

## Vocation

The language of vocation - or being called - may sound as if it refers to a few roles preserved for a few people.

MERTON  
PRIORY  
CHRISTCHURCH  
HOLY TRINITY  
+ ST. JOHN'S +  
TEAM  
MINISTRY

And yet as Christians we are all called to be the people of God: 'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' (1 Peter 2.9).

And God has something special for each of us to do.



All too easily this gets focused onto specific roles within the church. Our role within the life of the church is something we should reflect on and pray about, because the Church needs churchwardens and Junior Church leaders and people to host house groups and SPAs and lay readers. But this limits vocation.

Being a nurse or a teacher or a mother or a godfather or a friend may also be a true response to God's call.

As baptised Christians we are all named before God. In the Old Testament, calling and creation are closely linked. In Isaiah 40:26, God creates the stars and calls them by name<sup>1</sup>. God creates and recreates human beings by naming them. So the vocation of us all is to exist as ourselves, to be bearers of our own name.

This means that no two vocations will look the same. If God calls us by name, and desires for us to grow into our truest identity, our vocation will be entirely personal to us alone.

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, R. (1994), *Open to Judgment*, London: DLT, p173

## Is God calling you to something new?

There are times in our lives when we may be aware of a voice inside us which whispers 'Do I really want to go on doing this day after day, year after year, until I retire?' Or 'Am I integrating how I spend my time with what I really believe?' Or 'Am I truly fulfilled?'



It is unlikely that this will be a loud voice. You may become aware of a calling through your feelings, or through looking at your gifts. And sometimes the recognition of a calling may start with a sense of dissatisfaction with the way things are.

If you have a very vague sense that God is calling you to do something different, you may like to allow yourself to dream a little. If you could be or do anything you liked, what kind of a future would you invent for yourself? If you were writing your own obituary, what would you like it to say? And how might this fit into God's dream for the world?

A call from God may be an uncomfortable one. As the book of Isaiah says of God: 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways' (Isaiah 55:8). Responding to God's call may involve a letting go; may feel risky; and there may be something mysterious about how it all works.

But if it is of God, it will be a source of deep joy and fulfilment.

## How do we know if a calling comes from God?

God's voice can get so tangled in all the different voices of the world, and of all the voices in our own heads which speak loudly of what we want to do, that it can be hard to know if a calling comes from God or not.

However, a calling from God may include some of the following features<sup>2</sup>:

- It will be some activity that connects deeply with your character and nature.
- There may be something new, creative and non-standard about it, perhaps not something you have done in that way before.
- It may stem from some 'thorn in the flesh' that you have had to come to terms with, something you think of as a problem, trauma or disaster, some wound, disability or handicap.
- It will be something that in some way enriches the impoverished, gives sight to the blind, release to the prisoners or freedom for the oppressed (although these categories from Luke 4:18-19 can be interpreted in a very wide sense).
- It will be something that you love to do, even if it brings you stress, trouble and even suffering.
- It will be a generous self-giving of what you truly are.
- It may, in some way or other, prove personally costly for you.
- It will be something that will not go away, and will be affirmed and confirmed by other people.

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1. <sup>2</sup> This list is adapted from Dewar, F. (1988) *Live for a Change*, London: DLT

## Discernment

Hearing God's call is an ongoing process. Some big decisions may take years to discern, but listening for God is a daily discipline. Here are some things we can do to help ourselves to do so:

1. *Make space* to listen to God. You may like to take a walk somewhere quiet. Open your ears and eyes to be more aware of your surroundings. When you have finished your walk, sit quietly for a while and let your inner silence take root. And look out for quiet or contemplative services in church.



2. *Pray with the Bible.* You might like to use the story of the angel appearing to Mary (Luke 1:26-38). Read the story slowly. Are there words or images which particularly jump out at you? Can you situate yourself within the story?
3. *Talk* to other people. Make the most of home groups and discussion groups. Talk to the clergy. Think about meeting with a spiritual director (the clergy can help you find one).
4. *Read.* Try the following resources as a starter:  
Dewar, F. (1988) *Live for a Change*, London: DLT  
Dewar, F. (1991) *Called or Collared?*, London: DLT  
Nouwen, H. (1989), *The Road to Daybreak*, London: DLT  
Anything by Margaret Silf is excellent on discernment, particularly *Wayfaring*, London: Doubleday  
Williams, R. (1994) *Open to Judgment*, chapter 30, London: DLT
5. *Act.* Spend time thinking and praying but don't put off a decision to act. In the end, God needs us to say yes to our calling.