

Living Faith in Suffolk



Living Vocation

Images

Front page, l – r from top:

Sudbury © Peter Tarlton; Fields © John Parr; Orford Castle © Richard Croft;

Passion Play © Christ Church Moreton Hall; St Edmund © St Edmundsbury Cathedral; Church © Neil Bromley;

Orford Ness © Ashley Dace; Orwell Bridge © Corinne Mills; UCS © Oxymoron

Page 4, l – r from top:

Nurse © United States Navy; Teacher © Rex Pe; Buddhist monk © Steve Evans; Bricklayer © Jamain

Page 5, l – r from top:

Volunteer © Dustwin; Public domain; Stonemason © Flassig Reiner; Mechanic © Seattle Municipal Archives;

Soldier © Ministry of Defence; Baristas © Antifixus; Ordinands © Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich;

Emergency lights © Ian Britton

Copyright © 2014 by the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

All rights reserved. This publication is intended only to be reproduced, free of charge, by local churches. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means for financial or commercial gain, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Living Vocation is one of the Living Faith in Suffolk resources produced by the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich and available on www.cofesuffolk.org

It is written by John Parr and Ruth Dennigan, 2014.

If you use this course, please let us know at lesley.steed@cofesuffolk.org.

Introduction

What is life for? What does God want me to do with my life? How does God want us to live as a Christian community? These are the basic questions of vocation.

The Bible begins with God's call: 'let there be'. This turns the whole of life into a living vocation. Humankind is made in God's image. We are all called to share God's creative enterprise. Within this common human vocation, Abraham's descendants have a particular calling to be God's servant, light to the world – a calling that is fulfilled in Jesus.

Jesus is our model of living vocation. The gospels reveal the character and shape of his calling as God's Son. It has a rhythm of listening, hospitality and service. Jesus invites people to become followers and companions, who learn how to move to the rhythm of his calling. His call to be disciples brings the natural human vocation to life.

Jesus' call extends to us. Living vocation takes shape as our particular talents – gifts, passions, interests, expertise – engage with the wider world in the way of Jesus. This gives each person and community its unique calling within our common human vocation.

Living Vocation is written to help individuals and groups to explore what it means to live the whole of life as a response to God's call, by asking these five questions:

- What is vocation?
How we understand the pattern and shape of vocation in everyday life and in the Bible
- How do we hear God's call?
- What are the gifts we offer?
- What is the world we serve?
- How does vocation grow in us?

The course is designed for groups, with individual members using this work book to prepare for meetings. You will see that there is space throughout the book for you to record your thoughts and impressions. You should also find a conversation partner outside your group to help you to reflect further on your thoughts and impressions.

I. What is vocation?

The aim of this chapter is to identify some of the essential characteristics of vocation in individuals and communities. We start by reflecting on our understandings of vocation in everyday life. We compare these with leadership and management consultant John Adair's take on the pattern of vocation, and the philosopher Aristotle's insights into its shape. Then we read the stories of three biblical people who are examples of living vocation. By the end of the chapter we will be clearer about what we mean when we speak of being 'called'.

Vocational People

It is easy for our vision of vocation to be limited. We see particular ways of life or types of work as vocations, and we speak of some kinds of learning as vocational rather than academic. Look at this collection of photographs and note your responses to these questions:

- Which of these images speaks to you of vocation?





- What do you think makes a particular activity or way of life vocational?

Jackie worked in a restaurant, and belonged to a local art club. “I earn my living as a waitress”, she said, “but I find my vocation as a painter”.

- What does this suggest about Jackie’s understanding of vocation?

- How much do you agree with her?

Vocational Organisations

If we can see a wide range of activity as vocational, then we may be able to imagine communities or organisations as well as individuals having a vocation. Look at some of these websites and ask yourself:

- Which of these statements speaks to you of vocation?

