Section One

Exploring the World of Ministry

1
Sensing the Call

We begin this chapter, and indeed this entire book, in the place where we will end. We begin and end in the knowledge that we, all of us, are known and loved by God. We begin and end in the knowledge that God summons us into relationship, invites us to share in his divine life, and calls us to ministry in the world. How we hear and respond to that call is the topic of this first chapter and sets the stage for the unfolding of this text.

This famous prayer of *Thomas Merton* (1915–1968) acknowledges the challenge and difficulty, as well as the hope and promise, of all who make this journey:

> God, we have no idea where we are going. We do not see the road ahead of us. We cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do we really know ourselves, and the fact that we think we are following your will does not mean that we are actually doing so. But we believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And we hope we have that desire in all that we are doing. We hope that we will never do anything apart from that desire. And we know that if we do this you will lead us by the right road, though we may know nothing about it. Therefore, we will trust you always though we may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. We will not fear, for you are ever with us, and you will never leave us to face our perils alone.[1]

Thus we set out to explore what it means to be called by God. How do we hear that call? How do we know it is a call from God? What could following that call mean for our everyday lives? What is the role of the community in discerning a sense of calling? How do we prepare ourselves and open ourselves to perceive and respond? Even to begin to answer these important questions requires some definition of terms as well as a common understanding of the nature of *discernment*, neither of which is simple or easy.

An Introduction to Ministry: A Primer for Renewed Life and Leadership in Mainline Protestant Congregations, First Edition. Ian S. Markham and Oran E. Warder.

Thomas Merton

Thomas Merton was born in 1915 and perhaps is the most influential American Roman Catholic writer on spirituality. In 1941 he became a Trappist monk and, while a Trappist, he became a strong advocate of civil rights. Later in life, he became interested in other religious traditions, especially Zen Buddhism. Thomas Merton died in Bangkok in 1968. His legacy is a significant range of publications of which his autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948, Harcourt Brace and Company), is one of the best known.

Call and Vocation

Part of the confusion is that words like *call* and *vocation* are often used interchangeably. This is understandable since the word vocation comes from the Latin *vocare*, which literally translated means "to call." The confusion comes in the application of these terms. The word vocation can be rightly understood in a number of different ways. The dictionary offers three standard definitions: one being a summons to perform a certain function or career, especially a religious one; another refers to a function or career to which one believes he or she is called; and a third refers to any career, profession, or occupation.[2] Notice that there are both religious and secular meanings implied in each of these definitions.

For our purposes, writing from a mainline perspective, we will follow the pattern established in what has become a classic text in Christian discernment, *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community*. In this book, the term *vocation* is used in the broadest sense, while the term *call* is reserved for something more specific. For instance, someone might have a vocation as a choral director and yet respond to a call to serve a particular choir at a particular time in a particular place.[3] The title of this book is derived from the Judeo-Christian understanding that the heart is more than flesh; it is the very core of being, the hub of mind, body, and spirit. It is in the heart where we enter into communion with God and one another, and it is the place where we struggle to understand our vocation and God's call.[4] The premise of this text is that God's call involves obedience, God's call involves some form of ministry, and God's call involves community.

Pointing to the origins of the word *obedience*, from the Latin, *audire*, which means, "to listen," the authors of this book contend that every true call is a call to obey.[5] Obedience refers to the deep listening of the heart, which requires a response. For people of faith, that response is ministry. In this sense, ministry is not simply the doing of good deeds, but more specifically refers to "something that Christ does in us and through us and that we do in and through Christ."[6] Christian vocation, therefore, involves our striving to hear and respond to God's call in ways that conform to a living and active partnership with Christ.

