

SERVICE

Session 3

Your Calling

This is the third and final session on service. In this session we will more deeply explore how to finally discern our calling individually and as a group - what ministries are we called to participate in or start. What strengths and weaknesses does our congregation have and where are feeling called to either fill a gap or strengthen an already existing ministry? As Christians, we need to be rooted in church communities that genuinely turn our attention to God. One danger in seeking spiritual community is that we will be forever floating from one spiritual high to another, looking for the perfect faith community that will do it for us. Staying with a church, either a denomination or congregation, even when things are not going according to our preferences or when conflicts arise, is part of growing in love and faithfulness. We need the deep wisdom of the church, its rhythms and seasons, Word and sacrament, the gathered community. Our individual journeys, when isolated, can only be as broad and wide as our personal limits. With one another - past and present - we begin to taste the unlimited possibilities in God.

Opening Activities



Centering Moment

Light a candle and observe 30 seconds of silence as a reminder of God's presence among us.



Philippians 1:6

"I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ."



Reflect

What work do you feel God is calling you to be part of?



Opening Prayer:

Gracious Lord, we are called to live in the light of your glory and your kingdom. Help us now as we discern your will for us in this group, this congregation, and this community. Amen.



Music (optional)

Sing or listen to “We Give Thee But Thine Own.”



Watch: Service - Your Calling



Group Exercise - Deepening our Walk With Christ

Every group in the church has a call and a mission. Let us now listen for where God might be calling us to move farther in this journey. No one is expected to commit - this is just an exploration. As you read through the questions, keep your responses as brief as possible.

- **Using Lectio Divina, read Mark 6:30-44.** The disciples are on a type of retreat when they get “called out” to serve. Listen for where God is calling us to serve.

Read the passage three times using the steps for lectio divina.

Listen with your hearts for God’s call beneath the surface to the whole group. Remember: God may speak to you through the least likely, most unexpected thought or voice. When you are invited to respond, don’t give lengthy answers or commentary.

First reading: Notice images, words and phrases that catch your attention, linger in the mind, or words that you seem to be hearing for the first time. Share briefly with one another what you noticed from the first reading.

Second reading: Read slowly verse by verse as we contemplate questions following each verse:

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.

- *In what ways have your meetings been for you a gathering around Jesus, a deserted place all by yourselves, a time to rest for a while, apart from the comings and goings of your busy lives?*

Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them.

- *Who are these people in the story and what are they looking for? Who are the people in your community who are searching and hungering, and what are they looking for?*

As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

- *What did Jesus see in the people that moved him? What do you see in the people in your community that moves you to compassion?*

When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.”

- *How did the disciples want to respond to the need they saw? How do you and your church respond to the hungers or needs that you see in your community?*

But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.”

- *What is your reaction to Jesus’ command here?*

They said to him, “Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?” And he said to them, “How many loaves have you? Go and see.” When they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.”

- *What assumptions shaped the disciples’ view of the resources that were available to them and where they would find them? What resources do you find are available for the need at hand? Invite brief responses.*

Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

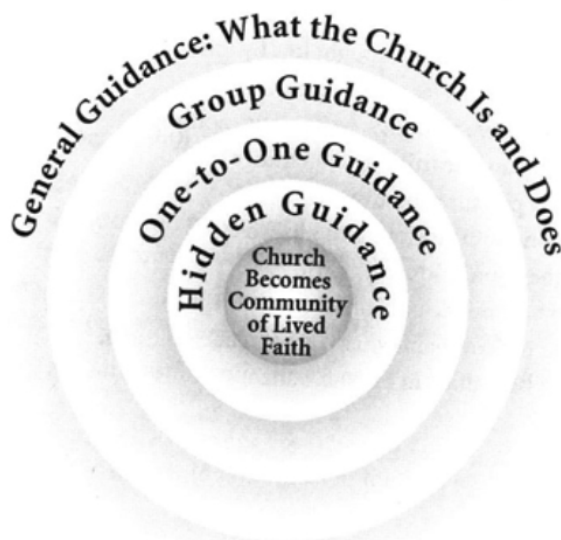
- *What did Jesus have the disciples do with what meager resources they had?*
- *What is Jesus calling you to do with the resources you have to help people find bread for the hungers of their hearts? What ways can we fill people’s lives? Invite brief responses.*