As the nation's leading first aid charity, we want to teach everyone simple, life saving skills
www.sja.org.uk

Building faith based communities, with and without learning disabilities, all over the world. Growing as human beings who are valued by society, nurtured by meaningful relationships.
www.larcheipswich.co.uk

Smaller, Smarter, Swifter: Babergh & Mid Suffolk working together
www.midsuffolk.gov.uk

Trebuchet is a full service design and marketing agency with bags of experience, energy and, most importantly, great ideas. Get to know us and a little bit about what makes us tick.
www.trebuchet.co.uk

Our core purpose – making what matters better, together; using our scale for good.
www.tesco.com

Howlett's has an excellent reputation for quality of service and we believe we achieve continued success through fair trading plus good customer and staff relations.
www.howlett-ltd.co.uk

Run by the community for the community.
www.metfield.org.uk/MS_homeNEW.html

A community enterprise keeping independent cinema alive for the public benefit of Aldeburgh and region

www.aldeburghcinema.co.uk

Offering help, support, coaching and mentoring to the under 25s. Visit our shops in Newmarket, Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich
www.crackon.org

- What gives a community or an organisation its vocation?

The characteristics of vocation

We can now gather up the basic characteristics of vocation, as they apply to individuals, communities and organisations. Write up what you've found on the sheet below. Compare and contrast vocational people and organisations by underlining the most obvious similarities and differences.

Vocational people are...

Vocational communities are...

Vocation according to Adair and Aristotle

John Adair, the well-known leadership and management consultant, lists eight key characteristics of vocational people¹:

1. They are dedicated and self-disciplined.
2. Their gifts are well used.
3. They are not primarily motivated by money.
4. What they do expresses their creativity.
5. They are enthusiastic and even passionate about what they do.
6. They see themselves serving something greater than their own interests.
7. They do not give up easily.
8. They love what they do.

Not all these characteristics are found equally in all vocational people, but Adair reckons that when enough of them are present, they form a pattern of vocation.

Adair also highlights these characteristics of vocational communities and organisations²:

1. They put service to their customers and to society before the interests of shareholders.
2. They know and make good use of their unique resources.
3. They encourage creative teamwork.
4. Their leaders offer direction, example, inspiration and motivation, and draw colleagues into creative partnerships.
5. Their staff enjoy their work, especially working as a team.

Adair makes the point that people who might not see themselves as vocational individuals might nevertheless find their vocation as part of a vocational organisation or community.

- How do your reflections on vocational people and communities compare with John Adair's?

¹ John Adair, *How to Find Your Vocation. A guide to discovering the work you love*, Norwich: Canterbury Press 2000, pages 2-18.

² Adair chapters 7 and 8.

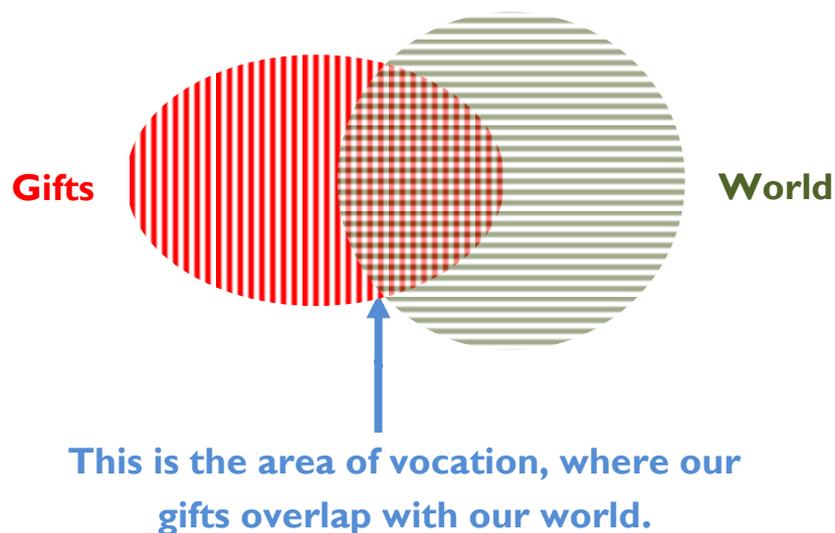
The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) had a dynamic understanding of vocation:

Where your talents and the needs of the world cross there is your vocation.