According to this understanding, being obedient, or listening for God's call to ministry, requires discernment. This term, which is so crucial to our understanding of vocation and call, comes from the Latin *discernere*, and means "to separate," "to distinguish," or "to sort out." In the realm of classical spirituality, discernment has to do with identifying what spirit is at work in a specific situation. In this sense, discernment helps one to determine the source of a call, helps one to determine to whom a call is directed, and helps one to determine an

appropriate response. It also helps one to determine if one is being deaf or blind to a call, rejecting or ignoring a call, or resisting or avoiding a call. Discernment itself is a gift from God and is a matter of both hard work and a generous amount of grace. This is particularly true since we are bombarded by any number of voices. The voices of ego and pride, of culture and career, of success and self-interest, can compete with, and drown out, the voice of God. How, then, are we to differentiate these voices, sort out the spirits, and discriminate between our will and God's will?[7]

Unfortunately there are no rules and no definitive answers, and the rules that do exist, even the most sincere and well intentioned, are imperfect and incomplete. For example, we can look to the experience of a sect of early *Quakers* who were convinced that God's "true" call was always contrary to one's own will. The assumption was that any "cross" to one's personal will provided an opportunity to take up the cross of Christ. This line of thinking produced some rather absurd results when some Quaker Friends were discovered walking naked through the streets of their community simply because it was clearly "contrary to their own will and inclination" and therefore was most certainly an action taken in "obedience to the Lord."[8] Another definitive test or rule regarding the true call of God, far less dramatic than the last, yet often far more problematic, is the reliance on particular passages of *Scripture* to determine God's call and will. "Frequently, however, this meant (and can still mean) merely choosing some biblical passages and ignoring others to confirm a precharted course."[9] Therefore, Christian discernment cannot be reduced to a set of rules or formulated answers, but rather develops in a relationship with God; that is, our hearts being rooted and grounded in the heart of God. To that end, discernment is better understood as "apprehension rather than comprehension."[10] Using the analogy of driving a car at night, discernment is like the light that is cast only far enough ahead to see the next bit of road. Discernment involves taking risks, it involves making mistakes, it involves having faith in God, and it involves trusting that more discernment will come.[11]

This is precisely why the role of the community is so important and why a life lived in community is so central to the Christian faith. Paul aptly uses the metaphor of the Body of Christ to describe the mutuality and interconnectedness of members. "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it (1 Corinthians 12:26, New Revised Standard Version, NRSV)." Given this reality, something incredibly important happens when we consult one another within the Christian community. "God calls us each individually but as individuals we see only partially."[12] Other members of the community can have the ability to open our eyes to see things that we might not have seen and open our ears to hear what we might not have been able to hear on our own.

> Even a person who feels absolutely certain about a call may be mistaken in how it is applied. Because God often reveals part of the picture to one person and another part to another person, it is prudent to consult one another to discern God's counsel, guidance, and direction, even if there is no apparent reason to do so. While circumstances sometime require us to act without consulting others, the danger of arrogance and error in proceeding on our own can be great.[13]

So vocation and call require obedient listening, a response that takes the form of ministry, and community discernment. Vocation and call require risk and the possibility of making mistakes. Vocation and call require trust that even when we act in error, more discernment will follow. Central to this understanding of call and vocation is the basic idea that God has

called each one of us to do something with our lives, and in the doing of that something our lives will have meaning and purpose.

The pages of Holy Scripture abound with stories of call, and in practically every instance there is a corresponding story of how the call from God is at least initially resisted. In almost every case there is an immediate sense of inadequacy on the part of those being summoned. This is typically followed by a litany of reasons why this particular call is bad idea, which is then typically followed by the suggestion that God would do far better to choose someone else. The classic call stories of the great prophets Moses, Jeremiah, and Isaiah all fit this pattern. Moses, for instance, refuses God's call no less than five times (Exodus 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10 and 13); he also complains that he does not know God's name, is not a person of consequence, has no credibility, and is not a public speaker. Jeremiah famously complains that he is just a boy and does not even know how to speak (Jeremiah 1:6), and Isaiah opines that he is a person of unclean lips who dwells among a people of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5).[14] And yet, in spite of an overwhelming and sometimes crippling sense of unworthiness, in each story, by the grace and power of God, the call is ultimately heard and heeded. These stories offer both consolation and inspiration as we grapple with similar issues in our own lives.

