of God in the world.

Quotidian graces are not graces to be dismissed, and I am grateful for the regularity and predictability with which the church practices baptism. Still, I have wondered from time to time why Jesus' baptism and his struggles in the wilderness are not more broadly appropriated by the church for our own understandings of baptism and vocational discernment. These are Bible stories we not infrequently hear read from the pulpit. They are Bible stories we teach and learn in Christian education curricula. They are stories we read in private devotions and around which we engage in Bible study. But they seem far removed from our experiences of baptism and our calls to ministry.

We have our reasons for not holding these stories as close as we could. We may think their relevance is limited to those called to what we used to label "full-time Christian service" rather than to the Christian ministry into which we are all initiated in baptism. I

will leave untangling that one to other writers in this issue. What I want to address here is the notion that that these stories have little to do with us because Jesus, after all, was divine and we are only human.[1]

I think Jesus' humanity gives us more trouble than his divinity. It's not comfortable territory, partly because it brings us more closely into relationship with him as a fellow human being, and partly because it opens our hearts to the essential paradox at the heart of the Incarnation. This is liminal space, not neatly defined or easily managed. Entering this space invites us to broaden and deepen our notions of baptism and vocational discernment. These stories have potential to orient us toward something central and vital to faith: a life-changing, lifelong, direction-setting, course-correcting, fire-lighting, fire-tending vision quest.

In Luke 3 and 4, the evangelist records Jesus' baptism and the beginning of his ministry. We hear about Jesus' struggle in the wilderness before he preaches his inaugural sermon at Nazareth and faces down the first attempt on his life—by his own townspeople. These vignettes, more than any other passages in the Luke's Gospel, define who Jesus is, and even more importantly, how he is going to go about being who he is. What sort of Messiah will Jesus become? How will he use his unique personality and power? Will he be Messiah in expected or unexpected ways?[2]

Baptism

Jesus' baptism was not a coming-of-age rite. By the time of his baptism he had been an adult for about eighteen years. We wonder why he needed to be baptized, and especially to undergo a baptism of repentance. It helps to remember that the word for repentance means not only contrition for and turning from sin but more broadly a change of mind, heart, and direction. For Jesus, his baptism and wandering in the wilderness led by the Spirit signal a decisive turn toward his ministry as the Son of God. This event marks the end of his primary identity as the son of Joseph and Mary, as a citizen of Nazareth, as a carpenter—and whatever else has identified him up to this moment. Now what he is about, clearly and conclusively, is the mission of God in the world.

In contrast to Matthew and Mark, Luke plays down the role of John in Jesus' baptism. In fact, Luke describes Jesus' baptism after

he tells us that Herod put John in prison. Luke does not identify John as the agent of Jesus' baptism; he uses the passive voice: "Jesus also had been baptized." In all of Luke-Acts, the agency of disciples is secondary. Yes, they baptize, make other disciples, heal, and perform miracles, but behind all these actions is the power of God as the primary agent.

The heart of the Spirit's empowerment is nothing less than the love of God. The power of the dove descending in Jesus' baptism is the mantle of love descending and holding Jesus now and forever.

That the power of God is at the center of Jesus' baptism, that his baptism is essentially an empowerment by the Spirit, becomes even clearer after the baptism. But perhaps what we have not noticed adequately is that the heart of the Spirit's empowerment is nothing less than the love of God. As Jesus is praying, the heavens open. The Spirit descends like a dove, and a voice tells Jesus that he is loved, that he is the Son of God, and that he fills the Father with joy. The power of the dove is the mantle of love descending and holding Jesus now and forever. At the beginning of his ministry it is a forceful statement that God is present in and empowering this most dearly treasured human life.

Wilderness

It may be simplistic to say that Jesus' baptism and his struggles in the wilderness are all about power and love. But in some ways, that statement is true. The empowerment of Jesus by the love of God in his baptism is exactly the point. That this empowerment and this love are immediately and forcefully challenged by forces representing other kinds of power and other kinds of love is also exactly the point. Luke Timothy Johnson argues that "against the backdrop of first-century Palestinian political upheaval and popular messianic expectation . . . Jesus eschewed the option of a violent, military, zealot vision of God's kingdom in Israel."[3] The central question for Jesus is how to understand and use the love and power he has received. Only when he has dealt with that question is he free to proclaim the kingdom. What Jesus says and does here will determine much of the rest of his course.

Jesus' forty-day sojourn in the wilderness recalls the Exodus and Israel's forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Jesus enters into

his struggle in a similar state of vulnerability and debilitation. It's hardly surprising that the first temptation Jesus faces is to turn stones into bread, a move that would mimic God's provision of manna for Israel in the wilderness. We have sometimes explained the problem with the devil's suggestion as self-interest: Jesus refuses to use his power in this way because it would benefit himself. The implication is that fulfilling one's own needs is somehow wrong for Jesus, but the Gospel makes it clear that seeking the fulfillment of one's own needs is not a moral failure;[4] God loved Jesus and God loves us. But the way a disciple seeks to meet these needs is carefully prescribed: it is to God that the faithful disciple takes these needs, in simple trust.

The temptation here, as it has been for disciples through the ages, is for the Son of God to take God's role in the fulfillment of human needs. Foundational to the kingdom offered by the devil is the understanding that one seeks the fulfillment of human need by human power to provide for oneself and one's own. Love can be so defined, and it often is. In a weary world, this temptation is a powerful one. Jesus' response comes from his reading of Deuteronomy 8:1–6, which recalls Israel's experience of hungering and being fed in the wilderness. There the lesson is that Israel does not live by bread alone but by the power of God who provides both the word and the bread by which human life is sustained.[5]

Here, in the wilderness that is reminiscent of the wilderness on the other side of the Jordan, Jesus chooses the kingdom represented by the God of Israel rather than the devil's shadow-kingdom, which parodies the true kingdom of God.[6] Ironically, Jesus proves that he is the Son of God not by transforming stones into bread, as the devil proposes, but by *not* transforming stones into bread. Human need is not to be brokered by the powers of the world. Human need is the arena where God loves and works in the world. Recognizing God's providential sphere does not, of course, mean that human beings are not to be involved in meeting human need in the world. It does mean that we come to these important and holy tasks in an attitude of trust rather than in the illusion that we are in control of making the world right.

In the second test, the devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time (4:5). The devil promises to transfer the authority and the glory of all these kingdoms to Jesus,

if Jesus will only transfer his allegiance to the devil. A divided love is a perennial issue for the children of Israel and for the followers of Jesus. Deuteronomy 6:10–15 is poignant. Moses is warning a convention of the Israelites that when they get into the land they will face the temptation to follow after other gods, even though their loving God has provided for them beyond their imaginings. When they enjoy prosperity, when they are surrounded by vineyards and olive groves, when they are filled with good things, will they remember the God who brought them up out of slavery?

This temptation and Jesus' victory over it will have an enormous impact on his ministry. When he decides to maintain his allegiance to the God of Israel, to love God alone, Jesus is limiting himself and his actions as well as freeing himself and his actions. In both of these first temptations, Jesus is determining that the love around which he orients his ministry and the power he uses to minister will not be his own or that of the worldly kingdoms. The love he offers will be the love of God—and it will be noncoercive. The power he uses will be the power of God—and it will be nonviolent. How things will all work out will emerge in the Gospel narrative, but the course is set here in the wilderness. Jesus will not seek to meet human need by human power, and he will not seek to implement the mission of God using the means of contemporary political and social systems.

Jesus is determining that the love around which he orients his ministry will be the love of God—and it will be noncoercive. The power he uses will be the power of God—and it will be nonviolent.

In the third temptation, the devil tests most directly Jesus' own trust in God. This test seems to us the least rational. We see the devil asking Jesus to trust God to triumph over gravity, and given our scientific worldview, we find it puzzling. But for Jesus, this temptation may have been the most difficult of the three, because it is a test of how much he loves God. The devil takes Jesus up to the top of the temple and tempts him to throw himself down from it. If you trust God enough, trust that the angels of God will keep you. Doesn't God love you? Since Jesus has shown himself as yielding to God's providence in the first temptation, and as unswerving in his allegiance to God in the second temptation, in this third

attempt the devil uses the distortion of a twisted heart to try to sway Jesus. Jesus' identity as God's Son and his loyalty to God alone have proven true. But this temptation, for all its twisted logic, is a question of the heart. And Jesus responds, also from the heart, that it is not the nature of God to demand such tests of love and loyalty. There will be tests, to be sure, including the ones that come in the night as Jesus prays on Olivet before he is arrested, but these tests are not just for the sake of being tested.

Sight to the blind

Jesus' ministry only really begins when he has settled in his own mind a basic direction about how he will love and how he will use the power he has been given. The struggles are not over, but he has enough vision to begin. He chooses to begin in his hometown, to make a stand there that will not be popular. The center of his mission, as he develops it, is release to the captives/sight to the blind/freedom to the oppressed.[7] That mission plays in Peoria—or Nazareth, in this case. God loves Nazareth, after all.

But Jesus goes on to insist that this love is not only for Israel; it's also for the nations. Love limited by national boundaries is not God's love but one of those parodies of love so dear to the devil's heart. And that word does not play so well: the inauguration of Jesus' ministry ends in a near lynching, portent of so much yet to come. But the heart and mind of Jesus are securely anchored in the power and love of God, and without returning the hostility of the crowd, Jesus walks on. The devil's tempting parodies have not won the day.

Remembering our baptism

A Roman Catholic friend uses one of her tradition's practices to remind her that she serves a countercultural Christ who shows the way through nonviolence and suffering love: each time she enters the sanctuary, she touches her hand to the water in the baptismal font and makes the sign of the cross. I envy her this regular way to remember her baptism.

Baptism is the place where we learn how loved we are. It is the place where the Spirit's power fills us. It is the place where we take strength for the tough and essential choices we must make about how to live out of that love and power. Jesus' baptism and the

tests in the wilderness have significant implications not only for how we practice baptism and vocational discernment in congregations but also for how we remember and appropriate our baptism and vocation.

Baptism is a singular event, but it cannot be contained in a single event. We need to return to it. Vocational discernment is more intense at certain junctures, but it is never completed. Our struggle to discern and reject the false kingdoms we find on every side, with their parodies of love and power, is ongoing. Our vocation as servants of the unconventional Messiah needs to be renewed and repeatedly reoriented to the truth.

We need to keep returning to our baptism. Our struggle to discern and reject the false kingdoms is ongoing. Our vocation as servants of the Messiah needs to be renewed and repeatedly reoriented to the truth.

I am convinced that our maturation as Christian disciples involves integrating the love of God into our lives, following the wounded and resurrected Messiah, and being enlivened and emboldened by the Spirit. Baptism and vocational discernment are focal points for that maturation—an orientation at the beginning of our Christian life that stays with us until we lay down our lives at the throne of grace. Let us find ways to remember our baptism.

Notes

[1] The relevance of Jesus' temptations to our own vocational discernment has been dismissed not only by some pastors and congregants but also by some scholars. In an otherwise wonderful book, *A Community Called Atonement,* Scott McKnight contends that the suggestion that Jesus is an example in the wilderness scene is "preposterous," because we are not tempted to jump from high buildings, etc. ([Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007], 57). It is an especially disappointing conclusion because McKnight, more than most scholars, makes a powerful argument for the practical and ethical implications of the cross. Not many of us are being crucified these days, either, but the cross has distinct ethical dimensions. The cross as Jesus' last temptation is intrinsically related to the wilderness temptations in Luke 4. Both events have significance for how we live.

[2] The title of Messiah, or Christ, is not used in the baptism and wilderness texts, but the idea is a live issue in them. The angels announce Jesus as Messiah in 2:11. Luke notes in 2:26 that Simeon had been promised that he would see the Messiah before death. In 3:15, John protests that he is not the Messiah, but the one coming after him is. Then in 4:41, Jesus does not allow the demons to speak because he knows that they know that he is the Messiah. Messiah is a fraught term in first-century Palestine, a term filled with nationalistic and militaristic expectations. Those expectations are the very good reason Jesus is reticent to claim this title for himself. When Peter comes up

with the designation in 9:20, Jesus is still not ready to go public with it. Finally, in 20:41, we come as close to Jesus' own thinking about the term as we can get—in an ironic and enigmatic reference to David. Jesus wonders how the Messiah, or Christ, can be David's son and also the one David calls "Lord." The aspect of David that Jesus mentions specifically is David's military prowess. By this time in the narrative, though, it is becoming clear that Jesus is on his way to becoming a very different kind of king than David. He is not meeting conventional hopes for the Messiah—a point Luke reinforces several times in the passion narrative (22:67; 23:2, 35, 39).

[3] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina series, vol. 3, edited by Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 77.

[4] The Lord's Prayer includes the request for daily bread (11:3). Children asking parents for food is a basic human behavior that Jesus uses as a norm for disciples in approaching God (11:11–13). The widow who hounds the judge to grant her justice (18:1–8) becomes an example of faithful prayer.

[5] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, Anchor Bible 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 1:511.

[6] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 75.

[7] For those who care about such things, the story of Jesus reading Isaiah at Nazareth is a lovely and compelling chiasm, a model of the form. The standing up/sitting down, opening the book/shutting the book all lead into that powerful Isaianic vision of release, sight, freedom.

About the author

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It's only water
The ritual of baptism and the formation of Christian identity

Irma Fast Dueck

Imagine a long line of people snaking their way up the river bank. They've left their homes, their cities and towns, some of them coming from a distance. Some families are travelling with kids in tow. Old folks are hanging on to the arms of their grown children. They are women and men of all shapes and sizes, lining up for all sorts of reasons.

For some, the river is the culmination of a journey. Others have given themselves in complete devotion to God. Some are there because someone else dragged them along—and after all, everyone else is doing it. Still others are wondering, struggling, not sure, but hoping the water might somehow change them. Some are half embarrassed, knowing that others are saying, "What is he doing there?" They don't quite know the answer, but still, here they are. And some know the water connects them to their ancestors who crossed the Red Sea long ago and found themselves on a path toward a place of promise. These people want to be on that path, too.

And there is Jesus, walking alongside all these people. And John the Baptist, the guy with no fashion sense, whose breath smells of sweet insects, baptizes them all—Jesus right along with the others.

But it's just water. The Jordan is an unremarkable river, by all accounts. People who have seen it comment on how underwhelming this modest body of water is. Dirty. A place where people wash clothes and bodies, where they water cattle. Who knows what all is in that water? It is just water—an ordinary river that becomes the place for an extraordinary act.

A defining act

It's just water. The potluck is finished; the kids, restless, have gone to the rec room to play Reformation Idol, the new game that's all

the rage. And the adults can't stop talking about the book they've all been reading for the first time and can't get enough of. It's a book that has captured their imagination so much that George asks Conrad whether he would pour water on him. And then Conrad asks to have water poured on his head. And then Felix, and then the others.[1] And the water keeps pouring down. And all the folks gathered in that living room experience new life in that water—though this very act of pouring water will eventually lead some of them to a watery death, their martyrdom. But it's only water.

It's only water. The service starts a bit late. People are still shuffling in after the call to worship. The sanctuary is packed. Eight people are being baptized today, and another one in a couple of months. A motley group—youth who have grown up in the church; a university student who just wants to be sure; a couple of folks who stumbled into the Mennonite church, having never experienced church before this year; a mother in her late forties, new to all things Christian, looking for a community of belonging. And there's Emma, a vibrant young woman with Down syndrome.

In Christian history, pouring water in the name of the Trinity has been a defining act. How do you know if someone is Christian? Is she baptized? Baptism has always been a rite of passage into the Christian faith.

Songs are sung, scripture is read, testimonies are shared, prayers are prayed, and the water jug is brought forward. Water is poured generously over the heads of the acolytes. Tears form in the eyes of the watching congregants. And Emma, beaming, takes her seat within the congregation, proudly wearing the white towel wrapped around her shoulders, a gift given by a deacon on this occasion. Now tears are flowing. But it is just water.