This suggests that individuals and communities live vocationally as they engage with their world. We could adapt Aristotle's statement to broaden its scope:

Where your gifts (your interests, passions, what you enjoy and good at) engage with the opportunities and needs presented by your world, there is your vocation.

We can represent Aristotle's approach to vocation like this:



If Adair helps us to identify a pattern to vocation in the lives of individuals and communities, Aristotle suggests that vocation has a shape. Notice that this is not fixed. The shape of vocation alters as

- our gifts develop
- new opportunities and needs present themselves in our world
- our involvement in that world changes.

Look back at what you've written about the characteristics of vocational individuals and communities on page 9:

- What do you think Aristotle would say are the most important characteristics of vocation in a changing world?

- What does this suggest about your calling – as an individual or church, or an organisation you belong to?

Vocation in the Bible

Unlike Adair and Aristotle, the Bible doesn't have much to say about the nature of vocation. But its writings are full of ideas and stories about calling. These three biblical people knew something about living vocation. As you read their stories, think about what makes them vocational people.

My name is Ruth. My mother-in-law Naomi migrated with her husband Elimelech from Bethlehem to settle in my country during a famine. After Elimelech died, I married one of their sons. About ten years later, my husband died too. I'll never forget Naomi's kindness. Her grief was still raw. Maybe that helped her to understand what I was going through.

Soon after that, Naomi told me that she wanted to return to her homeland – she still owned some land there – and I decided to go with her. At first she objected. "You must stay with your own people and find another husband here". But I insisted. I told her I would rather be without a husband than let her spend the rest of her life alone. I finally managed to persuade her. "Where you go, I go", I told her. "Your people will be my people, your God will be my God".

Back in Bethlehem, I wanted to be able to support Naomi as much as I could, but how? I went to work for a farmer called Boaz. He let me pick the left-over grain from the edges of his fields and take it back to Naomi. He was kind to me too. He told his workers to look after me, and he gave me extra grain. He said he wanted to reward me for leaving my own people so that I could take care of Naomi in her old age.

When I told Naomi about Boaz, her eyes lit up. "He is one of Elimelech's relatives", she said. "He's your next of kin. Perhaps he will give you a home". She told me to put on my best clothes and lie at his feet when he went to sleep at the end of the day. So I did. I tried not to disturb him, but he woke up in the middle of the night and wanted to know who I was. When I told him that he was my next of kin, he was impressed that I'd come to him rather than look for a younger man as a husband. "I'm a relative of yours, but I'm not your next of kin", Boaz said. "I know the man who is, and I'll see him today and sort everything out". Boaz was as good as his word, and he bought the

right to become my next of kin according to the local customs.

Boaz took me as his wife, and it wasn't long before we had a son. I wondered what the locals would think. After all I was a stranger in their country. The women of Bethlehem said that I, a foreign woman, was worth more to Naomi than seven sons! She nursed my son Obed, and he certainly restored her hope. Now her family name has a future. And so do I.

Note your answers to these questions:

- Where do you think Ruth experiences some kind of calling?
- What are its characteristics?
- How does it change as her world changes?

My name is Zacchaeus but my friends call me Zac – not that I have many friends. I work for the government. The Emperor's my boss. I'm the chief tax collector for the Romans in the Jericho area. They prefer to employ locals. That way we get all the aggro. Nobody wants to pay taxes, especially to foreigners. All that hard-earned money going out of the country, keeping them in their big houses and theatres and roads – and armies, of course. Soldiers are meant to keep occupied people like us quiet. It works.

I have a lot of men working for me. They do all the hard work, and I cream off the profits. As long as Rome gets what it wants, we can charge what we like – within reason of course. We can't afford to upset the locals too much. Am I a happy man? Yes and no. I enjoy what I do. I get things done. I'm good with figures. I get a strange sort of pleasure out of seeing the way the Romans have improved things around here. All that building they do employs a lot of people, and that means more taxes to collect, and bigger profits for me.