Practically every book, article, or lecture on the topic of Christian vocation in recent times includes quotes from one or all of the three Bs: Frederick Buechner, Walter Brueggemann, and *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Buechner, clearly the most quoted on the subject, sees call and vocation as the intersection of personal passion and the needs of the larger community, or in his words, vocation is "the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need." Notice how his thinking begins with self-understanding and moves outward to the world.[15] Similarly, Brueggemann places vocation at the intersection of personal will and divine will, or in his words, vocation is "finding a purpose for your life that is part of the purposes of God."[16] And lastly, Bonhoeffer emphasizes that the very process of obedient listening and responding faithfully to our vocation as disciples requires change and transformation. It means that we are drawn toward something different to our current situation. Echoing the call of the disciples, who immediately left their nets to follow Jesus, he points out that when Christ is done with us, we will not be the same people we were when we started. On the contrary, we may well be at odds with former beliefs, former understandings, and former lifestyles.[17] For Bonhoeffer, to be called as a disciple of Christ is to be changed fundamentally. So for the three Bs vocation has to do with passion, purpose, and the possibility of transformation. Notice that all three interpretations have a public dimension (a movement beyond self) and a future orientation (a movement beyond the present).

Parker Palmer

Parker Palmer's *Let Your Life Speak* is a key manual to those persons entering into a discernment process. It is personal, reflective, and ultimately instructive as to how one may listen to where God may be leading. Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic self-hood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we *ought* to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks – we will also find our path of authentic service in the world.[18]

Martin Luther on Vocation and the Ministry of the Baptized

It is a vast understatement to say that the reformed traditions of mainline Christianity owe a great debt to the brilliant theological mind of *Martin Luther* (1483–1546). We are particularly indebted for his recovery of the idea of the "priesthood of all believers," which provides the theological groundwork for our modern understanding of vocation. When he nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg in 1517 he was protesting Church abuses that he knew firsthand. Living a privileged monastic life he grew increasingly uncomfortable with the growing wealth of the Church and the growing poverty of the general populace.[19]

Philipp Melanchthon, a contemporary of Luther and fellow reformer, described the monastic life in this way:

> Everyone knows how much hypocrisy, ambition, and greed there is in monasteries; how ignorant and cruel those illiterate men are; how vain they are in their sermons and in thinking up new ways of making money. There are other vices, too, which we would rather not talk about. Though once upon a time they were schools of Christian instruction, they have degenerated as from a golden age to an iron age, or as the Platonic cube degenerates into bad harmonies which, Plato says, cause destruction. Some of the richest monasteries just feed a lazy crowd that gorges itself on the public alms of the church.[20]

It is against this backdrop that Luther sets out to be an agent of change. He railed against monastic life and promoted a Christian life returned to the fundamental principles of the love of God and the love of neighbor. He believed that a true Christian should have no other thought than the needs and concerns of his neighbor. This basic notion is the driving force behind his developing theology and the foundation for his emerging understanding of vocation.[21]

As previously discussed, today we appreciate both the secular and religious understandings of the word vocation, yet in Luther's day there was no such distinction. On the contrary, it was understood that only those in religious orders received the gift of vocation. Luther thought differently. He believed and championed the radical notion that all Christians had a calling in life. In particular, he felt that every Christian was called to live a life that consisted of faith in God and love of neighbor. Vocation for Luther was simply a function of Christian love. This, he believed, was true regardless of station, status, class, or office. For Luther, vocation was not simply understood as an occupation, but as relationship. Even more far-reaching and controversial, Luther would come to believe that even the most common and lowly work of society was equal to, if not greater than, the work of the religious orders of the day.[22]

It is little wonder that Luther found himself in such trouble with the established Church when he wrote words such as these:

> However numerous, sacred and arduous they (vows of monkery and priesthood) may be, these works in God's sight are in no way whatever superior to a farmer laboring in a field, or a woman looking after a home. Rather all are measured by him by faith alone. … Indeed it occurs quite frequently that the common work of serving man or maid is more acceptable than all fastings and other works of monks and priests where faith is lacking.[23]

For Luther, it is through *baptism* that we receive our religious vocation, our ordination for ministry, and our welcome into the priesthood of believers. The calling of all the baptized is then to spread the love of God through Christ in all that they do, whether in religious order in the Church or in daily work in the world.