At its roots baptism is the practice that brings us into the Christian community. According to the New Testament accounts of the beginnings of the church, Jesus commanded his followers to baptize new disciples in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the history of Christianity, pouring water in the name of the Trinity has been a defining act. How do you know if someone is Christian? Is she baptized? Baptism has always been a rite of passage into the Christian faith.

Is baptism necessary?

As a teacher at Canadian Mennonite University I've been struck by the fact that many students consider themselves Christians, are committed to walking the path of Christ, and are active in their churches—yet are not baptized. Some remain unbaptized for reasons having to do with the many transitions common to contemporary young adult life. For other students the resistance to being baptized has more to do with the connection between baptism and church membership. Some of these youth see the church as an institution; in the absence of a compelling vision of Christian faith and life that is tied to the church, they see no reason to join. Other youth lack an understanding of the significance of rituals and symbolic acts. If it's only water, if it's just a symbol, then why is it important? The argument goes something like this: Why do I need to be baptized to be a Christian? I can participate in most aspects of the life of the church, including, in many congregations, communion. Baptism doesn't make me more or less Christian. Why is it necessary?

I find these young adults' responses disheartening but not surprising. The disinterest in baptism may reveal a lack of ritual sensibility with roots as much in their parents' generation (and perhaps previous generations) as among these children of the baby boomers. The reasons for this lack are various: some may assume that the rites and rituals of the church belong to less mature stages of human development, destined to become obsolete as reason and rationality triumph. Perhaps people are critical because believers have sometimes supposed that the rites of the church function magically; a kind of idolatry attaches to trust in performance of the rite itself rather than in the God who is at work in it. Or perhaps the way the church engages in ritual fails to capture the theological imagination of those observing the practice. Whatever the reason, many of those who practice believers baptism are left to try to sustain meaningful baptismal practices against such limited or distorted understandings of ritual. If it is just water, why *is* it so important?

Many young adults consider themselves Christians, are committed to walking the path of Christ, and are active in their churches—yet are not baptized. If it is just water, why is it important?

Water's mystery

The ordinances or sacraments are gifts given to the church. They are human actions through which God acts. When we participate in baptism, things happen that we do not fully understand. Ironically, this is one of the first gifts of the ordinances: they operate at the boundaries of our understanding. In baptism, as in all the ordinances, there is a mystery. For some, baptism is a mystery that needs to be broken apart in order to figure out how it works; only then is it put back together. But to dissect it is to miss the gift of baptism that reminds us that we do not know—nor will we ever fully understand—God's working in the world.

All sacraments and all worship invite us to relinquish control, to let go of our compulsion to manipulate and master. Worship asks us to allow God to move us into holy presence. Rituals such as baptism are participatory experiences that enable believers to move from concrete reality, in which water is just water, to another reality, in which water carries the believer into a world hidden beyond the world of facts and rationality and beyond a linear understanding of time. In baptism, believers are submerged in the reality of God and in the new creation; they are immersed in the grace, love, and mystery of God.

Water binds us

Among the other gifts baptism as a rite of the church offers us is the unique ability such rituals have to create community and foster connectedness. In the service of baptism, as in communion, we experience community both as participants and as observers. Rituals offer a sense of solidarity and unity with one other that transcends differences. Theologically, baptism has been understood as the rite of initiation into the Christian faith and into the body of Christ, the church.

But the act of baptism connects us not only to one another in the congregation of the church but also to our past and our future. Baptism reminds us of "the big here and long now," a phrase coined by musician Brian Eno. We live in a time, according to Eno, when the cultural tendency is to live only in the moment and in the place immediately around us; we don't move far out of comfort zones and seldom think too far ahead or too far back. Eno describes this as living in a "small here" and in the

"short now." We see this phenomenon everywhere: in environmental short-sightedness that takes account only of our immediate needs and wants, or in iPods ("me-Pods," as some cynically call them) that shut us off from what is going around us, reducing our here and our now to the dimensions of a tiny tech gadget.[2] The small here and short now are also evident in the church, when baptism becomes a personal decision enacted in a moment, without regard for its communal dimensions and its potential to give shape to a way of life.

All sacraments and all worship invite us to relinquish control, to let go of our compulsion to manipulate and master. Worship asks us to allow God to move us into holy presence.

By contrast, the long now recognizes that the moment we live in grows out of the past and is a seed for the future. The longer our sense of *now,* the more past and future it includes. When we participate in baptism we can locate ourselves in a long now and a big here. We can bind ourselves not only to our immediate communities but also to global ones and those of centuries past, to the baptism of Jesus and his followers in the early church who baptized and made disciples. And we attach ourselves to Conrad Grebel and George Blaurock and Felix Manz. And we join ourselves to one another—yes, even to those we don't know or even like. They all become our brothers and sisters. And our baptism connects us to a future in which in Christ we are all made one.

Water drowns us

In baptism we discover our identity in Christ. One of the most common ways of speaking about baptism in the New Testament, particularly in Paul's letters, is as death or drowning. In baptism we die to old definitions of ourselves and rise to discover our identity in Christ. Paul writes to the Colossians, "When you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead . . ., God made you alive together with him" (Col. 2:12–13; NRSV). And he tells the Corinthians, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor. 5:17). And to the Galatians Paul says, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew

or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27–28).

In Christ through baptism a new creation is emerging in which inherited social definitions are no longer basic. In baptism the believer dies to those definitions and rises to a new one. Baptism is that entry into the new people, the new creation, the new world. It was for the early church the distinguishing mark of this people, and it transcended previous definitions, such as those that separated Jews and Gentiles. It marks a new kind of social relationship, a unity that overarches our differences and separations and creates a new reconciled community in Christ.

But it's only water

The rituals of the church tell a story about what Christians believe about faith and the meaning of life, even if we're not fully aware that they are doing so. Baptism is no exception. The church's rituals are critical in helping Christians maintain their identity as followers of Jesus. Anthropologist Mary Douglas studied various cultures for years, particularly minority cultures living within larger dominant cultures. She discovered that as these minority cultures lost their rituals, they lost their cultural identity and were soon subsumed into the dominant culture. This research is instructive for Christians who seek to nurture and sustain a distinctive identity as Christian people in the midst of broader—dominant—cultural identities.[3]

As minority cultures lose their rituals, they lose their cultural identity. This research is instructive for Christians who seek to sustain a distinctive identity in the midst of broader cultural identities.

The early Anabaptists were careful to make sure the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper were kept in proper perspective. Anabaptist theologies of the sacraments and of worship were, for the most part, formulated in reaction to the medieval Roman Catholic Church and the Magisterial Reformation. In these traditions the definitive characteristic was God's initiative. The Anabaptists emphasized the human response of faith and love. Simply put, they were more interested in the nature of the human action within the sacrament than with the sacrament itself. Water was just water; bread was just bread.

If water doesn't make a difference, then why baptize? Because we need the waters of baptism. The Anabaptists were ardent in emphasizing salvation by grace through faith and not by sacramental mediation. But while the waters of baptism do not save us, they do locate us, reminding us who we are and what is required of us.

For some reason, many of us who practice believers baptism see baptism as an isolated event rather than as an opening into a way of life or a pattern for Christian formation. Yet as the rich symbolism of the water of baptism reminds us, it is God who mysteriously and continually washes us, regenerating, initiating, calling us into relationship. We are not our own saviours, nor are we masters of our own destinies. When we are baptized in Christ, we not only become connected to one another in our congregations, but we also find ourselves part of a larger story that binds us with Christians who have gone before and provides a vision for reconciliation as we move forward. We spend our lives learning to respond faithfully to the gift of baptismal identity in Christ. The dying of baptism continues to surround us as we learn what it means to live as Christ's body, a new creation. Yes, it is only water, but it ushers us into a way of life.

Notes

[1] The January 21, 1525, baptism of George Blaurock, a former priest, by Conrad Grebel, in the home of Felix Manz, is one of the defining moments of early Anabaptism, marking a beginning of the radical reformation and the Anabaptist movement.

[2] Brian Eno, "The Big Here and Long Now," http://longnow.org/essays/big-here-long-now/.

[3] See Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1973).

About the author

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Loved, blessed, and freed to hear God's call

Lydia Neufeld Harder and Gary Harder

Bob's call has been discerned, and he has been blessed and ordained for Christian ministry. Part of his ministry is to be a street pastor with street people. Sometimes he advocates for them with the powers that be, which brings him into conflict with those powers. Sue is a journalist who files stories from that same world of homelessness. She was blessed by the church in her baptism but not for her work in journalism. She sees herself as a truth-teller, shedding light on the dark places of our cities. Bob and Sue are working together to tell a story of police abuse of a homeless person. Both feel called by God to do this. The powers that be will resist. Bob and Sue hope the result of telling this story will be blessing for their city.[1]

We live in a culture that separates our lives into sacred and secular spheres. We aren't nearly as good at calling people to live out God's blessing in their secular vocations as we are at giving them a job to do in the church.

A theological reflection on church and calling

The church is good at blessing people in the church. We have parent-child blessings and baptism blessings and marriage blessings. We have official blessings for people working on committees and in Christian education. We bless people when they become members and when they move elsewhere. We pray a benediction on everyone who gathers on Sunday morning.

And then we read the story of the call of Abraham, which ends with "And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3; NIV). And that complicates things. This blessing goes beyond God's chosen people to encompass everyone. God wants the people of Abraham, the people of Jesus, to participate in blessing all the people on earth. This is missional agenda. This is vocation in broad strokes. Paul names the will of God as "to

bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:9–10). This mission is what motivates Bob and Sue. But the church finds it easier to bless Bob in this work, because his is a "Christian" vocation, while Sue's work is "secular."

The complication is that our theology of church is still deeply affected by modernity and its many dualisms. We still live within a culture that separates our lives into different spheres: sacred and secular, communal and personal, church and society. We aren't nearly as good at calling people to live out God's blessing in their secular vocations as we are at giving them a job to do in the church. The number of vocational options is expanding dramatically, and we have no idea how most of them can be used to bless all the people of the earth.

Starting with baptism

We assert that our calling grows out of our baptism. The archetypal story is that of the baptism of Jesus. In some ways this story is problematic, because none of us is called to be or capable of being a saviour. And yet this story is profoundly applicable, because the church is called to represent the continuing presence of the risen Christ in the world. The church is called to be a primary instrument of God in blessing the world.

Mark 1 tells the story of the baptism of Jesus, his temptations in the wilderness, and the beginning of his public ministry. These three stories are in a carefully arranged sequence: Baptism. Temptations. Public ministry. His baptism can be read as his commissioning for his earthly mission—that is, for his vocation.

What is striking to us in the baptism story is the description of the Spirit descending like a dove on Jesus, and the voice from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11; NRSV). In this amazing affirmation of God's love for Jesus—God's blessing on Jesus, Jesus' empowerment for public ministry—we see that Jesus does not need to earn God's love and blessing by his hard work. Before Jesus engages in any public ministry, God is already assuring him that the Holy Spirit is empowering him and that he is fully loved by his heavenly parent.

We might think that this assurance should be obvious, given who Jesus is—the Son of God. But Jesus too needed this message and this affirmation. As we all do, he needed this full blessing

from God before he began his ministry. He would not need to earn that blessing or that love. It was already given to him as a gift.

Every baptism is a wonderful opportunity to declare that the one baptised is a beloved child of God. It is not that the act of baptism makes that person beloved. It is rather that baptism gives the church the opportunity to especially name that love and celebrate it. This naming solidifies one's identity as a person deeply loved.

All ministry, all service, all calling—whether within the church or in the world—grows out of being assured that we are loved and that the Holy Spirit will empower us for what God invites us to do.

This naming of our being loved and blessed then frees us to hear God's calling to love and serve others. It frees us to listen for God's invitation to our vocation. All ministry, all service, all calling—whether within the church or in the world—grows out of being assured that we are loved and that the Holy Spirit will empower us for what God invites us to do. If we are trying to earn God's love or the love of others, or even to merit our own self-love, we can easily fall prey to myriad temptations to gain acclaim in ways that violate our core identity.

Baptism is both personal and communal

In the 1970s and 1980s our church struggled with the encroaching individualism of the day. Over and over again we heard, "I want to be baptized, but I don't want to join the church. My faith is personal, and there are too many problems in the church." That there were problems in the church we couldn't deny. The church, from its very beginnings, has been full of problems and conflicts and sinful behaviour.

And yet we Mennonites mostly refuse to baptize individuals apart from the church. Our theology of baptism and the church holds these two together. To be fair, there are stories in the New Testament where an individual, or a household, is baptized outside of a gathered community. A primary example would be the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, baptized by Philip without a witness (Acts 8:26–39). But we believe that most of the biblical witness indicates that baptism is an act of the church and has its place in the church community. We believe that to be "baptized

into Christ" is also to be baptized into Christ's body, the church (Rom. 6:1–4).

The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, in its article on baptism, asserts that "believers are baptized into Christ *and his body* by the Spirit, water, and blood."[2] The commentary on this article spells out this conviction: "Baptism should always be done by the church and its representatives, if possible in the presence of the congregation. It should be public because baptism means a commitment to membership and service in a particular congregation."

In his recent book, *The Naked Anabaptist*, Stuart Murray names believers baptism as one of the core convictions of the early Anabaptists.[3] He notes that "the conviction that baptism is for believers is inextricably linked to fundamental beliefs about the nature of the church in the Anabaptist tradition." Murray says further, "Baptism, in the Anabaptist tradition, is not only a visible expression of personal faith but a pledge of discipleship, an invitation to mutual accountability, and commitment to active participation in the church community." We would add: and to its witness within the culture and society in which we live.

Two biblical texts have been particularly important here. The Acts 2 story of Pentecost and the birth of the church recounts the first baptism, when three thousand people who had listened to Peter's fiery sermon and experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit were baptized. Then "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). In other words, these baptisms led to the formation of a genuine church community. The rest of the book of Acts then recounts how the community and the individuals in it lived out the Great Commission as their vocational calling. This commission was given by Jesus to his followers: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19–20). In our theology of church, baptism and mission belong together.

Jesus then adds, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." It is a final blessing and promise. When we are baptised, we hear, "You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased." In the

living out of our discipleship and calling within the church and in the world we hear, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:21). Being blessed and blessing others are brought together in baptism. Our personal vocation and the vocation of the church are brought together in our baptism.

Vocation writ big

If vocational choices—and all other major choices—were totally up to each individual, then they are of no concern to the church (or to God, for that matter). Then there would be no point in inviting advice or discernment or even blessing from the church.

Being blessed and blessing others are brought together in baptism. Our personal vocation and the vocation of the church are brought together in our baptism.

But if baptism matters, and church matters, and living in the world as God's ambassadors matters (that is, if we reject the dualisms of the personal and the communal, and of the sacred and the secular), then the church community should play a vital role in helping shape each person's vocational choice. Then the church can play a part in helping all of us discover and develop our gifts. Then the church can bless the use of these gifts, and hold each of us accountable for how we use them vocationally and in mission.

How can the church bless our gifts and hold us accountable?

We turn again to the stories of the baptism and temptations of Jesus. In his baptism Jesus hears that his core identity is that of a beloved child of God. Then he is sent into the wilderness, by God's Spirit, to face temptations to live out his vocation in culturally acceptable and self-aggrandising ways. His intense struggle with these temptations refines his commitment to live out his calling in God's way.

These stories highlight temptations to live out vocation in self-serving ways, in order to get acclaim and honour and prestige and wealth. They are temptations to try to earn love and blessing and public approval: Turn stones into bread. Throw yourself from the pinnacle of the temple, and by angelic rescue publicly authenticate your identity as Son of God. Through a simple act of worship, be granted the world's kingdoms and their splendour.

The baptism voice helps Jesus resist these temptations. He doesn't need to earn love and blessing; he knows he is loved and blessed by God, before he has done anything to earn that love and blessing. This assurance gives him such a solid core of self-love and self-worth that he won't be driven off course. Right after he rejects these temptations, Jesus begins his public ministry.

Vocation and calling are so much more than holding down a job. Every baptized Christian's vocation is to live for God in the world. Our calling is to live truthfully and honestly and lovingly, wherever we find ourselves. It is to understand shalom-making as our core vocation. It is to be a part of blessing every family on earth. But we all, whether we are pastors or reporters or anything else, are tempted by our seductive culture to buy into the values and choices and habits of its shallow consumerism.