But I'm getting tired of the hassle. Only last week I was punched in the face by a wine merchant who accused me of ripping him off. Where are the soldiers when you need them? I've been thinking for a while of getting out. I've made enough money to take things easy. Maybe I'll go and

live by the coast, where nobody knows me.

But then the other day I met this rabbi from Nazareth, Jesus. I don't usually have much to do with rabbis. They don't earn enough to pay taxes. And I keep away from the synagogues. I break too many rules to feel welcome there. Anyway, Jesus - I was walking through the market place, keeping my head down as usual, but I couldn't help hearing what he was saying to the people there. Something about there being a place for scum like me – only he didn't use that word – when God's new world comes. Hope for the future if only we'll change our ways. No need to go to the temple to pay your dues, because God is on the lookout people who've lost their way in life. People like me, I thought.

I could see he was about to head for the main street, so I ran ahead of him. I don't know why but I wanted to hear more. Being a bit on the short side I couldn't really see him through the crowd, so I climbed the nearest tree, and would you believe it, he stopped right underneath and invited himself round to my place. What could I do? The people in the crowd weren't best pleased. No surprises there. Fortunately there was plenty in the larder, and he sat down with the family and a few of his friends for a good meal. One of them was a tax collector. "Tell me more", I said to this Jesus. Next thing I knew I was promising to give back all I'd cheated people out of, and more besides. The wife was not pleased, I can tell you!

I know I've been mulling this over for a while, but since I met Jesus I can't avoid the question any longer. What am I going to do with my life now?

Make a note of your answers to these questions:

- What was happening to Zacchaeus' calling before he met Jesus?
- How has his vocation altered since?

My name is Philemon and I live in Colossae (that's in western Turkey to you). I'm comfortably off, with a large household – a wife, two sons, three daughters and several slaves. Ten years ago I became a Christian. I was living in Ephesus at the time, and I met Paul when he started to preach in the synagogue there. Though I'm not Jewish, I was a fringe member of the local synagogue. Like a fair number of other non-Jews, I was drawn by its worship and values. I had a lot of Jewish friends

there, but I knew I'd always be an outsider in their eyes, even if I converted.

Paul's teaching about Jesus made a lot of sense. He turned my life around. He helped me to see that even as a Gentile I had a place in God's world. I began to realise that my household could show something of God's love and power to everyone, whoever they are, whatever their standing in the world.

I moved here to Colossae five years ago, and my house is big enough to accommodate one of the city's Christian congregations. We're a mixed bunch, as you'd expect from our attempts to live out Paul's teaching. And we're not without our problems. Colossae is a challenging place to be Christian, with a lot of spiritual alternatives on offer. But I'm facing a different kind of challenge at the moment.

Onesimus, one of my most trusted and long serving slaves, ran away last year. I thought he was happy at home, but we had a serious disagreement and that was the last I saw or heard of him – until this week, when I received a letter from Paul addressed to our house church and its leaders. Onesimus must have made his way to Paul, who's currently under house-arrest in Rome. Our laws allow slaves to find someone who will advocate for them when they have a dispute with their owner. What's clear from his letter is that Paul doesn't want to send him back to me as my slave. Onesimus has become a believer. Paul writes very warmly of him as 'his child' and his 'very heart'. He wants me to forgive whatever wrong Onesimus may have done, and regard him as a 'beloved brother'.

I'm touched by the tone of Paul's letter. I've heard about the way he writes to some churches, firing off orders here and there and leaving people in no doubt about what he expects from them. But this letter is much more thought-provoking. He says he doesn't want to tell me what I should do. I must be free to make my own decision about Onesimus. But I'm not free to do what I like, am I? My decision has to be informed by our church's calling to live by compassion, kindness, love and forgiveness. Paul is confident that I'll do even more than he asks. But I wonder what that will mean for my household, and our house church.