> Therefore, both vocations – the Ministry, and the vocations of secular life which serve love to one's neighbour, spring from the same source and arise out of the same Gospel. Since the ministries which serve faith and those which serve love take their origin in the same source, they possess the same dignity and are different aspects of the same priesthood.[24]

Again, Luther in his own words, "As many of us as have been baptized are all priests without distinction. … For thus it is written in I Peter 2, 'Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, and a priestly kingdom.' Therefore we are all priests, as many of us as are Christians."[25]

It is this legacy that lives on today in the denominations of the mainline; all in one way or another have been shaped and formed by the premise that all are called to ministry through baptism. The question for mainline Christians therefore, is not "Have I been called to ministry?" but instead, "To what ministry am I being called?"[26] It is critical to note at this point that Luther did not advocate for an end to ordination, nor did he wish to abolish the role of clergy, but rather wanted to make certain that a call to serve in this capacity stood in the shadow of baptism and not apart from it.

Denominational Perspectives

It is this fundamental shift in the understanding of vocation that has been inherited by mainline Christianity. At this point we will now explore the manner in which various denominations have dealt with the distinction between the ministry of all the people of God and the representative ministry of the clergy.

We will begin with *The Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church USA* that states:

> All ministry in the church is a gift from Jesus Christ. Members and officers alike serve mutually under the mandate of Christ who is chief minister of all. … One responsibility of membership in the church is the election of officers who are ordained to fulfill particular functions. The existence of these offices in no way diminishes the importance of all members to the total ministry of the church. These ordained officers differ from other members in function only … when women and men, by God's providence and gracious gifts, are called by the church to undertake particular forms of ministry, the church shall help them to interpret their call and to be sensitive to the judgments and needs of others.[27,28]

The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, the book of law for this denomination, offers a similar statement:

> Ministry in the Christian Church is derived from the ministry of Christ, who calls all persons to receive God's gift of salvation and follow in the way of love and service. The whole church receives and accepts this call, and all Christians participate in this continuing ministry. Within the church community, there are persons whose gifts, evidence of God's grace, and promise of future usefulness are affirmed by the community, and who respond to God's call by offering themselves in leadership as ordained ministers.[29]

The candidacy manual for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America offers the following:

> It is by Christ's gift that all baptized persons are called to ministry. Every baptized believer is given gifts and abilities for ministry. Every baptized believer is called to ministry in daily life. Some are given gifts and abilities which equip them to provide leadership in one of the rostered ministries of this church.[30]

Quite similarly, the canons of the Episcopal Church state that every *diocese* of that denomination shall:

> make provision for the affirmation and development of the ministry of all baptized persons, including: (a) Assistance in understanding that all baptized persons are called to minister in Christ's name, to identify their gifts with the help of the Church and to serve Christ's mission at all times and in all places. (b) Assistance in understanding that all baptized persons are called to sustain their ministries through commitment to life-long Christian formation.[31]

The Episcopal Church's "Outline of the Faith" also affirms that, "the ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons."[32]

A closer look at denominational literature reveals that each denomination has its own unique review process for helping the Church to determine which ministry best suits those who present themselves seeking such discernment. For those seeking ordination there are a few general assumptions that seem to permeate all of the literature: (i) there is an assumption within each denomination that the gifts necessary for ordination will be readily apparent to the Church; (ii) there is an assumption that candidates for ordination will be supported by their home congregations in pursuing the call to ordination; (iii) there is an assumption that this support is operative for at least 6 months before moving forward; (iv) there is an assumption that a local congregational process occurs prior to judicatory level process; (v) there is an assumption that this discernment and these series of interviews happen over an extended period of time; and lastly (vi) there is an assumption that it is the work of the church to decide who is suitable for ordained ministry and who is not. The corollary to the last item is the assumption by all mainline denominations that not everyone who senses a call to ordination should, in fact, be ordained. Generally speaking, the candidate's desire to be ordained is not a deciding factor. Therefore, in mainline denominations it is either explicit or implicit that community discernment (at the local and judicatory levels) is integral to the vocational process, with each church reserving the right to discriminate.[33]

In the United Methodist tradition, the historic questions asked of all candidates for ordained ministry are found in *The Book of Discipline*. These questions contain John Wesley's own standards for pastoral leadership and have been in use since he first asked them in 1746:

1. Do they know God as a pardoning God? Have they the love of God abiding in them? Do they desire nothing but God? Are they holy in all manner of conversation?
2. Have they the gifts, as well as evidence of God's grace, for the work? Have they a clear, sound understanding; a right judgment in the things of God; a just conception of salvation by faith? Do they speak justly, readily, clearly?