Perhaps the biggest contribution the church can make to each person's vocational discernment is to keep naming that he is a beloved child of God, and then to send him into the wilderness. That is, the church sends each person into the world with the knowledge that the choices that she will make in her vocation are crucial, because these choices will determine how she will participate in the church's larger vocation to be a blessing to all peoples. Therefore the church promises to be with people in the depth of their struggles. The church will be ready to enter the chaos of people's lives. And the church will be ready to help people discern their bigger vocational identity and perhaps also identify their gifts that might lead them to a particular job. But always, vocation is much bigger than job. Always *how* we live out our calling is bigger than *what* (job) it is we do.

Every baptized Christian's vocation is to live for God in the world. Our calling is to live truthfully and honestly and lovingly, wherever we find ourselves. It is to understand shalom-making as our core vocation.

Gary's father was a reluctant farmer. No other occupation was open to him after fleeing Russia. But he was deeply respected for how he lived in the community. Ron and Don, renovation experts we have hired a number of times, live out their values and their faith every day. They do their work with integrity and with a contagious joy. They are trusted and respected everywhere they work.

Discernment and accountability

Are there some specific discernment practices the church can offer to help people connect their gifts with a strong sense of vocation? Ponder these stories.

As her string quartet continued to prepare for their concert, Jill sensed that the tension had eased. All four were professional musicians, and the violist was especially intense. There had been some hurtful words. Jill, drawing on her church's history of conflict mediation, had found the courage to initiate an in-depth airing of feelings. She reflected on the awareness that it was in fact the many opportunities she had been given to play in church as a youngster that had led her to become a professional violinist. It was the support and encouragement of her Sunday school teacher that had helped her discern her direction. In the end, the quartet's concert was the best they had ever played.

Our baptismal journey begins with knowing that we are deeply loved—by God and by the church. It continues with knowing that we are part of God's people trying to bring God's love and blessing to all people on earth.

Pam felt that her life was at a crossroads. The atmosphere in her workplace was becoming more toxic. And yet she liked the work she had chosen. What should she do? Her pastor encouraged her to gather a small group of people from different parts of her life, who knew her well, to meet with her as a discernment group. Her pastor offered to lead it. As Sue heard these people—four of them from her church—share their insights, and then pray for her, she suddenly knew what she needed to do.

Tom often reflected on his pastor's prayers, especially when he heard prayers for people in different vocations. His pastor from time to time brought specific people and the work they do before the Lord. He mused about whether the work he did would merit a prayer. Probably not. And then he heard it. "We bring before you, Lord, those who work with their hands in construction, people like Tom." He felt a special blessing on the work he loved doing.

Finally, at twenty-six years of age, Karen was being baptized. The journey to this moment had not been easy. For a while she had stopped coming to church, though deep down she knew that she would come back. And she had. She had requested that her former youth sponsor preach the baptism sermon. The sermon

took her almost by surprise: this sponsor challenged her to live out God's love in every part of her life, including her work. But she felt a full Amen rising to her lips.

More and more Sam felt his aging, felt he was useless. But not this evening. The youth and young adults of his church invited Sam and some other seniors for an evening of "traditional foods and storytelling." Sam worked with several young people in preparing a favourite dish (he was good at making *platz*), and then told stories over dinner about the faith challenges of his growing-up years. Thus began a spirited friendship.

Blessed and blessing

Our baptismal journey begins with knowing that we are deeply loved—by God and by the church. It continues with knowing that we are part of God's people trying to bring God's love and blessing to all people on earth. The church challenges all baptized believers to live out their lives and their calling with integrity and blessing, whatever job they do. Sometimes the church offers a prophetic word about jobs that are hard to reconcile with kingdom values. Always the church tries to create an ethos of blessing, and discernment, and calling, and empowering.

Notes

[1] The stories in this article are fictional but based on experiences in congregations of which we have been a part.

[2] *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1995), 46–48 (our italics).

[3] Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist* (Scottdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2010), 111–12.

About the authors

Gary and Lydia Neufeld Harder are semi-retired from their respective careers, Gary as a pastor and Lydia as a professor of theology. Now they work part-time as interim pastors of Hagerman Mennonite Church (near Toronto). They continue to teach a course on church and ministry at Conrad Grebel University (Waterloo, Ontario). Gary has written a book on his pastoral experience, entitled *Dancing through Thistles in Bare Feet: A Pastoral Journey* (Herald Press, 2007). Lydia's scholarly writings have explored the nature of church as a hermeneutical community.

"He has shown you, O man, what is good"

Larry Plenert

I am a lawyer. My colleagues and I are regularly tarred with a brush that depicts us stereotypically as the scum of the earth. Lawyers are greedy. Lawyers are sharks. Oft quoted is Shakespeare's "The first thing we do, let's kill all lawyers." To many, the phrase *Christian lawyer* is an oxymoron. Lawyers are not perfect people, and I am no exception. Yet these depictions, though durable, are generally silly and shallow. I believe I am serving God through my work, and that my practice of law is founded on biblical principles. I profess to being a lawyer and a Christian.

Recently, I met an elderly client, and after an exchange of pleasantries, she stated, "You know, I trust you. I knew your parents, and they were like that, too!" I value this unsolicited comment as a compliment of the highest order. It speaks to my desire to be a lawyer of integrity and my commitment to a high ethical standard. It implies a lawyer-client relationship that transcends giving and receiving legal assistance. The mention of my parents points to a legacy of trustworthiness. In Luke 16:11, Jesus asked his disciples, "If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" (NIV). Like Jesus, my parents modeled trustworthiness, and it was a trait they expected me to emulate.

I believe I am serving God through my work, and that my practice of law is founded on biblical principles. I profess to being a lawyer and a Christian.

My parents influenced and shaped my life in many ways, but when it came to occupational choices, I was determined to be independent. For ten glorious years I devoted myself to a pursuit of athletic dreams, and it took a serious ankle injury to force me to hang up my volleyball kneepads and write my law school entrance exams. I did not seek the advice of my parents, or anyone other than my older brother (a lawyer), about my decision

to go to law school. To my surprise, my dad—who clearly disapproved of my pursuits on the volleyball court—supported my choice to enter a different court. "Perhaps you'll become a magistrate," he said on the day of my call to the bar.

These words were somewhat prophetic, given my present adjudicative work. But I understood them at the time to perpetuate unspoken but often demonstrated life lessons from my dad: the importance of setting ongoing goals, working hard to achieve success, and aspiring to improve yourself and the world. For my mother, my actual vocation was not as important as the underlying values I brought to my work. On the day of my call to the bar, my parents presented me with a marble pen stand and a small card of congratulations. In a tradition from days gone by, Mom "gave" me a Bible verse on that occasion, handwritten into the card: "He has showed you, O man, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic. 6:8).

For twenty-six years that card has remained one of my most valued treasures, and I consider my mother to have been an agent of God in assigning to me these specific words, of all the verses she could have chosen. I have indeed been shown what is good. All the members of my extended family have been caring, moral, and righteous people, reflecting the spirit of God. My church (Langley Mennonite Fellowship) and my mentors illuminate God's goodness. I try to be alert to continued revelations of God's goodness, and ways to apply that goodness in my profession.

The message to do justice is proclaimed throughout the Bible, and it is endorsed by the Mennonite church. Ironically, a close reading of Shakespeare's line about killing lawyers indicates that it was said by someone who wanted anarchy, and was therefore meant as a compliment to attorneys and judges who instill justice in society. The law of the Old Testament spoke for all who were treated unjustly: those who are poor, widows, orphans, strangers, criminals. In the New Testament, Jesus took special note of people society rejects and treats unjustly. Anabaptist traditions have long connected faith with justice and peace. The vision of a just society is no more beautifully expressed than in Psalm 85:10: "Love and faithfulness have come together; justice and peace have kissed."

I currently balance time between my law office and my work as an adjudicator of claims by survivors of serious abuse at Indian Residential Schools. It is in this latter context that I have most deeply discerned a union of my work and my faith, and in particular the requirements to love kindness and do justice. I have learned of terrible evil, including deplorable mistreatment of Aboriginal children throughout most of the history of Canada, the very country I was so proud to represent as an Olympic athlete. It deepens my shame and complicity to know that these schools that devastated the lives of generations of Native children were run by Christian churches.

This adjudicative work involves listening to the stories of the survivors of residential school abuse, and ultimately deciding the compensation they are entitled to. I aim to convert the hearing room, be it in a hotel room, a prison, or a living room, into a place of safety where healing and reconciliation have the potential to develop. I seek opportunities to promote restorative justice, a model that God has shown me is good.

In my work as an adjudicator of claims by survivors of serious abuse at Indian Residential Schools I have discerned a union of my work and my faith, and in particular the requirements to love kindness and do justice.

My chosen career builds on convictions instilled in me by my parents and extended family. It is shaped by my mentors and my church. It is closely connected to God requiring of us that we do justice and love kindness. My law practice has always been stimulating and seems to have provided value to my community. And just at this time, I am able to see a deep connection between practicing law and my faith, through the opportunity to create healthy processes and offer fair outcomes to those so badly hurt. For me, this opportunity has shifted what I do from profession to a calling.

About the author

Larry Plenert played on the Canadian national volleyball team for six years, and represented Canada in many competitions, including the 1976 Olympic Games. He became a lawyer in 1987, and has practised law in Abbotsford, BC, ever since. He lives with his wife, Sheryl, in Fort Langley, BC. They have two adult daughters. He particularly enjoys going to the lake, and playing piano.

The measure of his days
How Milo Shantz lived his vocation

Marcus Shantz

Church and business are often viewed as separate worlds. Milo Shantz's vocation successfully bridged those worlds, partly because he was humble about what he could offer the church, and partly because the church was (generally) receptive to his unique gifts and unusual personality.

When my grandfather died some years ago, I wrote a tribute for his funeral. That wasn't hard, because my grandpa was a wonderfully uncomplicated man. A gentle and a patient man, he lived long enough to accept death as another part of life. He had done everything he wanted to do. He had no unfinished business.

This tribute for his son Milo (my father) is harder, partly because Milo was a wonderfully complicated man, a man who generated strong opinions. You might think you knew him, but you'd be surprised. He was a businessman but wanted to be remembered as a churchman. He was a churchman who sometimes preferred to skip church on Sundays. He was a lousy student, but he served on college boards and received an honorary doctorate. He was a successful man who wanted to talk about his failures—who sometimes felt like a failure himself. He was hard-nosed and soft-hearted. He acted like he had a thick skin, but he really didn't. He was interested in art. He took up painting once, and thought he might have a talent for it. He really didn't. The point is that he tried. Gentle and patient? Those aren't the first two words that come to mind. But he was capable of both gentleness and patience.

Milo Shantz was a wonderfully complicated man, a man who generated strong opinions. He was a businessman but wanted to be remembered as a churchman.

His father lived to be ninety-four, and was retired for more than thirty years. Milo lived to be seventy-six, and never really retired. "LORD, let me know my end, and what is the measure of

my days; let me know how fleeting my life is" (Ps. 39:4; NRSV). Milo could have written that. He speculated about how long he would live. Was he trying to bargain with the Almighty about the measure of his days? I remember him saying, "I'm going to live until I'm eighty." Was he saying, "Look, I'm not asking to reach a hundred, or even ninety; just let me get to eighty years"? He wasn't morbid. He just loved life, and he knew he didn't have much time. There were so many things he wanted to do.

Milo grew up on the family farm in Wilmot, Ontario, and went to grade eight in a one-room schoolhouse. He disliked school, and it was there that he developed a prejudice against duly appointed authorities. Why didn't Milo like school? He might have had an undiagnosed learning disability. While he was naturally talented in mathematics, he struggled all his life with writing and reading. And there is also this story, from when he was thirteen or fourteen years old: One day, his hapless teacher called a much younger boy to the front of the class, to get the strap. Milo looked the teacher in the eye and said, "Put the strap down." And incredibly, the teacher obeyed him. When I asked Dad why he stood up for this child, he said, "The teacher had no business hitting that kid. He didn't deserve it. You should almost never hit a kid." *That was Milo. Nerves of steel in the service of a soft heart.*

He was a teenager during a creative time in the Mennonite church in Ontario, a time when institutions and agencies were taking shape. The church challenged its young people to consider their mission in life. It encouraged them to go to seminary and become pastors, to travel overseas to do relief or mission work, to work in the inner city. Milo watched his friends make those commitments. And Milo also found his calling. He would support these activities through business. All this church work would need help: organization, infrastructure, money. He could help provide those things.

When I asked my father how he wanted to be remembered, he talked about church and community work. The list of his volunteer activities is long. And he was attracted to tough jobs that required real work. When Rockway Mennonite Collegiate nearly went bankrupt forty years ago, he chaired the fundraising committee that rescued the school. He had an eye for unfairness in organizations. When he became treasurer of the Ontario Menno-

nite Conference, he was ashamed to learn that some retired church ministers couldn't live on their meagre allowances. He did his best to change that. *That was Milo: You should almost never hit a kid. And pastors should have a decent pension.*

But the project he was proudest of was Mennonite Economic Development Associates, a network of Mennonite entrepreneurs working on international development projects—a perfect match for his interests and abilities. He was asked to become involved on the MEDA board in the 1960s and was soon made chairman. Milo's mandate was to help move it to the next level: to make MEDA into a professional international development agency. He served as chairman for ten years, and he was intensely happy to see MEDA grow, and keep growing—long after he was directly involved. *And that was Milo: He could let things go, and he could take pleasure in the success of others.*

Why did he do all these things? I think his activities flowed from his sense of what the church ought to be. The idea of church as a private club of clean people held little interest for him. Milo thought church should be a network of people doing good things in a messy world. It should be as open, as generous, and as hospitable as possible. So he moved easily from his own denomination into a wider circle that included Habitat for Humanity and St. Mary's Hospital. It was all the same to him. He had friends from all walks of life, all over the world, from many backgrounds and beliefs. He wasn't concerned about boundaries.

The idea of church as a private club of clean people held little interest. Milo thought church should be a network of people doing good things in a messy world. It should be as generous and hospitable as possible.

During Milo's lifetime, controversies kept arising about who is in the church and who is out. Could you wear wedding rings? Could you be in the church if you were divorced? Could a woman be a minister? Could you join the church if you were gay? His answer was the same, every time, in every decade. Yes. Yes. Yes. He said it publicly. But he spoke quietly, and he generally remained on good terms with those with whom he disagreed. *And that was Milo. Practice hospitality, and make room for all kinds of people.*

I suppose I should say a few things about his day job. He was a serial entrepreneur, a scattergun of business ideas—although many

of his ideas didn't work out. Milo often said that he had more business failures than successes. He did not have a magic touch; he had to work for everything. The 1990s were some of the most difficult years, and the heavy going wore on him. I believe he talked openly about his failures to set an example for other people, to show that failing is better than not trying.

I think Milo died with some regrets, mostly related to the business. He wished that more projects had worked out, wished he had seen more success. He probably could have been more successful in business. Part of his problem was that heart. That compassionate heart ordered him around and told him to do more: to work hard in the church and the wider world, to build up the common good among friends, family, community. *His heart was in charge, and it told him that hospitality can make the world a better place, that you can stand up to the powers that be, especially for the sake of others—and you should almost never hit a kid. That was Milo. That's the measure of his days.*

About the author

Marcus Shantz is a lawyer and business person in Kitchener, Ontario. This article is an excerpt of a tribute he delivered at his father's funeral on January 9, 2009.

Cultivating a congregational climate of discernment

Marlene Kropf

Last summer I visited an extraordinary garden in Cornwall. Once a dazzling showpiece, the Lost Gardens of Heligan had been abandoned for nearly a century, lying hidden under an overgrowth of brambles and ivy. When an heir eventually returned to the property, he discovered that many of the original plantings still survived under the debris. With the help of a host of volunteers, the gardens were rescued from oblivion and restored to their original glory.