Make a note of your answers to these questions:

- Which communities does Philemon belong to?
- How do these shape his calling?

Summary

This chapter has introduced the characteristics of vocation, both for individuals and communities. Vocation can be a quality of ordinary life. It has a pattern and shape that arise out of our involvement in our everyday world. When we have a sense of calling, we are saying that our lives have some meaning and purpose, as our talents engage with our world. It's as if something or someone outside us speaks to something within us. This doesn't happen in isolation. An individual's calling may be fashioned by belonging to a vocational community. For Christians, Jesus' call to be his followers and companions builds on and strengthens the natural human experience of living vocation.

When you meet as a group

You may like to use this prayer:

God our maker
you call the whole creation into life,
and give what we need to live faithfully and wisely.
Help us to use this time
to open our hearts and minds
to the many ways you call us
to offer ourselves in your service.

These questions will help your discussion:

- Share your individual responses to the pictures and website material (pp.4-8). How do your ideas about vocation differ as a group?
- How has your understanding of vocation been encouraged by what you've read?
- How has your understanding of vocation been challenged by what you've read?
- What questions about vocation has the material raised for you?

Gather up what you've learned in this session by spending a few moments in silence together, to allow each person to identify something that you'll take away with you to think about further, or something that you'll see or do differently in the coming week.

You may like to close with this prayer:

Lord God,
we give thanks
for those whose calling reminds us of our desire
to engage more fully in our world.
In all that we hear from within and around us
help us to listen for the voice that comes from you.

2. Hearing God's Call

The aim of this chapter is to explore the different ways in which we experience God, so that we can hear God's call more clearly. We start by drawing on David Csinos' work on spiritual styles to help us to understand our relationship with God, and then use the Bible to illustrate the range of spiritual experience Csinos describes. By the end of this section we will be more confident about the ways in which we can listen for God's call.

Christians not surprisingly speak of *God's call*. What does this mean? God doesn't have a voice-box, and we don't experience God directly through our five senses. But our faith leads us to believe that God is involved in our lives and in our everyday world. We expect to experience the presence of God through the people and events that shape our lives, and the many ways that the material world addresses us. Paul's words about seeing in a mirror dimly (1 Corinthians 13.12) suggest that our experience of God is never as clear as we might wish. God's voice is always indirect, mediated through the many channels of God's engagement in our world. That said, we can still be confident that it is God who is calling us, though we will always want to check what we believe we are hearing by listening to those whose spiritual wisdom we trust.

Our experience of God

This chapter focuses on God. The Bible is full of stories of the God who 'calls' people, sometimes individually and sometimes as communities. Ask yourself:

- When or where or how do I feel closest to God?
- Who else does this involve?

Use words, pictures or any other medium to express this.

David Csinos has analysed the different ways in which we know and experience God³. He identifies four spiritual styles:

Word-centred people value thinking. They learn about God and grow spiritually through spoken and written words. Preaching, Bible study, clearly-articulated beliefs and rational argument are important to them.

Emotion-centred people value feelings. They learn about God and grow spiritually by getting in touch with their deepest emotions. The performing arts (music, dance and drama), close personal relationships, the experience of conversion and testimony all feature in their spiritual world.

Symbol-centred people value images, symbols and metaphors. They see God as the ultimate mystery, beyond all human understanding. They look to nature, art, silence and meditation to open up the reality of God for them.

Action-centred people focus on justice, healing and social transformation. Their relationship with God is lived rather than spoken or felt. They express their faith by listening for the cries of the poor and identifying with the needs of the world.

Csinos' work on spiritual styles shows that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to relationships between human beings and God. Spiritual diversity can be challenging, but also enriching if we are prepared to learn from the preferences of others. Many people are strong in one or two styles, though a healthy relationship with God involves a degree of balance among them – what Csinos calls 'harmonious dissonance'. If we are to grow spiritually, it is important to play to our existing spiritual strengths, as well as allowing ourselves be stretched beyond them.