3. Have they fruit? Have any been truly convinced of sin and converted to God, and are believers edified by their service?

> As long as these marks concur in them, we believe they are called of God to service. These we receive as sufficient proof that they are moved by the Holy Spirit.[34]

Aside from the implicit assumption that not all persons seeking ordination would be found suitable, these questions do expect that candidates would have a high level of commitment and would also exhibit a certain degree of spiritual maturity. These questions also strongly suggest that those candidates who do possess these particular gifts will be readily apparent to the Church.

> Those whom the Church ordains shall be conscious of God's call to ordained ministry, and their call shall be acknowledged and authenticated by the Church. God's call has many manifestations, and the Church cannot structure a single test of authenticity. Nevertheless, the experience of the Church and the needs of its ministry require certain qualities of faith, life, and practice from those who seek ordination.[35]

One final example is found in *The Evangelical Lutheran Candidacy Manual*:

> Candidacy Committees have the responsibility to determine which form of ministry is most appropriate for the individual's gifts and abilities. When an individual's gifts are not suited for rostered ministry it is the responsibility of the committee to clearly indicate that and direct the individual to the important ministry of the baptized. When an individual does possess those characteristics which enable a person to serve in rostered ministry the committee will need to affirm and support the candidate in the process of preparation and formation.[36]

All of these examples point to the reality that a call to ordination in the mainline is not solely a matter of a personal sense of call, or simply the affirmation of the local congregation, but also requires the official approval of the larger denominational body.[37] In the mainline, a call to ordination is a multi-layered, multi-faceted, and deeply interconnected process that requires prayerful discernment at all of those levels.

A Compelling Alternative View

Returning now to the broader topic of call and vocation as it relates to the ministry of all of the baptized, and not just those seeking ordination, we conclude this first chapter by offering a slightly different perspective. This alternative view, while not diametrically opposed to the traditional overview that we have provided, is a reaction against the large and popular strand of contemporary evangelical theology that emphasizes that one finds one's call and vocation by searching for and finding God's will. In his article, "No secret plan: Why you don't have to find God's will for your life," Philip Cary criticizes this thinking not only as anxiety producing and unhelpful, but also as profoundly unbiblical.

Rather than embracing the idea that God's will is elusive – something out there waiting to be found – he contends that God's will is unambiguous, revealed in Scripture, and is right in front of us. Rather than praying that we find God's will in every moment and every decision (from whom we will marry, to what career we will choose, to what we will have for dinner) he suggests that we pray for wisdom and understanding to make these, and all decisions, as responsible and faithful moral agents. Citing the prophet Micah's admonition that we are to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8), Cary also echoes the 10 commandments and Jesus' summary of those commandments, which compel us toward love of God and love of neighbor. Cary suggests that this is the will of God, this is what God asks us to do, and that nothing more is required of us. All we have to do is apply it. "Anyone who tells you that you need to do more in order to be 'in the will of God' is teaching falsehood."[38] This understanding of vocation and call fits well with Brueggemann's idea of locating our purpose within the purposes of God.

Understanding God's will, revealed in the whole *Word of God*, does not tell us what to do in every situation we encounter, and Cary believes this leaves the door wide open for mischief on the part of those who would look for formulas, simple answers, or foolproof methods for making these decisions. Rather, Cary contends that there are no recipes; there is only wisdom. He defines wisdom as the heart's ability to discern: the ability to discern what is good and what is evil, the ability to discern between a positive choice and a negative choice, the ability to discern constructive decisions from destructive ones. The heart's intelligence is "not a method or formula you can apply to a particular situation simply by applying the rules, but a habit of the heart developed through personal experience that includes making mistakes."[39] Any attempt to follow a prescribed method in search of a short cut, or as a guarantee against failure, disrupts the arduous task of acquiring wisdom.