The spiritual practice of discernment depends on a relationship with God. It requires a capacity to listen—to God, to ourselves, to the faith community, and to the world around us. Such listening demands space and silence.

Today more than 200 acres of carefully tended gardens and wild areas are open to the public: walled perennial flower gardens, productive vegetable plots, a sunken garden, an Italian garden, herb gardens, and trees and shrubs collected from around the world.

When visitors arrive at the garden, they are given a map and a small, inexpensive compass to guide them. Without this equipment, it would be easy to get lost in such a vast array of gardens. I discovered, however, that one more thing was necessary to successfully find my way around the garden. I needed to stand still in order for the tiny compass to give accurate directions. When I became completely still, the compass would point toward north, and I could consult my map and find my way again.

Contrasting images of discernment

Sometimes the church thinks of discernment as a mechanical exercise. If we have a correct understanding of scripture and an organized process for making decisions, we believe we will find God's will quickly and easily. Perhaps we imagine the spiritual practice of discernment to be like operating a GPS (global posi-

tioning system) device. We plug in an address—and off we go! A recorded voice and a map will tell us exactly where to turn in order to reach our destination.

But it's not so simple. The spiritual practice of discernment depends on a relationship with God. It requires a capacity to listen—to God, to ourselves, to the faith community, and to the world around us. Such listening demands space and silence. Finding true north in the spiritual world is more like pausing to use a compass than like making an electronic transaction. It means turning away from distracting clutter, waiting long enough to get our bearings, and then giving our full attention to God's guiding presence in the midst of our communities and our world.

Discernment is where prayer meets action. As such, it is a complex spiritual practice required for everyday discipleship. When we are baptized, we commit ourselves to the baptismal life, to know and follow Christ as disciples; to be in relationship with Christ's body, the church; and to participate in God's mission in the world. In order to come to maturity in faith, both individual Christians and faith communities need to be able to discern God's call and respond in loving obedience.

Discernment is a complex spiritual practice required for everyday discipleship. In order to come to maturity in faith, both individual Christians and faith communities need to be able to discern God's call and respond in loving obedience.

Tools for discernment

What this means is that a primary spiritual formation agenda for the church is the development of a capacity and tools for discernment in individuals and in congregations. In response to a neglect of personal formation in the church, we have tended in recent years to emphasize the spiritual formation of individuals through retreats, teaching, and spiritual direction. While this emphasis has been a necessary corrective, it is not all that is needed. We must remember what the church has understood through the centuries, that we are formed first through our communities. Consequently, the most effective way to equip individuals for personal discernment is to focus first on shaping the church as a community of discernment. In other words, an individual Christian will know how to exercise spiritual discernment if the community of faith and its leaders model a discerning

life. Personal mentoring and instruction will still be necessary, but young people and new Christians who need to learn discernment will get their bearings by seeing what it looks like in the ordinary life of the congregation.

Though many tools and approaches to discernment are valuable,[1] two seem critical to me: the first is prayer, especially a capacity for prayer as listening (how else will we discern God's voice?); the second is a hospitable process for discernment.

Listening prayer

Pastors and congregational leaders can nurture the practice of prayer in many ways: in public settings, such as worship, as well as in smaller, more intimate contexts such as small groups, committee meetings, and spiritual direction. If I were to choose just one practice to teach a congregation, I would focus on the prayer practice John Ackerman calls "Stop, Look, and Listen." This is a well-rounded, well-grounded way of praying that includes three simple movements:

> ***Stop*** *Breathe out and in, focusing on the Spirit's presence as the breath of life.*
>
> ***Look*** *Reflect on the past twenty-four hours, thanking God for the gifts of the day, acknowledging struggles and confessing failures, and asking God for whatever is needed for the day to come.*
>
> ***Listen*** *Read aloud a brief portion of scripture and listen to how it speaks today in one's particular context. Meditate on the Word and respond.*[2]

These easily remembered movements correspond to three classic prayer practices—centering prayer, the consciousness examen, and lectio divina.[3] "Stop, Look, and Listen" encourages people to notice and respond to God's presence, adopting the posture essential for living the baptismal life.

Eugene Peterson once commented that it is remarkably easy for pastors to do ministry without being in touch with God. After a novice pastor gets the hang of preaching or teaching or administration, it is not all that difficult to function adequately in a public role without a dynamic, living relationship with God. In the same

way, congregations can go on "automatic"—filling slots, showing up for activities, and even enjoying one another's fellowship, without nurturing a vital spiritual life. Because activity can so easily substitute for a relationship with God, we can believe we are fulfilling God's purposes when we are simply keeping busy.

When congregations learn to pray, and especially to listen as they pray, they are being formed in a relationship with God, which is far different from being busy for God. Living in an ongoing relationship of prayer provides a necessary, supportive environment for the spiritual practice of discernment.

Communal discernment

Yet people can be well practiced in prayer and still not have skills for discerning how God is calling them personally or corporately to embody God's radical vision of grace-filled hospitality in the world. A tested and reliable process of discernment is needed in order for communities of faith to listen together to God and act in obedience.

What we don't have is a common model for discernment—one that we could teach baptismal candidates and that people would understand how to use when we come together in larger gatherings.

As with the practice of prayer, many fine resources are available for communal discernment. The Jesuits and the Quakers, for example, have long experience with such tools as Ignatian discernment and clearness committees.[4] Many Mennonite churches have also used a variety of discernment processes. What we don't have, as a body, is a common model for discernment—one that we could teach baptismal candidates and that people would understand how to use when we come together in larger groups such as regional or denominational gatherings.

One of the most fruitful discernment tools I'm aware of is one that combines the strengths of the Jesuit and Quaker approaches and honors our Anabaptist understandings of the church. The process invites engagement of the whole person—mind, heart, and body—and trusts the tradition of scripture and church history as well as the dynamic, moving presence of the Spirit today.

Developed by leaders in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), this discernment process with five movements has been used by congregations for many kinds of decisions, but especially

for those related to the congregation's engagement in God's mission.[5]

First movement: Engaging Christ. Not all decisions a congregation makes require the use of an extensive discernment process. Many administrative or program decisions can simply be entrusted to staff or committees who conscientiously and prayerfully fulfill their responsibilities on behalf of the congregation. The first step, then, is for leaders to decide whether a particular issue requires a prayerful, informed, time-intensive process of discernment.

When that decision has been made, leaders state the issue or question as clearly as they can, phrasing it in terms such as: What is the mind of Christ with regard to the particular situation at hand? Because the will of the majority is not necessarily the same thing as the mind of Christ, the issue is not so much *what we want to do* as what *God is calling us to do*. In *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, Diana Butler Bass makes a critical distinction between "I-questions" and "God-questions" in discernment. She quotes Frederick Schmidt, an Episcopal priest, who observes that "I-questions are driven by the need for self-actualization and a sense of entitlement," whereas God-questions point us to "the task of distinguishing the spirit or presence of God at work in the world from other, competing spirits in an effort to determine where the spirit of God may be moving."[6] These questions more helpfully guide us to the mind of Christ.

One fruitful discernment tool combines strengths of Jesuit and Quaker approaches, and honors Anabaptist understandings of the church. It invites engagement of mind, heart, and body, and it trusts scripture, tradition and the dynamic, moving presence of the Spirit today.

When this crucial step has been taken, leaders review the core values and mission or vision statement of the congregation, to identify which of these channel markers might provide guidance for their discernment. They present this information to the congregation, testing their sense that the issue under consideration requires communal prayer and discernment.

Second movement: Emptying ourselves. Perhaps nothing inhibits or distorts a fruitful discernment process more than preconceived ideas and agenda brought to the discussion. Whether this baggage is conscious or unconscious, participants

need a spiritual practice that will help them identify and let go of such impediments. For the sake of engaging the process with maximum freedom, participants enter a time of silence in which they invite the Spirit to show them whatever might hinder faithful listening. A litany or a ritual, such as the following, can encourage people to willingly relinquish their ideas and personal agendas:

> *Each participant in turn: For the sake of our common task, I lay aside* [my preconceived idea or agenda].
> *All: These we lay down.*
> *Leader* (lights a candle)*: We light this candle to remember and welcome the presence of the Spirit of Christ among us.*
> *All: We open ourselves to the light of the Spirit. Together we seek God's wisdom as we listen, pray, and work together. In all things we desire to know the mind of Christ.*

Third movement: Encountering our past and present. After emptying themselves of preconceptions and opening themselves to the light of the Spirit, the group remembers biblical images or texts that seem to connect with the issue at hand. This movement might well include a guided study of relevant passages.

In addition, members of the group share experiences from their own lives that could inform the discernment process. If special expertise and knowledge are required, these are sought. If certain members' perspectives are not represented in the group, leaders make arrangements to hear those voices.

Fourth movement: Examining new possibilities. This movement begins as an open-ended process that is sometimes called "blue sky thinking." In other words, the sky is the limit—all possible options that might honor the Spirit of Christ and the church's mission are considered. No one offers rebuttals or critiques. Instead, each option or path is expanded, making it the best it can possibly be. The group also discusses in a dispassionate way what might be the possible outcomes of each option—both positive and negative.

A time of silent reflection follows, in which participants consider what they have heard, listening for the two or three possibilities that seem to most embody God's call to the church at

this time. They name these options to one another, recording them for all to see, and noticing whether consensus seems to be emerging.

Fifth movement: Embarking in a new direction. This is the movement where prayer meets action. Participants ask each other: Of all the possible paths we've identified, which seems to be the one on which the Spirit rests? If there is general agreement, the group identifies what steps need to be taken to implement the decision. If a consensus hasn't emerged, the group determines what further steps of discernment are needed.

Finally, the group celebrates God's presence and guidance, giving thanks for the Spirit's illumination and committing the decision and action to God.

Letting a decision rest. In some churches, a decision reached by discernment is not acted on immediately. Instead, the congregation waits for several weeks or a month and then comes back to ask: Does this still seem to be the decision on which the Spirit rests? Rather than feeling pressure to act quickly or prematurely, the congregation trusts that if they have truly sensed the Spirit's leading, that direction will be confirmed with the passing of time.

For people to face and relinquish their fears as well as their possessiveness about outcomes, they must have confidence that the process will have integrity. Any attempt to rush or manipulate the process will destroy the freedom needed for true discernment.

Discernment as spiritual formation

This process of five movements is rooted in a profound conviction that the body of Christ can recognize and know the mind of Christ. With its nonanxious approach and contemplative pacing, it does not privilege the powerful or articulate but rather provides space for all to listen deeply and respond to God's Spirit and to one another.

Though such a process can be learned easily enough, it does require skilled, trusted facilitators. For people to genuinely face and relinquish their fears as well as their possessiveness about outcomes, they must have confidence that the process will have integrity. In other words, any attempt by leaders to rush or manipulate the process will destroy the freedom needed for true discernment. The process is also enhanced by the presence of experienced models and men-

tors who can demonstrate patient listening, ask thoughtful questions, and model deep trust in the Spirit's work, thus increasing the capacity of the entire community.

Congregations must also recognize that spiritual discernment takes time—sometimes a very long time. What is happening is much deeper than simply making a decision. The church is growing in faith, hope, and love; the community's capacity to hear God and one another is expanding; in addition, members are learning skills for discerning their own personal call to ministry and mission. As such, discernment is the lifeblood of Christian ministry and witness.

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts of a good discernment process is the energy it unleashes. Few experiences are as deeply satisfying as sensing God's Spirit moving in the body, calling and uniting believers in a common purpose. When people experience the human and divine interacting in such tangible and visible ways, they are empowered to act with confidence and joy.

Returning to the garden

The restoration of the Lost Gardens of Heligan has taken more than two decades to accomplish. Instead of thorns and briars, the gardens are filled today with fragrant blossoms, healthy vegetation, and abundant crops. Creating such an environment has required the collaboration of many gardeners with extensive skills and long-term commitment to a common vision.

To cultivate a climate for spiritual discernment in the church also requires a long-term vision. The spiritual formation of hearts and minds takes time and practice; so does learning a common model for discernment.

What must finally be acknowledged is that without prayer and discernment, all our effort and activity run the risk of being little more than weeds and vines obscuring the beauty of God's garden. On the other hand, few things will cause the body of Christ to flourish more vigorously than knowing we can confidently discern God's will together. To do discernment well is a source of vitality and joy that perpetually renews the body and links us with God's abundant future. It is the practice most needed in a church that desires to be engaged in God's mission in the world.

Notes

[1] Two helpful guides for personal discernment are *Hearing with the Heart: A Gentle Guide to Discerning God's Will for Your Life,* by Debra K. Farrington (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); and *Sacred Compass: The Way of Spiritual Discernment,* by J. Brent Bill (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2008). Two fine guides for communal discernment are *Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations,* by Suzanne Farnham, Stephanie McLean, and R. Taylor McLean (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1999); and *In Tune with God: The Art of Congregational Discernment,* by Sally Weaver Glick (Scottdale, PA: Faith and Life Resources, 2004).

[2] John Ackerman, *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 2001), 136.

[3] For descriptions of these classic prayer practices, see *Praying with the Anabaptists: The Secret of Bearing Fruit,* by Marlene Kropf and Eddy Hall (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1994); or *Paths to Prayer: Finding Your Own Way to the Presence of God,* by Patricia D. Brown (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

[4] A discussion of Ignatian discernment can be found in *Discernment: The Art of Choosing Well,* by Pierre Wolff (Liguori, MO: Triumph Books, 1993); or *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality,* by Margaret Silf (Chicago: Jesuit Way, 1999). The Quaker clearness committee is described well in *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation,* by Parker J. Palmer (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000). See also: http://www.fgcquaker.org/library/fosteringmeetings/0208.

[5] Ruth Fletcher, *Take, Break, Receive*: *The Practice of Discernment in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),* rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Disciples Home Missions and the Office of the General Minister and President of the Christian Church [Disciples of Christ], 2008). This booklet is available online at: http://web.me.com/ispiritual/spirituality_pages/discernment_files/rfletcherdiscern.pdf.

[6] Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 94.

About the author

Marlene Kropf has recently retired from her role as denominational minister of worship, Mennonite Church USA Executive Leadership, as well as from the faculty of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, where she taught in the areas of spiritual formation and worship. She continues to teach in congregations, to offer spiritual direction, and to serve as co-chair of Bridgefolk (a group of sacramentally minded Mennonites and peace-minded Roman Catholics who meet annually) as well as the Bi-national Worship Council for Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada.

Holding together inner and outer dimensions of call

Janeen Bertsche Johnson

A common question seminary students hear is some variation of the call query. It starts out fairly indirectly: How did you come to be at seminary? Eventually it gets more direct: To what type of ministry are you sensing God calling you? And eventually even: Do you sense God's call to this particular place of ministry? During my years of teaching and pastoring seminary students, I've had the privilege of hearing hundreds of stories of God's call. I've witnessed students' sense of call emerging, shifting, solidifying, focusing. Each story is unique; all are holy.

The call of God is always something of a mystery. Each person experiences God's leading differently, so it is difficult to generalize about or even describe what a call to ministry is like. Personality may play a role in these differences. In addition, religious language varies from tradition to tradition, and it shapes how we experience our faith.

The inner call is a person's sense of God's invitation to pursue a ministry vocation. The outer call is the affirmation of the community. Usually one of these calls develops before the other, but both are essential for the healthy functioning and identity of pastors.

Call may be described as the leading of God—discerned through any number and kind of divine, human, or inner conversations—which directs our choices about use of our time, energy, and passion. The call to pastoral ministry has both an inner and an outer dimension. The inner call is a person's sense of God's invitation to pursue a ministry vocation. The outer call is the affirmation and validation of the community. Usually one of these calls will develop before the other, but both are essential for the healthy functioning and identity of pastors. A key task of ministry preparation is the nurturing of the existing sense of call and the development of a holistic sense of call combining inner and outer aspects.

Inner call

An inner sense of call to ministry can happen in a variety of ways. Some people have "Damascus road" experiences in which they receive a clear, direct message or vision from God—an unmistakable sign. Others have "Emmaus road" experiences, in which there is an "aha" moment, followed by the question, "Did not our hearts burn within us on the road?" For still others, the inner call comes as a gentle nudging, a quiet whisper suggesting a direction. And there are some who have just always known, for as long as they could remember, that they would be pastors.