Make a note of your responses to these questions:

- What does the way you experience God tell you about your preferred spiritual styles?
- How do you think this has changed over time?

³ David Csinos, *Children's Ministry That Fits. Beyond One-Size-Fits-All Approaches to Children's Spirituality*, 2011: Wipf & Stock. Csinos carried out his research on children's experience of God, but he argues that his findings apply to adults too. The lectionary-based material published bi-monthly in Roots magazines draws on Csinos' work: see www.rootsontheweb.com

Awareness of spiritual styles can help us to become more receptive to God's call. Word-centred people are inclined to find God speaking through the Bible and their thinking. Emotion-centred people are open to God's voice through feelings and relationships. Symbol-centred people need stillness and solitude if they are to hear God's call. Action-centred people are more likely to hear God speaking through their often passionate engagement in projects and causes.

Ask yourself:

- How can my stronger spiritual styles help me to become more sensitive to God's call in everyday life?
- How can I develop the other spiritual styles so that I can become more receptive to God's call?

Experience of God in the Bible

Whatever your spiritual style, the Bible is likely to play some part in your relationship with God and your awareness of God's call. The following passages show something of the range of spiritual experience in the Bible.

- Exodus 3.1-12 (Moses and the burning bush)
- Deuteronomy 6.1-9 (the importance of God's commandments)
- Psalm 42 (a lament)
- Micah 6.6-8 (what God asks from his people)
- Mark 1.9-11 (at his baptism Jesus hears God's call to begin his ministry)
- John 20.19-23 (Jesus' appearance in the locked upper room)
- Luke 10.25-37 (Jesus' response to the lawyer's question)
- Galatians 5.22-26 (the impact of the Spirit in a culturally divided church).
- James 2.14-26 (two kinds of faith).

Read through these passages and note:

- Which spiritual styles are found in them?
- Which of them speaks most / least clearly to you? Why do you think this is?
- The passages from the gospels tell us something about Jesus' experience of God. What can we learn from them about his spiritual styles?

If you have time you might want to read these passages which also illustrate the range of different spiritual styles:

- Psalm 150 (a hymn of praise)
- Isaiah 6:1-8 (Isaiah's experience in the temple)
- Matthew 6:25-33 (Jesus' call to trust God)
- Matthew 25:31-46 (the parable of the sheep and goats)
- Mark 1:35-39 (Jesus at prayer)
- Luke 4:16-21 (Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth)
- Acts 10:1-23 (Peter and Cornelius)
- Philippians 2:1-11 (the way of Jesus in a hard-pressed church).

The Bible as a whole reflects a range of spiritual styles. It also shows that it is possible to experience God in the whole of life. Christian communities and scriptures certainly bring God's presence into focus, but they do not exhaust it. God is as real in the desert as in the temple. Words bring us close to God, but so do silence, symbols, actions and people.

The call of God in our lives

God is lovingly involved across our entire experience and more, not just in what we call the religious or spiritual areas of life. If we experience God in different ways, we can hear the call of God in different ways too. So God's call can come to us in the midst of everyday life, and for the business of ordinary living.

Summary

This chapter has introduced spiritual styles as a way of interpreting our experience of God. We have recognised something of our own preferred styles, and how they help us to hear God's call more clearly. And we have seen that by developing the other spiritual styles, we can become more receptive to God. Just as the first chapter painted a broad picture of vocation and its characteristics, so we can now see that the call of God can come to us in many different ways across the whole of our lives. Living vocation knows no limits.

When you meet as a group

You may wish to use this prayer:

Lord God,
we thank you that you have made us to flourish
in the love that flows from you.
Make us more attentive to your presence,
that the sound of your still small voice is not lost
in the clamour and chatter that surround us.

These questions will help your discussion:

- Share what you discovered about your experiences of God and your preferred spiritual styles. How has this helped your understanding of the call of God?
- How is your experience of God informed by the Bible passages in this chapter?
- In the light of what you now know about yourself and your experience of God, what could help you to hear God's call more clearly?