Third Reading: *Read through entire scripture again in its entirety and then sit in silence for 1-2 minutes. Invite the participants to speak about how they heard God speaking to their hearts during the silence.*



Group Exercise - Congregational Call & Direction

This is an exercise in beginning to seek God’s call and direction for our congregation. The exercise involves some assessing of current reality, some envisioning of possibilities, and listening for the voice of God’s truth and guidance for us.



The outer circle:

“General Guidance: What the Church is and does”

This is the whole structure of worship, music, sacraments, and teachings by which the church directs the attention of her children toward God.

The second circle: “Group Guidance”

Groups & ministries that enable people to grow in faith and take greater advantage of the richness of the church’s general spiritual direction. (Organized retreats, support groups, scripture-based groups, covenant groups, etc.)

The third circle: “One on One”

Someone who provides intentional listening and direction for you during a crucial time. (ie: a Stephen Ministry)

Fourth Circle: “Hidden Guidance”

Guides come to us in many guises. These are people that may not be leaders within the church but are the people you encounter that have believed in you. Sometimes all we need to draw us closer to God is the listening ear, the shared prayer, or the faithful support of another person. There is often that unobtrusive person who graces you with wisdom and experience who will share their faith with you. (Just be careful this relationship does not turn into harmful gossip or an elitist sensibility like “we’re the only holy ones in this church.” No relationship should cut itself off from the larger church.)

1. Name the current reality.

Write down the name of each active ministry setting from each of the circles within the congregation that you know about. Identify the one that has been most important in your life. (Worship, small group, bible study, one-on-one, etc)

2. See the promise.

Note other possibilities that you believe people need in order to continue to mature in the Christian life. Identify the one you feel most strongly about and why.

3. Reflect on what both is current and what is the potential.

Look at the many settings for ministry represented. How would you characterize the different kinds of ministries represented here? What does this say about what kinds of ministries are most and least available, most and least needed at this time?

4. Listen.

Listen again in your mind to the concerns, hopes and testimonies that you have heard and listen for how God may be speaking to us through these words. What word, insight or image continues to reverberate within you regarding the promise of our church as a community of grace and guidance?

Let's continue to ponder the promise, listen for God's call, and ask ourselves what all this means about the way we participate and lead in the congregation.

Next step will be to take these insights into group conversation with your pastor.



Closing Prayer

Choose a prayer style that you have learned about to close.



Exercises To Do At Home

Read Matthew 5:1-12

Meditate on the Beatitudes as a stairway of growth in God's blessing. The Beatitudes are stages in the experience of those who are "poor in spirit." Where do you find yourself? What do you have to lay down or take up in order to go the next step? What would you need for that to happen? Spend time listening to what God wants to say to you about these things.

Read Colossians 1:24-2:7

In this passage Paul articulates his personal passion and pastoral goal that motivates all he does: "That we may present everyone mature in Christ." For what do you and your church "toil and struggle?" Notice phrases and images that illumine what it means to mature in Christ. Rewrite them in your own words. Pay special attention to whether you see the "you" that Paul addresses as individuals, the faith community, or both; and what difference that distinction makes.

Read Hebrews 5:11-6:2

These verses liken someone believers to infants who have not yet progressed beyond a diet of milk, even though by now they should be teachers. What kind of spiritual nurture do milk and solid food consist of? Which is YOUR usual spiritual diet?

Now imagine your church as a spiritual nutrition center. Design a balanced spiritual diet for persons in your church who want to be “mature.” What are the main food groups? Reflect on what it would take for you and other people in the church to represent and provide such a diet.