Those who experience an inner call first tend to be more intuitive folks—N's on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The inner call is usually more sensed than overt, so those who perceive the world intuitively may be more likely to receive and pay attention to an inner call. Also, those who articulate a strong inner call tend to feel more comfortable with the idea that God is still speaking and acting in our world. They tend to have a well-developed sense of the Holy Spirit's presence and empowerment in the church and in their own lives.

How is an inner call answered? Some people accept that call quickly and easily. It feels natural to them, or the sense of peace that floods them assures them that they can trust this calling. Some people resist the call, ignoring or fighting it. Others delay their response. They know that God is leading them toward this vocation, but they sense that the timing is not right. Still others carry their call tenderly for some time, trying to discern what it means for their future. In general, students entering seminary with a strong sense of inner call have already spent significant time and effort sorting through their questions and issues.

The story of Moses's call may be helpful in understanding the common questions of those who have received an inner call. First, there is often the question, "Who am I, that I should go?" There may be a large gap between the person's perception of what a pastor is like and how she sees herself. Just as Moses argued that he was not an eloquent speaker, many people receiving an inner call may feel that they are not adequate to the task.

Second, people who receive an inner call often have doubts about whether others will validate that call. In his ongoing struggle with God's call, Moses responded, "But suppose they do

not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The LORD did not appear to you' " (Exod. 4:1; NRSV). This comment expresses well the hesitancy of many who have received a strong inner sense of God's calling to ministry. Especially if that call included a supernatural experience of hearing God's voice or seeing a vision, people often wonder whether others will think they are arrogant or crazy.

One of the main issues the church must face as we work with people who have an inner sense of call to ministry is the question of how we know when such a call is authentic, and when it is misguided. This discernment is not always easy, and perhaps it is is why Mennonites and other community-based traditions have felt more comfortable with and have given more weight to the outer call.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, Mennonite writings about the selection of pastors spoke only about the congregation's selection and discernment, not about a person's inner sense of God's calling.

In fact, several of the earliest Anabaptist leaders stressed that a person could never appoint himself as a pastor but must be chosen by the church.[1] Until the middle of the twentieth century, Mennonite writings about the selection of pastors spoke only about the congregation's selection and discernment, not about a person's inner sense of God's calling.

Why are we sometimes uncomfortable with people who are certain that God has called them to pastoral ministry? We may fear attributing responsibility to God for human decisions and actions. We may worry that people will claim too much personal authority with too little accountability to the church. We may have experienced such people as being less open to guidance and critique, or less willing to listen to others. Or this kind of call experience may simply be foreign to our own experience, and we don't know how to validate it.

It is important that inner calls be tested and affirmed by the church. But what if the church doesn't do its job of discerning that outer call? Too many of our congregations don't take seriously our task of affirming gifts and calling out leaders. I once talked to a student who had a clear sense that he should be in seminary but was not at all sure why. He said no one in his congregation had

encouraged him to consider ministry, and then he quickly added, "But that's not something our church does."

An even greater tragedy is that many women who have sensed an inner call to pastoral ministry not only have received no encouragement but have even faced barriers to their calling. Those barriers may be subtle (not ever seeing women in ministry roles) or overt (constitutions limiting the roles of women, or refusal to ordain). But the most common and debilitating barriers women face are the discouragement of family members, biblical arguments against their leadership, and nonrecognition of their gifts in the church. Thankfully, these obstacles are less common than in previous generations, but the church cannot ignore the painful reality that resistance still exists in too many places.

How can churches and individuals nurture these inner calls while developing an accompanying sense of outer call? The story of Samuel's call (1 Sam. 3) illustrates four stages: clarifying, initial validating, preparing, and testing of the wider community.

Sometimes an inner call must be ***clarified*** before it can be tested. Many people's sense of call begins vaguely and needs guidance or time to become more specific. Samuel heard God's voice calling his name but believed it was Eli calling him. Finally Eli realized what was happening and told Samuel that he was being called by God. Samuel was hearing something but was not sure of the source. Similarly, many people first hearing an inner call to ministry need help to identify what it is. Spiritual direction can be a helpful tool in clarifying the call.

Second, the inner call needs some sort of ***initial validation***. This validation might be through testing it with one or two other people, or it might come as a sign from God. After Samuel received God's message, Eli insisted on hearing it, and when Samuel reluctantly gave him the message about the coming punishment against Eli's house, Eli validated the message by saying, "It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him" (1 Sam. 3:18).

Pastors and family members are the most likely folks with whom people will initially test their sense of call to ministry. The response of these initial discernment communities is critical for many people.

Preparation is a stage embracing a variety of elements. It can include mentoring, spiritual guidance, academic training, and

experiential training. These aspects of discernment and doing ministry tasks are critical both for developing a sense of call and for readying people for the testing of the church. The story of Samuel doesn't elaborate on this stage, but we know from the context that Samuel continued to receive training and guidance from Eli to prepare him for his role as prophet.

Finally, the outer call comes with the ***testing of the wider community***. Verse 20 of 1 Samuel 3 says "And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD." As a person's gifts and personality are tested and affirmed in the church, the outer call can be added to the inner call.

Outer call

Those who begin their journey toward pastoral ministry with an outer call usually have obvious gifts of leadership, scholarship, or care-giving, and these gifts lead others to encourage them to consider pastoral ministry and/or seminary studies. The shoulder-tapping may be done by teachers, college professors, pastors, congregation members, small groups, family members, colleagues, or friends.

The people who begin their journey to ministry with an outer call are diverse, but they tend to have an external locus of authority, at least at this stage of their life, and the response of others is important to them. In the past, they would have been mostly male, but now the gifts of women are also being encouraged in many places. The ones who end up at seminary tend to be loyal to community, particularly the church, and take seriously the fact that someone has encouraged them to consider ministry or seminary studies. They also tend to be younger, perhaps because our college faculty have done better than many congregations in calling out gifts.

People who begin their journey to ministry with an outer call tend to have an external locus of authority, at least at this stage of their life, and the response of others is important to them.

Like those who begin with an inner call, some who first receive an outer call accept that calling readily, while others resist it or delay acting on it. But the journey to join an inner call to their external call is still in front of them, and that journey can't be controlled or forced. Therefore these people tend to bring more

unanswered questions about their call with them to seminary. They usually struggle more with the idea of being a pastor than with doing the tasks a pastor does. They may also find it hard to claim their own authority, especially if they are young adults.

Just as people with an inner call need the affirmation of the church in order for their call to be complete, people who have been outwardly affirmed need to develop a sense of inner call. If this fails to happen, they won't have the spiritual and emotional resources to survive rough times in ministry, particularly when they meet critique or opposition. Mary's call (the Annunciation) illustrates four stages of developing an inner call: clarifying, preparing and exploring, continued validating, and claiming.

Many people, when first told they should consider ministry, respond with shock. Often the idea is not one they have considered, and it may not fit their self-perception. Like Mary, they may be perplexed by the affirmation and wonder what it means (Luke 1:29). And often their initial response will be like Mary's: "How can this be?" (Luke 1:34). The reason for perplexity may be anything: "I am too young," "I don't know the Bible well enough," etc. Their questions and protests are part of ***clarifying*** the initial call they have received.

Preparing is just as important for people who begin with an outer call as for those who begin with an inner call. But in this case, a primary benefit of preparation is ***exploring*** various options for the future, which can help people develop a sense of where the need of the world and the church matches their deepest longings and joys. Often the inner call develops in the process of testing gifts. Doing leads to being. Acting as if one is a pastor may lead to realizing that one is in fact a pastor. Along the way, people need the assurance Mary received, that nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37).

For people who are struggling to sense an inner call, it can be frustrating to hear the call stories of others, especially those whose inner call is extremely clear and those from a tradition that stresses the importance of a clear word from God. Such stories are especially hard for people who operate more rationally and find the inner, intuitive world more foreign.

Often the journey to claim an inner call takes time. This journey can't be controlled or forced. But offering companionship

along the way, whether in spiritual direction or mentoring, can create a climate in which the inner call can develop. When we invite people to consider ministry, we need to commit ourselves to walking with them, listening to them as they explore their doubts and longings.

Another critical part of the journey is ***continued validating***, or ongoing affirmation of their gifts. Mary received an unmistakable external affirmation of her calling from her cousin Elizabeth. At Mary's greeting, Elizabeth exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (Luke 1:42–45).

It was at this point—after Elizabeth confirmed what the angel had said, and when she had blessed rather than judged Mary—that Mary was able to express her praise of God in the Magnificat. In this song Mary was finally able to ***claim the call of God internally***. That is the goal for those who begin with an outer call—to be able to claim the joyful assurance that "the Mighty One has done great things for me" (1:49).

At various points in ministry, pastors may have a stronger sense of inner or outer call. During times with less affirmation, the inner call may sustain them. During times of self-doubt, the outer call may sustain them. But for the ongoing health of pastors and their ministry, both need to be held together.

Note

[1] Hans Hotz, "Bern Colloquy" (1538); and Peter Riedeman, *Account of Our Religion, Doctrine and Faith* (1542); quoted in Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline* (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1981), 125–26, 129.

About the author

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Tell me about your call

Sara Wenger Shenk

"Tell me about your call," the veteran missionary said to my husband and me during a week of orientation, his eyes shining with eager anticipation. Gerald and I had just completed two years of seminary and were heading off at twenty-four years of age for an atypical mission assignment in Yugoslavia. At the height of the cold war in 1977, leaders at Eastern Mennonite Missions and Mennonite Central Committee were beginning to send Mennonite young adults to various eastern European countries as university students with a mandate to study, connect with local churches, teach if invited, and build bridges with our communist "enemies."

While I was ready for the adventure of this unusual assignment, I was floored by the missionary's question. As a missionary kid, I knew the language of call. I was a baptized disciple of Jesus Christ, drawn to reflect deeply on God's work in the world and to give myself to the purposes of the kingdom of God. But I had grown uneasy with the piety associated with the language of call. It seemed to give people license to see their own enterprises as God's work.

I stumbled into an awareness that what I have felt called to is *integrity*, an honest way of being present in the moment, in spirit and truth. My call had more to do with a way of *being* in the world than with any specific work.

And I harbored an undercurrent of skepticism. During my college years I had imbibed the critique of colonialism and its influence on the missionary enterprise, and I didn't want to be lumped in with overly zealous people who disrespect indigenous peoples and their traditional wisdom and rich culture. That description didn't characterize the work of my parents or most of their colleagues, but it was the prevailing caricature of the mission enterprise.

The truth is that I didn't really know what I was called to be or do. My husband thrived in Yugoslavia. He excelled at language

learning; made friends easily; readily took risks to teach, preach, enter war zones, and forge friendships with Marxists and Muslims—among many others. I, on the other hand, was intensely private and reserved; I preferred to stay behind the scenes. While intellectually I had welcomed the biblical feminist invitation to become all that God intends me to be, I wasn't sure what that meant for me, and I needed time to ponder. In that pondering, I began slowly to find my voice as a theologically attuned, spiritually grounded writer.

Several years later, as a young mother and published author, I was surprised by an invitation to teach at Eastern Mennonite Seminary (Harrisonburg, Virginia). During chapel one day, we were invited to share about our own call to ministry. I was paired with a faculty colleague. After fumbling around the question, I stumbled into a profound awareness that what I have felt called to is *integrity*, an honest way of being present in the moment, in spirit and truth. My call, as I was able to identify it, had more to do with a way of *being* in the world than with any specific work.

The question of my call took on new urgency when the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Indiana) presidential search committee contacted me as one of three people they'd identified in the final stage of their discernment. I was caught off guard—honored that they'd consider me but sure they'd been misled. I agreed to call back in a week with word about whether I was willing to engage the process. After most of the week had passed, I still had no idea how to respond. I knew there was no way I would accept the job if I were invited, but I also knew they'd spent months in discernment, so I didn't want to say no lightly. I take the call of the church seriously.

I sought out a former college president, a woman who shared her own story of surprising call. My husband and I engaged in many an argument about whether I could simply say no, which I was sure I needed to do. Other close friends counseled me to give the process of discernment time to unfold. I agreed with reservation to take the next step at each point in the process. Days before the interview with the search committee, I called to say that if I were invited to the job, I was unlikely to accept. The only way I could proceed with integrity was to let them know. After conferring, the committee decided they wanted to move ahead as planned.

Meanwhile, I was deeply disquieted. For days I lived with strange dreams, before they began to open themselves to me. Biblical stories of call drew me in with new urgency. I often awoke at 4:30 or earlier and could hardly wait to light a candle and sink into prayer, holding on for dear life because the ground was shifting beneath me. Morning after morning, the choral music of the Russian Orthodox Church held me in its deep harmonies when I had no words.

The mystery of call pulled me into the cavernous unknown. I've never felt so inexorably led, step by step, in a direction I resisted with every fiber of my being. Walter Brueggemann's book of prayers, *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth,* became a rod and staff for me. Here is an excerpt that broke me wide open:

We arrange our lives as best we can,
to keep your holiness at bay . . .
Safe, virtuous, settled.
And then you—
you and your dreams,
you and your visions,
you and your purposes,
you and your commands . . .
We find your holiness not at bay,
but probing, pervading,
insisting, demanding.
And we yield, sometimes gladly,
sometimes resentfully,
sometimes late . . . or soon.
We yield because you, beyond us, are our God.
We are your creatures met by your holiness,
by your holiness made our true selves.
And we yield. Amen.[1]

I don't easily yield. I resist doing anything out of a sense of duty or obligation. I'm schooled in self-preservation. But this time it was different. I don't know if it's the weathering that comes with age, or if it's surviving wrenching personal experiences, or learning to trust despite the vulnerability of any given moment—whatever it is, I have over time developed more solid footing in the love of

God. More and more often I remember that calling isn't about me. And it isn't about you either. Yet of course it is, because God created and calls us each by name. But what we're about is really the mission of God in the world. That's what fills me with gratitude—and courage. It's about Jesus. It's about the great God of the heavens who comes near to us with tender love, forgiveness, and justice for all. That is what we're each called to testify to through whatever it is we are and do day in and day out—with integrity—in spirit and in truth.

I have no illusions about the challenge of the job I've undertaken. I normally prefer to avoid risk, and to count on someone else to shoulder major responsibilities. We put much at risk in this move. Yet I've been surprised by joy—and this wonderful community. AMBS isn't perfect, by any means, but I've sensed in a deeply reassuring way the legacy of faithful devotion to God's mission that undergirds this place. I've quickly felt at home in profound ways that I hadn't known were possible.

I accepted the call to leadership as a sacred trust—joining a team of extraordinarily gifted, spiritually grounded, and delightful people who find great fulfillment in preparing leaders for God's reconciling mission in the world. Indeed, yielding to the call, when it comes from the community of faith and rings true within one's own spirit, is a blessing.

I'm reminded of the scene from the Gospel of Luke when "a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Jesus, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!' But he said, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!' " (Luke 11:27). There is nowhere I would rather be than fully yielded to God's call day in and day out—and becoming more fully my true self, for the glory of God.

Note

[1] Edwin Searcy, ed., *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth: Prayers of Walter Brueggemann* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003). Reproduced by permission of Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

About the author

Sara Wenger Shenk is president of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Indiana), and loving it—the work, the community, the opportunity to be about God's reconciling mission in the world.

Speak, Lord, for your servants are still listening
Calling and vocation in the last third of life

Muriel Bechtel

It began as a leisurely Sunday lunch with church friends at a local restaurant. When I mentioned that I was writing an article on calling and vocation in retirement, suddenly the conversation went to another level. It was evident that the topic had captured the group's interest, as each person in turn responded to these questions: What was your calling in life? What happened to that calling as you reached retirement, whether by choice or through other circumstances? As a soon-to-be-retired area church minister, my interest was more than academic. It was intensely personal.