You may find it helpful to reflect on this further over the next few days by

- sitting quietly at home or in a church
- reading one of the passages from the Bible on page 20-21, by yourself or with others
- praying before an icon or hold a cross
- listening to a favourite piece of music
- spending some time in the open air
- engaging in an activity that benefits other people.

Gather up what you have learned in this session by spending some time in silence together, to allow each person to identify something that you will take away to think about further, or something that you will see or do differently in the coming week.

You may like to close with this prayer:

Lord God,
we give you thanks for all that we have in common
and all that makes us unique
in our relationship with you.
Help us to value our own spiritual strengths
and give us the courage to explore the strengths of others,
that we may become more attentive to your presence and call.

3. The gifts we offer

The aim of this chapter is to identify and value the gifts we offer as our response to the call of God. We start by imagining our perfect day. We then go on to look at some concrete examples of our gifts in action. Finally we use two stories from the ministry of Jesus to help us to reflect on our gifts and their value to God.

Your perfect day

Suppose you could have your perfect day. What would it look like? Be still for a minute or so, and then let your imagination fly freely. Spend the next ten minutes noting the ingredients of your perfect day.

Your perfect day reveals something important things about you: what you're interested in, what you feel strongly about, what you enjoy, what you're good at.

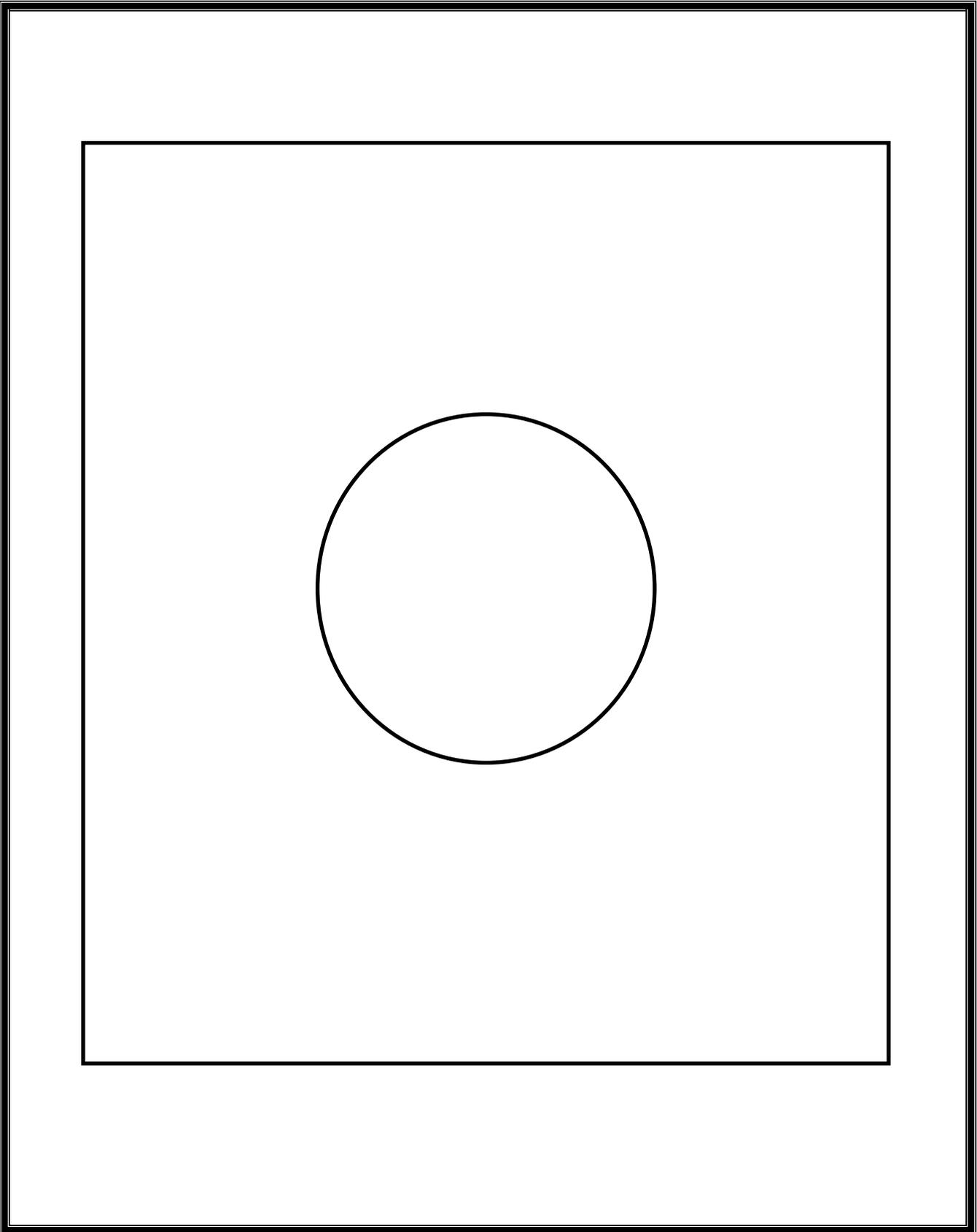
- Write the four gifts that mean the most to you inside the circle at the centre of the diagram on the next page.