Referring to the "Parable of Talents" (Matthew 25:14–30), Cary says that the work of the steward begins as soon as the master leaves town. In the parable, the steward has been entrusted with talents, has been commanded to do business with them, and is expected to make good investments. What have not been given to the steward are specific, step-by-step instructions about which investments to make and which to avoid. Those decisions are left to the steward. While it is conceivable that the steward could invest using a formula or method, it is more likely that the master expects the steward to employ the virtues of wisdom. It is clear that when it comes to proficiency in this work, there is no substitute for practice. The task is to learn in our own hearts how to carry on God's work in the world, thus acquiring the virtue of wisdom and becoming a co-worker with God. In the parable, the steward, who refuses to decide, refuses to invest, refuses to risk failure, and buries the talents, is deemed not only disobedient and slothful, but even wicked.[40]

In summary, Cary believes that the frenzied search for God's will in every moment of our lives is misguided. He suggests that our time, energy, and resources, as stewards of the master, as God's co-workers, as individual moral agents, would be better spent praying for the ability to discern. "For we already know God's will for our lives, he wants us to discern good from bad which includes making good investments for His kingdom."[41] In this process of taking risks, making mistakes, and learning from them, our hearts are remade into hearts of wisdom. It takes time and much effort for this to happen, and "the Lord does not short-circuit the process by making our decisions for us."[42] We believe Cary's view, while

alternative to a popular strand of contemporary evangelism, is in fact consistent with the traditions of the mainline.

And so we end where we began, setting out on a journey not fully knowing where the road will lead, or what might happen along the way. We walk by faith and trust, knowing that we are loved and known by God, invited into relationship and community, and called to serve. We strive to locate our passion within the needs of the world, we strive to find our purpose within the purposes of God, and we strive to discover our truest selves within the transforming love of Jesus. Our vocation and call, with all their challenges and difficulties, with all their hope and promise, are rooted in the heart of the One who summons us and promises to be with us to the close of the age.

Notes

1 Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Image Books, 1958), 81.
2 Virginia Samuel Cetuk, *What to Expect in Seminary: Theological Education and Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 57.
3 Suzanne G. Farnham, Joseph Gill, R. Taylor McLean, Susan M. Ward, *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community (20th Anniversary Edition)* (New York and Harrisonburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2011), 103.
4 Ibid., 2.
5 Ibid., 13–14.
6 Ibid., 17.
7 Ibid., 23.
8 Ibid., 24.
9 Ibid., 25.
10 Ibid., 26.
11 Ibid., 27.
12 Ibid., 55.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 14–15.
15 Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 16.
16 Joyce Ann Mercer, "Call forwarding: Putting vocation in the present tense with youth," *Compass Points: Navigating Vocation* (Princeton, NJ: Institute for Youth Ministry, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2002), 29.
17 Cetuk, *What to Expect in Seminary*, 49.
18 Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 16.
19 Cetuk, *What to Expect in Seminary*, 56.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 57.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 58.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 60.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 59.
28 The Presbyterian Church, USA (PCUSA) now uses the title "teaching elders" for what were previously called "ministers of the word and sacrament." There are therefore both "teaching elders" and "ruling elders."
29 Ibid., 59–60.
30 Ibid., 60.
31 Canon III.1.a, b, in *Constitution and Canons for the Government of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America: Otherwise Known as the Episcopal Church* (adopted in General Conventions 1789–2012 together with the rules of order revised by the Convention) (New York: Church Publishing, 2013), 67.
32 "Outline of the faith: Commonly called the Catechism," in *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 855.
33 Cetuk, *What to Expect in Seminary*, 60–61.
34 Ibid., 61–62.
35 Ibid., 62.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 63.

38 Philip Cary, "No secret plan: Why you don't have to find God's will for your life," *Christian Century* 127, No. 20 (October 5, 2010), 21.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 23.
42 Ibid.