Roy had been a principal. After retiring at fifty-five he accepted two consecutive executive roles in nonprofit community organizations. He said, "When I retired from school administration, I prayed for a place to use my administrative skills to make a contribution to the community." Though no longer in active leadership roles, he continues to be interested in the work of the wider church.

How might the church provide opportunities for Christians in late adulthood to give and receive counsel about how their Christian calling relates to their personal calling for this season of life?

Marg, who cleans apartments for seniors in a retirement residence, said, "I'm a worker. I need to be active. I couldn't visit someone just to talk. But I love talking with people and listening to their stories while I'm cleaning their apartments." Marg also readily identified the calling of her husband, whose retirement was forced when his career in sales was cut short by a stroke: "Doug has been lobbying for stroke victims for better rehabilitation services in the local hospital. Without his persistence and determination, I'm convinced it would not be happening."

Gladys, retired from working in food processing or manufacturing plants most of her life, reflected on how the recent death of her husband has changed her life: "When you lose a spouse, you

lose a big part of your identity. It takes a long time to figure out who you are and where you belong." Her calling for now is to develop a new identity and a new community.

I asked my questions of several retired pastors. Since her retirement, Martha assists with credentialing interviews for licensing and ordaining pastors; she also serves as a mentor to younger women pastors. She told me: "My calling really hasn't changed since I retired. It's to be a faithful disciple and to offer my gifts, but now I do that depending on the situation and on my time and energy."

Paul, a retired pastor who is facing limitations related to failing health, observed: "My calling is to be a servant, like it's been all my life. But it means something different now. At this stage in my life, being a servant means letting go, passing on the responsibility, and being willing to receive from others. After a lifetime of doing for others, I have to learn to let others do for me. It's not easy." He is writing about his life experiences. "I find meaning in reflecting back over my life, the experiences I've had and the people I have shared them with. I hope others, especially my children and grandchildren, will find these reflections meaningful too."

As these conversations suggest, having a sense of call or vocation in life continues to give purpose and meaning to life after retirement. That calling will be expressed in new ways appropriate to the person's stage in life, but it does not end.

Asking the right questions

Henry Simmons has suggested that at each stage of life, as available time, energy, and abilities change, we have to answer three questions: Who am I? What will I do? With whom will I do it? Each new stage calls for the "creative and responsible reordering and living out of one's life" by addressing these three key issues: identity, generativity, and intimacy.[1]

Others have suggested a fourth question: What will give meaning or purpose to my life? Calling and vocation are words that speak to the meaning question. They hark back to our baptism, when we were affirmed as God's beloved sons and daughters. At baptism, Christians publicly commit ourselves to being participants in the saving work of God through living and loving as Jesus did. When we promise to "give and receive counsel in the

congregation" and to "participate in the mission of the church,"[2] we don't add a qualifier that specifies "until retirement."

North American society bombards retirees with messages convincing them that the primary purpose of the years after retirement is to relax and enjoy the fruits of their working years. Such messages render invisible those for whom economics, health, or family circumstances make relaxing an impossible dream. Furthermore, research shows that even with better health care and greater longevity, older people who spend all their time in leisure activities and without a sense of purpose are more susceptible to declining physical and mental health, as evidenced in symptoms such as weight gain, boredom, self-absorption, and depression.[3]

Older people who spend all their time in leisure activities and without a sense of purpose are more susceptible to declining physical and mental health, as evidenced in symptoms such as weight gain, boredom, self-absorption, and depression.

Nor are clergy, mission and church workers, or people with a "religious" vocation the only ones who are called. The early Anabaptists agreed with Martin Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, which asserts that "all baptized Christians are . . . called to participate in the saving work of God" and that all stations in life are divine vocations.[4]

Biblical understandings of calling or vocation

The first mention of call in the biblical text is God's call to Abram: "Go from your country and your kindred . . . to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing" (Gen. 12:2; NRSV). God's call included a promise and a purpose: in following his call, Abram would be blessed *in order that* he would be a blessing to others.

A less familiar biblical account of call is described by Jeremiah, who heard this word from the Lord: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you: I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:4–5). This passage depicts calling as a unique way of being that is given by God when one is still in the womb. The implication is that such a calling animates one's doing from birth throughout life.[5] Long

before his baptism, Jesus seems to have had a growing awareness of his vocation when at the age of twelve he told his worried parents that he must be in his Father's house (Luke 2:49).

Both understandings of call or vocation begin with God, but the first is about doing and the second is about being. Our being is not limited by our ability to do. Our core identity informs our calling and remains part of us no matter what our station or stage in life. The invitation at each stage in life is to discern how our unique calling will be expressed in this particular time and place and in light of our larger Christian identity as God's people who are called to be part of Christ's ministry on earth. Each transition offers us new opportunities to grow deeper in God's love and to bless others in ways we had not imagined or thought possible.

The church's calling

In North American culture, aging is often depicted as a process of growing incompetence and declining significance. In a changing demographic, in which the proportion of active seniors in the general population will increase dramatically in the coming decades, the Christian church has a unique opportunity to invite older people to reimagine their calling and vocation.[6]

To do so will require converting the imaginations of old and young. Rather than letting our culture define aging, older adults in the church have a missional opportunity to redefine what it means for each person to be fully human until life ends. "Older people who refuse to be seduced by [the culture's] value system have the potential to be an unprecedented prophetic force in the world."[7] What they need from the church is what all Christians need from the community—to be reminded that they are still loved and still called to be a blessing, in this season of life as in all those that preceded.

In *Called for Life: Finding Meaning in Retirement,* Paul Clayton poses questions that relate specifically to vocation or calling: What are my skills and abilities? Where and how am I being called to use them?[8] When people are in young or middle adulthood, the church often asks questions related to calling or vocation. Does the church also invite people who are entering retirement to reflect on questions related to calling? How might the church provide opportunities for Christians in late adulthood

to give and receive counsel about how their Christian calling relates to their personal calling for this season of life?[9]

Aging well involves "achieving a sense of integrity and wisdom."[10] Asking older people about their calling invites them to a deepening integrity: to find ways to be true to their God-given identity and their baptismal commitment as they enter later adulthood, a stage that could constitute as much as a third of their life. Asking about calling at this stage of life recognizes the wisdom God has given older people through their life experiences, and it invites them to continue to be a blessing to others.

The golden years—a golden opportunity

The twenty-first-century church is faced with the missional challenge of inspiring the imaginations of older adults, some of whom are disillusioned with the self-absorption of society and ripe for new dreams. The church in its worship, life, and mission can create opportunities for asking questions of vocation and inviting older people to share their wisdom. Older people who are still eager to say yes to God's call are found in the Bible, and in our families and communities.

When Naomi's husband and two sons died in Moab, she found new purpose in being a mentor for Ruth, her son's widow. At Obed's birth, the women who were Naomi's community reminded her that God's surprise of a grandson through her foreign-born daugher-in-law would bring meaning and purpose to her old age: "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin . . . [This child] shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him" (Ruth 4:14–15).

The invitation at each stage in life is to choose how our unique calling will be expressed in this time and place and in light of our larger Christian identity as God's people who are called to be part of Christ's ministry on earth.

Pastors and leaders who have served with passion and persistence and find it hard to let go will find wisdom in Moses's encounter with God after leading Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness. When they finally arrived at Mount Pisgah, though Moses was tired in spirit and body, the sight of the Promised Land in the distance reignited his passion for leading the

people across the Jordan to their destination. But God had hard words for Moses: "Look well, for you shall not cross over this Jordan. But charge Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, because it is he who shall cross over at the head of this people and who shall secure their possession of the land that you will see" (Deut. 3:27–28). God reminded Moses that the journey to which he had dedicated his life was not just about him. There was still work to be done, and Moses's new calling was to step back and to charge, encourage, and strengthen his successor.[11]

The church's calling is to be as intentional at the end of life as at the beginning—reminding God's people of their calling to be a blessing as circumstances and abilities allow, and assuring them that they are beloved.

Those who are scarcely able to do but who are seasoned in recognizing God's voice may well learn from the elderly priest Eli, who, though his eyesight was growing dim, taught young Samuel to recognize and respond to God's voice (1 Sam. 3). They may learn from Simeon and Anna, who waited patiently at the temple in Jerusalem to see the fulfillment of God's promise and to tell others what they had seen (Luke 2:25–38).

At a certain point, some of us will need others to care for us. Jesus' words to Peter name that reality: "When you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go" (John 21:18).

Even in dying each of us is invited to be the person God has called us to be. As an intensive care nurse, Jean had given years of her life to nursing others through their dying. A few months after retirement, she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and given three to six months to live. Rather than spend her last weeks in bitterness and anger, she saw it as her calling to die well, forgiving past hurts and telling people what they meant to her. Jean was a blessing to all who witnessed her let go of *doing* God's work and focus on *being* God's person in the world[12] in her dying.

The church welcomes people at the beginning of life and patiently forms them to be disciples of Jesus Christ. At baptism, they become members of a community with others who promise to give and receive counsel as they discern what it means to do

God's work and be God's people in the world. The church's calling is to be as intentional at the end of life as at the beginning—reminding God's people through our worship, communal life, and mission of their calling to be a blessing as circumstances and abilities allow, and assuring them that they are beloved even as they take their last breath and depart this life to enter the next.

Notes

[1] Henry C. Simmons, "A Framework for Ministry for the Last Third of Life," in *Aging, Spirituality and Religion*, ed. Melvin Kimble and Susan H. McFadden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 87.
[2] Taken from the baptismal vows in *Minister's Manual*, edited by John D. Rempel (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1998), 48.
[3] Harold G. Koenig, MD, in *Purpose and Power in Retirement: New Opportunities for Meaning and Significance* (Radnor, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2002), provides a historical overview of how societal expectations for retirement have changed: our current perceptions about retirement and old age are relatively recent developments.
[4] Keith Graber Miller, "Transforming Vocation: A Mennonite Perspective," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 83 (January 2009): 30–31.
[5] Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn, *Healing the Purpose of Your Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 2.
[6] Simmons, "A Framework for Ministry for the Last Third of Life," 92–93.
[7] Kathleen Fischer, *Winter Grace: Spirituality and Aging* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 15.
[8] Paul C. Clayton, *Called for Life: Finding Meaning in Retirement* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2008).
[9] Virgil Vogt stresses that every Christian accepts her/his Christian calling at baptism, in *The Christian Calling*, Focal Pamphlet no. 6 (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1961).
[10] Carroll Saussy, *The Art of Growing Old: A Guide to Faithful Aging* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 31.
[11] Clayton, *Called for Life*, 83.
[12] Ibid., 88.

About the author

Muriel Bechtel is area church minister for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. Her interest in discerning call was the focus of a recent sabbatical at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Indiana), and it continues to shape her approach to her ministry with pastors. Muriel is married to David; together they look forward to the callings still to come in their retirement.

Cross-cultural perspectives on the call to ministry

Maurice Martin

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC) is becoming increasingly multicultural as people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds across the globe come to Canada, form congregations, and join our area church. Each Sunday across MCEC worship is conducted in twelve languages.

MCEC is also called on to bestow credentials (licensing or ordination) on pastoral leaders in these congregations. In the process we engage them in conversations about what it means to call people into ministry in this way. Some pastors with Asian origins come from within the Christian church; some have come out of the spiritual traditions of Buddhism or animism. As Christians they have experienced life, faith, Christian vocation, and ministry in denominations such as Alliance, Baptist, Church of Christ, and Presbyterian, to name a few. So we draw from a rich and diverse heritage as we develop the ministerium in MCEC.

"The priesthood of all believers" suggests that ministry belongs to the whole people of God, with somewhat less emphasis on the special status of called-out pastors.

In 2010 MCEC offered a program called Growing in Faith Together (GiFT), in which five English as a second language (ESL) pastors[1] and an elder were paired with six Caucasian pastors for five Saturdays of sharing, study, and fellowship. This was a modest attempt to begin breaking down cultural barriers and learning how these pastors with their congregations are gifted people and gifts to one another in MCEC.

In the final session five pastors were invited to share with the group their experiences of call to ministry. The presentations of several pastors in this setting, augmented by interviews, form the anecdotal base for this article. Out of these stories we can see the blessings and the challenges of coming to a common mind about

the meaning of call to ministry and the credentialing process that follows.

The Mennonite Church has a polity statement that may form a helpful backdrop against which to discuss our multicultural experience of call to ministry. According to this statement, "As a church committed to God's vision of reconciling all persons in Christ and breaking down all dividing walls of hostility (Eph. 2), we affirm that God bestows ministry gifts and God calls persons to leadership ministries without regard to gender, race, ethnic/cultural origin, or social standing. We, as the community of God's people, call out persons in the same manner."[2]

As we sought out pastors for the GiFT program, we discovered that the congregations of Asian origin did not have female pastors. (The Hispanic congregations would be more open to women's leadership.) Thus we paired one Caucasian woman pastor with an ESL female elder to enrich the conversation. Could this move contribute to future openness to calling women to ministry in these settings?

Mennonites often invoke the phrase "the priesthood of all believers," as Arnold Snyder says, "to extol the virtues of an idealized Anabaptist priesthood of all believers—all members are pastors, it is said, and minister in a variety of ways."[3] The concept *priesthood of all believers* is not understood or applied consistently. It originated with Martin Luther, who challenged the notion that believers need a priest to dispense grace to them. In that sense, each Christian is his or her own priest, receiving grace by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

The key issue of the Reformation era was the question of authority. Who has the authority to "dispense" grace in the church? In the place of apostolic succession (from Christ through Peter to the bishops of Rome), the Reformers pointed to scripture as the ultimate authority. But that move doesn't resolve the matter; it raises another question: who then is vested with the authority to interpret scripture? The mainline Reformers said this authority is given only to those who had been called by a legitimate political authority.

Anabaptists rejected this link between church and state. When pressed, they stated that their authority came from God through the Spirit. And thus we see something like a "priesthood of all

believers" emerging in early Anabaptism. But as Snyder notes, "this 'spiritual democracy' was not destined to last."[4] Soon the "office" of pastor was instituted among Anabaptists and their spiritual descendants, the Mennonites. Snyder notes that the Schleitheim confession (adopted by Swiss Brethren in 1527) and finally Menno Simons himself were clear that the only true pastors would be those chosen by the elders and/or the congregation. So the priesthood of all believers was rendered functionally obsolete, though compared to mainline Protestant churches, the surviving Anabaptist groups allowed for a much higher participation of the laity in church life.[5]

Our current *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* holds to an understanding of the priesthood of all believers that recognizes that "the Holy Spirit gives gifts to all believers and empowers them for service in the church and in the world," even as it recognizes "that God calls particular persons to specific leadership ministries and offices."[6] Mennonite congregations today may emphasize one or the other of these perspectives on Christian vocation.

Often the debate is between those who think in terms of the pastoral *function* and those who support a pastoral *office*. The former perhaps more closely admits the notion of priesthood of all believers and the suggestion that "all are ministers," as many church bulletins in the 1960s and 1970s declared. The latter recognizes that in the middle of the list of spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4 comes the statement "and some are pastors." A unique place is reserved for pastors as called-out leaders in the congregation. Yet one of the chief roles of the pastor is to call out the gifts of the people and ensure that they are used for building up the body (Eph. 4: 12).

The aforementioned ESL congregations join MCEC for a variety of reasons. A common theme is that they have found a basic affinity with Anabaptist thought, and especially with the gospel of peace. Is there also an affinity with Anabaptist understandings, beliefs, and practices of call to ministry?

Repairing broken walls, resisting hierarchy

Bock Ki Kim reflects on the hyphenated identity he acquired in coming to Canada. He describes himself as Korean-Canadian-

Christian-Anabaptist-Mennonite. When asked to speak about his call to ministry, he is quick to note that he was first called by God to be a follower of Jesus Christ. This is the Christian vocation that stems from baptism.

Eventually he realized that becoming a pastor is another way of following Jesus. He had been working toward a doctoral degree but then embarked on theological studies. He studied for seven years in Mennonite settings, beginning in Winnipeg. He remembered that for the love of Rachel, Jacob served seven years. He decided that for the love of God and Jesus Christ, he could study theology for seven years!

The Reformers pointed to scripture as the ultimate authority. But that move doesn't resolve the matter; it raises another question: who then is vested with the authority to interpret scripture?

In 1999, before Bock Ki applied to study at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Indiana), some friends pointed him to Isaiah 58:11–12: "You will be called Repairer of Broken Walls" (NIV). Bock Ki realized that many people have been hurt: how will they heal themselves? He understood that people might find life and healing through the gospel, as he would present it.

When he was invited to work in Korean ministry in Toronto, Bock Ki struggled with the sense that he was the pastor "wearing the big hat." He identifies with Jonah: He kept asking God why he was there. And after four years in the Toronto ministry, he ran away. But God spoke to him again. The pastor of Vision church at that time met with him and suggested that Bock Ki might succeed him in ministry there. That is the Korean way: you name your successor. Bock Ki felt the best way to minister is as a lay minister. He thought perhaps translation work might be his call. But various people, including the missions minister at MCEC, kept nudging him to accept the call to ministry.

Bock Ki reflects that initially the call came from outside himself. His father, a Presbyterian minister in Korea, always hoped that one of his sons would become a pastor. That Bock Ki gradually came to an inner sense of call he says was God's work, not his own initiative.

He accepted the call to ministry in MCEC because he values the Anabaptist way, which does not promote a hierarchical view

of the pastor's place. While he values much of what Anabaptism has to offer, he is less inclined to identify strongly with the "Mennonite" dimension of his "hyphenated self." So many cultural trappings are linked to Mennonite identity that he cannot feel totally at home with that designation.

Bock Ki says there are many pastors in Korea now. He notes that many people call themselves "pastor" without having had that call confirmed by a congregation; indeed, many of them have no pastoral placement. In reaction to this trend, Bock Ki's inclination was to hide his identity as pastor, especially if it implied a certain personal status within a hierarchical system. He did not wish to follow the mainstream way, and he sees Anabaptism as following a different path in this respect. He concludes that whether one is ordained or a lay person, God's call, our Christian vocation, is what ultimately matters.

"I don't hide myself"

Chinda Kommola, a native of Laos, came to know Christ from an animist/Buddhist background. He is profoundly aware that we are what we have been given. As 2 Corinthians 5:18 says, we who have been reconciled to God through Christ have been given the ministry of reconciliation. He considers himself a servant: "I serve God any time, any place. I don't hide myself." In Laos, a communist country, this declaration could put one in jail.

It is God's mission that we are on, not ours. We should not try to take things into our own hands. It is the word of God that speaks to people; the role of the pastor is simply to love.

Nonetheless, in a refugee camp in Laos he served as a youth pastor and evangelist among his people. He identifies with Moses on several levels. First was his disclaimer about his call to ministry—"Who am I, that I should go?" Then he began to realize that it is God's mission that we are on, not ours. We should not try to take things into our own hands, as Moses did when he struck the rock instead of speaking to it to call forth water for the people. Chinda sees a metaphor here. It is the word of God that speaks to people; his role as pastor is simply to love.

Like many of his compatriots, Chinda once thought that Christianity is all about being Western. Then he learned from

Acts 15:14 that from the gentiles God was calling out a people. The notion of a people separated to God was a shift for him. He had tried various churches in Canada, and in at least one felt uncomfortable with the group's politics. He realizes now that not all Christians are the same, and that Canada is not necessarily a Christian country—a perspective consonant with Anabaptist understandings. He senses some affinity with Anabaptist-Mennonites. He is pastor of the Lao Canadian Evangelical Mennonite Church and president of the Lao Mennonite Conference.

As an evangelist, Chinda feels a strong call to plant churches back in Laos. He finds that being identified as Mennonite facilitates this conversation, in a context where all too often Christianity is identified with the Central Intelligence Agency. Here too he feels an affinity with Moses: when Chinda speaks to the Laotian government, he feels like Moses speaking to Pharoah.

In Laotian culture, family values are important. Often leaders lack the support of their family. So in addition to the support of the congregation, as a locus for clarifying and owning the call, Chinda sees family support as critical. He says: "Be faithful to God, your family, and people around you." He adds: "And know your mission, as pastor, evangelist, and Mennonite."

God calls people like you

Brian Quan is a Chinese Canadian who pastors the English-speaking portion of Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church. His pastor noticed how much Brian served the congregation, and he kept asking him: "You are going to seminary, aren't you?" But Brian was reluctant. One day when a new pastor was installed at Toronto Chinese Mennonite, a guest speaker spoke about the call of Samuel (1 Sam. 3:8–21). He said: "God calls people like James, and like Brian." Needless to say, Brian felt singled out, but he was relieved that nobody else seemed to take note.

He attended a dinner for Christian professionals at which the guest speaker was a financial planner. Brian expected him to talk about economics. Instead he shared about his life as a Christian, and portrayed himself as a father and a Christian with a seminary degree. He spoke on the importance of being authentic about how God calls us and uses us. The door prize of the evening went to Brian. Was this another gentle reminder that God had been

speaking to him? That night he resolved to enter full-time seminary studies at Tyndale in Toronto.

Brian entered ministry in the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church, where it was expected that within two years he would be ordained. He postponed ordination for six years. After ordination he lived a bit uncomfortably with the Chinese honorific titles given to him and his wife. He experienced much discomfort when youth called him "pastor," and he felt somehow displaced from being "friend" in his relationships in the congregation. Honour and respect are strong Chinese values.

One could summarize the call to ministry in an Asian context in this way: God *calls* a person to ministry, and the congregation *receives* that person as their pastor.

When he left the Mennonite Church, it seemed like the right thing to do. But during the ten years of his service in the Alliance church, people from the Mennonite Church kept asking him to come back. So now he feels he has indeed come home and is reconnecting to his spiritual roots in the Mennonite Church.

A strong sense of God's call

Trakoon Yoel Masyawong, pastor of Grace Lao Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ontario, grew up in a pastor's family in Thailand, in a small Baptist church near the dormitory where he lived during school terms. He routinely assisted his father in music ministry. After completing high school he did a ministry internship for one year to test his call.

Yoel attended Bible school in Bangkok. On weekends he went out to serve in various churches. In his third year of study he did a nine-month internship in a Pentecostal church, followed by a fourth year of study toward a bachelor's degree in theology, accredited by the Asian Theological Association.

In 2001 Yoel came to Canada through the Mennonite Central Committee International Visitor Exchange Program (IVEP), working half time at Shantz Mennonite Church and half time at House of Friendship, a social service agency in Kitchener.

He returned to Thailand for two years to assist in student ministry in the Tao-Poon Mitrijit Church (Church of Christ) in Chiang Mai, located next to the university in the second largest city in Thailand. The congregation desired that he be licensed, so

they sent his name to the denominational office, from which he received his license by mail. There was no special service of licensing as is conducted in MCEC.[7]

Yoel was called back to Canada to serve at Grace Lao, where he had preached several times when he was there through IVEP. He was licensed for this ministry in MCEC in 2004, and ordained in 2008. Yoel was surprised that he was invited to be ordained at such a young age. In Thailand one could serve for decades before being ordained, and would probably be at least forty-five years of age. Thai Christians have the same attitude about this role that Brian Quan reports: ordination is a high honour. Or as Bock Ki Kim puts it, the ordained person wears a big hat.

Yoel, in reflecting on call to ministry in Thailand, suggests there is perhaps a stronger sense of God's call, and less emphasis on the call of the church or community. Of course, if you are called by God, you are committed to the church. As in our MCEC context, ordination is for the wider church, not just for service in a specific congregation. But the call is highly personal.

Learnings

In hearing these testimonials from people with origins in the Christian churches in the Asian context, one cannot easily separate denominational emphases from what has cultural overtones in that context. One could perhaps summarize the call to ministry in an Asian context in this way: God *calls* a person to ministry, and the congregation *receives* that person as their pastor.

Several of the pastors interviewed for this article are beginning to understand that Anabaptism not only emphasizes the gospel of peace but also reflects a somewhat different sense of what it means to be gifted and called into ministry. "The priesthood of all believers" suggests that ministry belongs to the whole people of God, with less emphasis on the special status of called-out pastors. These men are still sorting out what this idea means in practice as they own their particular call to ministry. Several of them are relieved to discover that perhaps status and high honour no longer need to be so much a part of ordination.

One challenge some of these pastors face is the financial constraints confronting many immigrant congregations. Yoel Masyawong drives school bus to augment his income. Chinda

Kommola is trained as a toolmaker and has worked in building machinery, gauges, and tools for automotive and aerospace applications. He works four days a week as a tradesman, then does pastoral work Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Bo Ki Kim's quarter-time salary is supplemented with honoraria for his translation work with Anabaptist materials for the Korean context. Brian Quan is employed full time in the English congregation of Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church.

Another challenge for these pastors is coming to terms with their hyphenated identities as Laotian/Korean/Chinese/Canadian-Christian-Evangelical-Anabaptist-Mennonites. They want to fit in in the Mennonite context without losing their identity. Some see the "Mennonite" designation is too culture laden; they prefer to be adopted into the Anabaptist vision. But Chinda notes that being known as Mennonite serves a practical function in his witness in Laos. In any case, the old cultural emphases are ever present, even in the process of doing theology and being the church, and they affect how we understand what it means to be gifted and called into ministry in the church.

Notes

[1] The designation *ethnic* does not adequately distinguish the people of whom we are speaking, since we often refer to the original Mennonite groups as ethnic Mennonites. In any case, we are all ethnic, rooted in various cultural backgrounds and maintaining various cultural distinctiveness. "English as second language" (ESL) thus seems to be a more helpful and acceptable way to designate the groups under consideration in this article.

[2] *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1996), 19.

[3] C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1997), 418.

[4] Ibid., 417.

[5] Ibid., 418.

[6] *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1995), 59.

[7] Yoel's brief account seems to indicate that the evangelical churches in Thailand, though from various denominational backgrounds, readily invite movement of leaders and credentials between churches.

About the author

Maurice Martin has been a pastor since 1974; most recently (until his retirement in 2010) he served as regional minister in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. At present he is teaching Anabaptist history and thought as part of a certificate program for pastors in Canada who have come from a variety of countries and denominations.

Gains and losses in the professionalization of the pastorate

Ervin R. Stutzman

Few of the many changes in the Mennonite Church in recent decades have had such a dramatic effect on congregational life as the professionalization of pastoral ministry. Along with more visible markers of societal assimilation, this development serves as one of the clearest divisions in practice between more conservative or Old Order groups and more progressive Mennonite churches.

The Anabaptist movement began largely as a lay movement, with some antipathy toward clergy in the Roman Catholic and Magisterial Reformation churches. Although the various descendants of the Anabaptist churches developed different patterns for choosing and ordaining pastoral leaders, the majority maintained a volunteer or lay leadership approach until the mid-twentieth century.

The Anabaptist movement in Europe began largely as a lay movement, with some antipathy toward clergy. Most Anabaptist groups maintained a lay leadership approach until the mid-twentieth century.

A look at the past

A. Lloyd Swartzendruber served as bishop and lead minister at East Union Mennonite Church near Kalona, Iowa, during the 1950s and '60s. The congregation's ministers received no designated salary, so they needed to earn their living from other work. Most ministers in rural churches were farmers whose children helped with the farm work when these men were tending to their ministerial duties. Not so with A. Lloyd, who as a young man had been called by Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities into a leadership role in a city mission. A. Lloyd served for nine years as superintendent of the Mennonite Children's Home in Kansas City, Kansas, and his wife, Mary, served as matron. They moved their young family back to Iowa in 1946, where A. Lloyd was ordained to the minis-

try a few months later. He was called by the congregation to become bishop and lead minister in 1954.

A. Lloyd worked at trades that allowed time for study, sermon preparation, and other pastoral responsibilities. Ministers were moving from being primarily preachers to doing pastoral visits and other ministerial duties. The congregation compensated A. Lloyd for his pastoral work by taking up an offering for his support every fourth Sunday of the month. The amount varied with many factors, including the price of farm goods.

In late 1957 or early 1958, as the story goes, A. Lloyd was driving a high-mileage 1950 Chevrolet. Because the area had few paved roads, the car took a beating on some pastoral visits. One week a visiting evangelist accompanied A. Lloyd each day to meet members of the congregation. Toward the end of the week of revival meetings, the old Chevy "blew a rod" on the way home from one such visit, disabling the engine not far from A. Lloyd's home in Kalona. Because the engine failed as they were coming down the hill just north of Kalona, A. Lloyd and his guest were able to coast into town.

In an older system that involved nominations from within the congregation and an election or the lot, candidates felt a sense of immediacy that does not come with hearing a suggestion that one consider going to seminary.

The next Sunday morning, the guest speaker began his sermon by describing his visits with the bishop, including the experience of rolling into Kalona in a disabled car. He also reported that just before the church service, he had walked around the parking lot looking at the cars. Well over half of them, he observed, were models newer than the bishop's car. To enable the bishop to continue serving the congregation well, it would be a good thing to raise the money for a new car right then and there. He invited the ushers to distribute blank checks from area banks, and then he gave time for married couples to consult about how much they would give. When the ushers took up the special offering some ten minutes later, the congregation was delighted to learn that they had given enough money to buy a new car not only for A. Lloyd but also for the other minister, who eventually succeeded A. Lloyd as bishop. The event still stands out to A. Lloyd's family as a sign of support and care at a time when lay leaders served without a salary.[1]

While such an event could take place today, it seems much less likely in a congregation with a professional pastor. The rise of other professions in society, and Mennonites' entrance into them after World War II, paved the way for the practice of hiring professional pastors. This change was complemented by seminary education in preparation for pastoral ministry.

For purposes of this article, we define a professional pastorate as one including these elements: (1) some level of formal training in preparation for the role, (2) ministerial credentials issued by an area conference or church, (3) specified compensation, (4) a job description or articulated role expectations, and (5) expectations of adherence to professional standards produced by the denomination. How has the professionalization of pastoral ministry changed Anabaptist-Mennonite understandings of ministry? What have we gained? What have we lost? What are the unique contributions of professional pastors in the church as it seeks to be part of God's mission?

I have divided the many changes into four categories to be considered: (1) the process for calling pastors, (2) congregational expectations of the pastoral role, (3) the nature of the pastoral work, and 4) the profile of those who serve as pastors.

The process for calling pastors. The move toward a professional pastorate has dramatically affected the process for calling pastors. In A. Lloyd Swartzendruber's day, the majority of pastors were called from within the congregation. Now many, if not most, congregations invite a pastor from outside. Many congregations rely on the denominational call system, which makes available a list of potential candidates who have been approved for ministry. The call system also provides congregations with a set of guidelines for calling a pastor. Most congregations assign a search committee to the task of identifying, interviewing, and recommending someone for the pastoral role.

One potential gain from these changes is that they introduce perspectives from outside the congregation. The area conference and denomination can be involved in shaping the congregation's self-understanding and helping a church develop the best potential match from a much broader list of candidates. Second, women and other people not recognized by typical congregations are

much more likely to be considered for pastoral ministry. People with a sense of call to ministry have expanded opportunities to get pastoral training, and upon graduation to enjoy the recommendation of seminary faculty. In addition, people new to the Anabaptist way can be considered alongside insiders with many relationships and long experience in the church.

Some long-time observers complain that this self-selection process for pastoral preparation means the church is losing some of its best potential pastors to other callings. In an older calling system that involved nominations from within the congregation and the use of election or the lot, candidates felt a sense of immediacy that usually does not come with having one's shoulder tapped or hearing a suggestion that one consider going to seminary.

Further, small congregations with fewer financial resources may find it difficult to attract a professional pastor. The result is empty pulpits, a situation far less common when laypeople were called from within the congregation. Again, people within the congregation have far less expectation that a current member or someone they know will be their next pastor. The pastor may well come as a stranger who is new to the relationships and family systems in the church. It may take a new pastor years to develop enough trust to lead effectively.