Annotated Bibliography

Badcock, Gary D., *The Way of Life: A Theology of Christian Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998).
Moving away from the idea of vocation as occupation, the author analyzes the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin origins and meanings of the word and provides a survey of various histories and theologies of vocation.

Cary, Philip, "No secret plan: Why you don't have to find God's will for your life," *Christian Century* 127, No. 20 (October 5, 2010), 20–23.
This article counters the popular notion that we are to seek God's will in our lives, or in a particular situation, by arguing that we are to focus more on the task of acquiring wisdom (the ability to discern what is good and what is bad). Using the Parable of the Talents, the author emphasizes that we are given talents with the expectation of the master that they be invested in the kingdom, but without specific details about how to do the investing. Therefore, the wise steward is a co-worker with the master.

Cetuk, Virginia Samuel, *What to Expect in Seminary: Theological Education and Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998).
While this primer to entering seminary is focused primarily on the academic, spiritual, and communal expectations with respect to leadership training, Cetuk (a professor at Drew Theological Seminary) sets the context for discussions on discernment and calling. In one chapter, she also includes a brief survey of the discernment processes in various mainline denominations.

Countryman, L. William, *Living on the Border of the Holy* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999).
This work is viewed as a classic in the exploration of faith, calling, community, and the priesthood of all believers. He defines "priest" from the beginning as one who inhabits the "borderlands" of our experiences and encounters with God.

Farnham, Suzanne G., Gill, Joseph P., McLean, R. Taylor and Ward, Susan M., *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* (20th Anniversary Edition) (New York and Harrisonburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2011).
For over 20 years this book has served as one of the key manuals for those who are sensing a call to ministry. The primary author, a Quaker, helps frame the questions about major life choices as they relate to the will of God, and suggests how one can listen to the community's affirmation in this process.

Gallagher, Nora, *Practicing Resurrection: A Memoir of Work, Doubt, Discernment, and Moments of Grace* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2003).
This moving story narrates the personal discernment of the author through recognizing a calling, discerning God's will as a member of her Episcopal congregation, and then navigating the inevitable polity and mechanics of discernment committees and Commissions on Ministry. Throughout the process she returns to prayer and soul-searching as her compass.

Grinenko Baker, Dori and Mercer, Joyce Ann, *Lives to Offer: Accompanying Youth on their*

Vocational Quests (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2007).

This entry in the Youth Ministry Alternatives Series focuses on the calling of youth to ministry. Chapter 8 is a key to this text, entitled "Whose Calling? Who's calling?", which is a distinction that is entirely appropriate in those sensing God's call at any age.

Mercer, Joyce Ann, "Call forwarding: Putting vocation in the present tense with youth" (lecture given as part of the 2002 Princeton Forum on Youth Ministry).

This lecture explores the various changes in the understanding of vocation within Christian theology, with particular emphasis on the implications of these shifts with regard to youth and young adults.

Palmer, Parker, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

Essential reading for a person preparing for a discernment process in ministry of any kind, Palmer's book has been referenced and reflected upon by many others when writing on the topic of call and discernment.

Placher, William C., ed., *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005).

Placher edits together a compendium of writings, passages, and resources from myriad theologians and writers about vocation, calling, and the inspirations of the Spirit. This book provides an excellent resource for looking at the Christian tradition on the subject of call and discernment.

Roscher, Ellie, ed., *Keeping the Faith in Seminary* (Minneapolis, MN: Avenida Books, 2012).

This anthology about particular seminary experiences from various mainline writers contains some valuable testimonials about calling and vocation in Protestant Churches.

Schuurman, Douglas, J., *Vocation: Discerning our Callings in Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004).

A discussion of calling may be best understood as an exploration of vocation. This book is a look at the Protestant understanding of vocation from a contemporary perspective.

Soughers, Tara, *Fleeing God: Fear, Call and the Book of Jonah* (Lanham, MD: Cowley Publications, 2007).

Soughers, an Episcopal priest, presents the Book of Jonah through the prism of her own discernment process, and offers some powerful thoughts and reflections on calling.