Congregations may be tempted to shop for pastors as though they were commodities. A congregation may even steal a good pastor from another congregation by offering better compensation. Further, the congregation may be tempted to conflate the concepts of vocation and profession, ideas that may best be kept separate. All believers, as Virgil Vogt helpfully explains in *The Christian Calling*, have a Christian vocation, a call to be followers of Jesus Christ.[2] Yet not all have Christian pastoral ministry as a profession. To make a living, people may have a variety of jobs, businesses, and professions.

Congregational expectations of the role. The professionalization of the pastorate has also brought significant change to role expectations of pastoral leaders. The two elements are interrelated; changing expectations brought about or hastened the process of professionalization. As A. Lloyd Swartzendruber's story indicates, the expectations for the pastoral role grew over time,

requiring adjustments to compensation. When volunteers served in the role of pastor, there were few, if any, written job descriptions. Not many ministers had seminary training, and there were few professional standards.

These developments in the twentieth century resulted in a number of gains. It is better for pastors to function with explicit rather than implicit expectations. The introduction of professional standards provides a greater degree of protection for members, who sometimes suffered ethical or professional incompetence through the ministry of untrained pastors.

There are also losses to be considered. Congregations may have unrealistic expectations of their pastor, particularly if they approach the job description and compensation of a pastor from the standpoint of getting the most for their money. The process of negotiating pastoral compensation can lead people to see a pastoral vocation as just another job. There is also the possibility that congregants expect the pastor to be available to meet all their needs, especially during times of crisis. Finally, congregations' heightened expectations for pastors may create a division between clergy and laity that does not fit Anabaptist understandings of ministry.

Congregations used to call a preacher. Today, they more often hire a pastor. One could describe the shift as a move from a largely prophetic ministry to a more priestly role.

The nature of the work. In A. Lloyd Swartzendruber's day, congregations called a preacher. Today, they more often hire a pastor. One could describe the shift as a move from a largely prophetic ministry to a more priestly role. Further, the role of the pastor has expanded to include many other administrative tasks, in a large congregation often including supervision of an administrative assistant and other pastoral workers. The increase of multiple-staff teams has led to greater specialization, and a larger congregation may have a pastor of worship, a pastor of youth, and a minister of education, among others.

From the congregational point of view, there have surely been many gains with this move. Many congregations now have a team of pastors that provides a full range of services. At least some professional pastors are trained to detect serious problems and to refer troubled individuals to trained specialists.

There may also be some losses. In order to provide a full-time role for a pastor, some congregations cobble together dissimilar or even incompatible roles, with the assumption that a generalist pastor should be able to do a broad range of work effectively.

The 2006 Mennonite member profile found a significant difference between ministers and lay members regarding role expectations of the pastor. A much higher percentage of pastors saw their role as equipping the laity for ministry, while members saw the pastor's role as serving members' needs. When the role of a pastor shifts largely to caretaking and priestly functions, one may lose a prophetic edge. Pastors may feel that they cannot express their honest feelings or confront the congregation without risking a bad evaluation or even losing their job.

According to the 2006 Mennonite member profile, a much higher percentage of pastors saw their role as equipping the laity for ministry, while members saw the pastor's role as serving members' needs.

John Howard Yoder's *The Fullness of Christ* is a study of the Apostle Paul's view of the ministry; it includes Yoder's serious critique of professional clergy as exemplified in the modern Christian church. He laments that over time the church has become increasingly clergy-centered, through a "multitude of tiny changes, mostly in the same direction," finally leading to "a set of forms and ceremonies more like the non-Christian cults of the first century than like early Christianity."[3]

The profile of those who serve as pastors. In the Mennonite church of Swartzendruber's day, nearly all preachers were married white men. Professionalization gradually led to a change in the general profile of the people who are called to the pastoral role, including women, singles, and individuals from different racial/ethnic groups. So, on the one hand, there is the potential gain of a greater diversity of people attracted to and suited for these roles. Those who do not enjoy public speaking may use their gifts in administrative or care-giving roles. As the pastoral role becomes more professional, it attracts people who are well suited to professional life, and who can relate well to other professionals in the congregation, such as teachers or medical workers.

On the other hand, professional pastors may find it more difficult to relate to business people, especially those who are self-

employed or entrepreneurs. In the days when preachers were nominated and chosen out of the congregation, they were more likely to be entrepreneurial leaders.

What are the unique contributions of professional pastors in the church as it seeks to be part of God's mission?

Perhaps the greatest advantage of the move to the professional pastorate is the ability of pastors to give their full attention to the missional task. Because professional pastors often serve as generalists with a view to the whole congregation, they have the unique opportunity to assess and integrate every aspect of the church's ministry from the standpoint of mission.

Many resources are available to professional pastors, including denominational publications and support systems, continuing education provided by seminaries and parachurch agencies, as well as affinity networks to provide coaching and mentoring to help pastors lead congregations in taking the next step in missional development.

Pastors can also have a significant role in developing congregational processes of discernment, raising up new leaders within the congregational context. Through the ministry of spiritual direction and discernment, pastors can encourage members to explore God's call for their lives, including the call to pastoral ministry.

Perhaps the greatest contribution that professional pastors can make is to empower the members of the congregation for their unique calling. As part of their prophetic ministry, pastors can challenge congregants to develop and exercise their spiritual gifts in keeping with that vocation, whether in the congregational setting or beyond.

Notes

[1] This story was told to me by H. D. Swartzendruber, about his father, A. Lloyd Swartzendruber.

[2] Virgil Vogt, *The Christian Calling,* Focal Pamphlet no. 6 (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1961).

[3] John H. Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1987), 19.

About the author

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Enlisting in the cause
Finding my voice as a missional church songwriter

Bryan Moyer Suderman

Now you've gone and done it
you chose to take the plunge
you've decided who you'll follow
and declared to everyone
that you're pledging your allegiance
enlisting in the cause
of the one who was crucified
infiltrating the world with the love of God . . .

So welcome to the body
the body of our Lord
this ragtag band of misfits
yearning for a world restored
we are healing and broken
full of hope and deeply flawed
we are sent into our neighbourhood
infiltrating the world with the love of God . . .

I pray that you'll be strengthened
for all that lies ahead
and I pray we'll pay attention
to what the Spirit says as we're
not-so-secret agents in the ancient urgent cause
of the one who died and rose again
infiltrating the world with the love of God . . .[1]

I wrote the song "Infiltrating the World" at the urging of a friend who was reflecting on her daughter's baptism. She suggested that we need a new "welcome to the body" song that helps us express an enthusiastic welcome to full participation in the vocation of the church, as mixed up and imperfect as it is (as we are). The

song seems appropriate in the context of this article as well, as I reflect on my sense of call to the songwriting that has become my primary ministry vocation over the past ten years.

You chose to take the plunge

I was baptized into Christian vocation at the age of eighteen, having been apprenticed into Christian vocation for as long as I can remember. As the oldest son of a missionary family living in Bolivia in the early 1980s, I was immersed in a milieu in which we knew ourselves to be sent people, agents in a compelling, exciting, challenging, and vital cause. I grew up acutely aware of how diverse and vibrant, how inspiring and messed up, how fractured and conflictive this ragtag band of misfits—the church—is.

The decision to be baptized was for me a way to say yes to the adventure of being the church in the world, and to declare my choice to embrace the pacifist convictions, discipleship emphases, and community orientation at the core of the Mennonite way of being Christian.

The decision to take the plunge and be baptized as a member of First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ontario, was for me a way to say yes to the exciting adventure of being the church in the world, and a way to declare publicly my choice to embrace the pacifist convictions, discipleship emphases, and community orientation that I understood to be at the core of the Mennonite way of being Christian.

It was clear to me that I wanted to be a part of the mission of the church, but it was far from clear what my part in that mission might be.

I pray we'll pay attention to what the Spirit says

Fast-forward through three university degrees, a wedding, and a three-year term of service in Colombia. Julie and I were faced with decision time yet again. What to do next? How to decide? We felt that we needed to be back in Canada again, and we wanted to serve the church. In what role exactly, we didn't know.

So we approached some high-level leaders in our denomination in Canada, declared our availability and desire to serve the church and our uncertainty about where or how that should happen. The response? "Well, there's always a need for pastors.

You could apply for some pastoral jobs, and see what happens." We found this response disappointing and disconcerting. We were hoping for help with discernment. Was this free market approach really the way the Spirit would lead?

Neither of us thought we were being called to pastoral ministry, but we knew we wanted to serve the church. We both had teaching qualifications. We decided that wherever one of us could land a teaching job, that's where we would go. Soon I was offered a job teaching grade eight at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate. Surely this was God's leading—what an answer to prayer!

Healing and broken, full of hope and deeply flawed

This "answer to prayer" turned out to be a disaster. Within weeks it was clear that I was struggling, and by the middle of the first semester I was barely hanging on. I would spend all evening trying to plan lessons, emerging hours later with nothing on the page and a pile of mangled paper clips on the floor. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't think. I would burst into tears at almost any time. I resigned on February 1 and spent a number of months in counseling, rest, and recuperation, working through a deep depression.

In the wake of what I saw as a public failure, I discovered that I was still loved and valued—by my spouse, my family, my church—even when I felt utterly unlovable and absolutely useless.

Vocational discernment? At this point we were thinking about survival. We were expecting a baby, I was not in any shape to handle full-time employment, and it was a challenge to think of how we could support ourselves.

But during this time something significant was happening to me. I was internalizing what I had known before, that I am truly and deeply loved. My being loved didn't depend on being successful or competent at my job (I wasn't), or on any accomplishments or achievements at all. In the wake of what I saw as a public failure, I discovered that I was still loved and valued—by my spouse, my family, my church—even when I felt utterly unlovable and absolutely useless. I was learning to see that the vocation of the church—as well as my own, whatever that might be—has less to do with accomplishments and achievements than with the simple, unchangeable fact that we are loved by God.

Sent into our neighbourhood

Fast-forward again, through two more employment/ministry placements—as a Bible college admissions counsellor and then as a youth pastor. In both cases I had the privilege of walking with young people on their own journeys of vocational discernment, helping them (1) catch a glimpse of what God is up to in the world (God's vocation); (2) begin to see that God calls, equips, and sends a people to participate in what God is doing (the church's vocation); and (3) hear the invitation to join in (our own vocation as individuals). This was at the core of how I understood my work as youth pastor. It seemed, in many ways, that I had arrived at a place of clarity in my own vocational journey.

And then something entirely unexpected happened.

Infiltrating the world with the love of God

Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA had just emerged out of the integration and reorganization of former denominations, each with its own history and mission agencies. What kind of mission structures would the newly organized denomination(s) have? How should mission activity be structured and facilitated according to missional church understandings, in which the church as a whole knows itself to be a sent people (rather than a supporting constituency that sends missionaries elsewhere), in which the basic question is not, does the church have a mission? but, does God's mission have a church?

Different teams formed to work at this agenda, and I was invited to be a member of Mennonite Church Canada's missional training team, charged with finding ways to effectively communicate these missional church understandings and help them take root at the local congregational level.

In a brainstorming session, a colleague and I started talking about the songs we sing with children, and the fact that the songs we learn as children stay with us all our lives. What if we could *sing* these missional understandings, even with our very young children, in such a way that they grew up thinking that *of course* God has a mission in the world, and *of course* we're all invited to join in—*of course* we are a sent people? Maybe these understandings might become more broadly part of our DNA as a church if we could sing them in a compelling way with our children.

That afternoon I sat down on the living room floor with our three-year-old son and sang for the first time:

God's love is for everybody
everyone around the world
me and you and all God's children
from across the street to around the world
from across the street to around the world

In short order a few verses took shape, describing God's mission as lived by various biblical characters, always with the hook that this is our story and our calling too. And then the refrain keeps coming back: "God's love is for everybody . . ."

Little did I know that this song would open the floodgates and that a new vocation was being born. Response was immediate and strong from those with whom I shared the song. I was asked to sing it at various gatherings, and immediately there were requests for a recording. I wrote a number of other songs in quick succession ("Sending Song," "On the Emmaus Road," "Disciples in Training," "A God Who Makes Friends")—all embedding foundational missional church insights in a form that is accessible and singable for children. The missional training team began making plans to record and publish these songs as part of a packet of resources for churches, to be released in time for the first Mennonite Church Canada Assembly in Abbotsford, BC, in July 2001. After the first day of the assembly, word came that we needed more—many more—CDs, so someone burnt a pile of additional copies.

What if we could *sing* these missional understandings, even with our very young children, in such a way that they grew up thinking that *of course* God has a mission in the world, and *of course* we're all invited to join in?

The demand for this music led Mennonite Church Canada to approve a project to make a professional quality full-length studio album of these and other songs that I had been writing. The result was the 2002 release of a CD and songbook called *God's Love Is for Everybody: Songs of Faith for Small and Tall*. We were pleased to see how quickly these songs were adopted and used in families, schools, and congregations.

But now I faced a dilemma. The songs kept coming, and I kept receiving invitations to share this music in a variety of settings. At the same time, the congregation where I was youth pastor was asking me to give more attention to the detailed organizational work of planning youth events. And I began to experience the now-familiar signs of approaching burnout.

For me, the primary vocational choice was and continues to be the decision to commit to membership in a body that seeks to pay attention to what God is up to and how we can join in. My songwriting remains subservient to that vocation.

What to do? We again entered a time of discernment, consulting with friends, colleagues, church leaders, and a counsellor. A number of things became clear: (1) The current pace of full-time youth ministry was not something I could sustain and be mentally, emotionally, and spiritually healthy. (2) The needs the congregation was expressing were no longer in alignment with how I understood my own gifts. (3) I seemed to have found my voice in a new and compelling way. Songwriting was bringing together my passion for biblical study; theological reflection; contextual analysis; church leadership; worship; ministries with children, youth, and adults; and of course, music. (4) Voices from across the church were saying that the songs I was writing were proving useful in helping families and congregations understand, articulate, and embrace their missional calling.

We decided that I would conclude my term as a youth pastor, and we moved to Ontario, where Julie had been offered a teaching position. We gave ourselves a period of three years, with Julie teaching full time and me as the primary homemaker, writing songs and exploring what it would look like to take this music ministry seriously as my main thing rather than as a side thing.

Not-so-secret agents in the ancient, urgent cause

Eight years later, it seems clear that the call to this songwriting vocation has been confirmed many times over. Affirmation and support come from many quarters, as songs are picked up, published, and sung in different contexts. When I get discouraged or impatient, when I am again tempted to measure my worth by grand accomplishments and achievements, I am reoriented by

someone letting me know that a song has found a home and is doing its slow and patient work in their family or community. I can work and rest and trust, knowing that even a small participation is meaningful because it is a part of the much bigger process whose outcome relies not on our own efforts but on God.

People often ask me where I find inspiration for writing so many songs. My typical response is something like this: Where does the pastor find inspiration for writing so many sermons, or the scholar for writing more articles, or the teacher for another day's classes, or the farmer for another year's crop, or the cook for another day's meals? I don't know that my process is so different from that of other members of the body of Christ. Paying attention to the realities around us, immersed in scripture and in prayer and in the life and mission of our local community of faith, we do the work that has been entrusted to us—preparing something to build up the body and offering it to the community in hope and trust that it may contribute in some way to the formation of a people capable of living our vocation in the world.

For me, the primary vocational choice was and continues to be the decision to commit to membership in a body that seeks to pay attention to what God is up to and how we can join in. This continues to be an adventure that gives meaning to my life. My own sense of call to this songwriting vocation remains subservient to the vocation of the broader body of which I am a part, and which in turn derives its vocation and identity from "the one who died and rose again, infiltrating the world with the love of God."

Note

[1] "Infiltrating The World," words and music by Bryan Moyer Suderman. Copyright 2008, 2009 SmallTall Music; www.smalltallmusic.com. From the 2009 CD *A New Heart: Songs of Faith for Small and Tall*.

About the author

Bryan Moyer Suderman lives in Stouffville, Ontario, and travels extensively, mostly by train, living his vocation of "building up the body of Christ by creating and sharing songs of faith for small and tall." SmallTall Music (www.smalltallmusic.com) has been his "flexible full-time" ministry since 2003, and he has released five CDs, the most recent entitled *Detectives of Divinity* (September 2011).