Others who know you may want to add something you've missed.

Whenever you offer your gifts as your response to the call of God, they become an essential part of your living vocation.

We use our gifts in everyday life, not just in our imagination. Suppose you showed what you've put inside the circle to someone who doesn't know you. They would be curious to know what you are actually doing when you are expressing these gifts, and where or when they are seen. So

- write some concrete examples of your gifts in action in the space between the circle and the rectangular frame on the diagram
- write the places or occasions when you exercise your gifts on the frame.



You now have a picture of what you and others recognise as your gifts, and when and where you use them. It's partial and incomplete, but there's enough to show some of the ways in which your gifts are seen.

What makes me the person I am?

In her creative writing classes the author Rachel Cusk⁴ encourages her students to select four words from different areas of their life experience that answer the question: “How did you become the person you are?” She uses this exercise to encourage them to write about themselves. This is also a good way of exploring the gifts that shape your vocation – your interests and passions, what you enjoy and are good at. Identify four things that have made you the person you are today.

This exercise shows something about the relationship between your life experiences and your gifts. You may feel that you were born with some of them, while others have been nurtured through upbringing, education and training, interests and hobbies, involvement in church, or sheer necessity. Some gifts are intentionally sought, some just happen. It is natural to think that the last category includes things that are ‘God-given’, but it may be unwise to limit the generosity of God to those features of your life that you can't otherwise explain. Whatever the source of your gifts, they are the substance of your response to the call of God – your living vocation.

How Jesus responds to gifted people

Read the stories of Jesus' meetings with the Galilean fishermen (Luke 5.1-11) and the Syrian woman (Matthew 15.21-28). You might want to picture the scene and imagine that you are there, perhaps as one of the people Jesus meets. Or you might like to re-tell the stories from the perspective of one of the fishermen, or the Syrian woman⁵.

However you choose to read the stories, note down:

- What you notice about the gifts (strengths, interests, passions, abilities) of the people Jesus meets here.
- What you think has made them the people they are.
- What Jesus sees in them that they might otherwise have missed.

⁴ *The Guardian*, Saturday 30th January 2010.

⁵ For more on different ways of reading the Bible see www.rootsontheweb.com; Sue Wallace's *Multi-Sensory Scripture*, Scripture Union 2005, is part of a larger collection of multi-sensory resources. Walter Wink's *Transforming Bible Study*, Abingdon Press 1990 (2nd edition) and Patricia W. Van Ness, *Transforming Bible Study with Children*, Abingdon Press 1991, use an approach that draws on right/left brain theory.

We know something about the impact of Jesus on three of the fishermen (Simon Peter, James and John), but not so the un-named woman. These men lived their vocation as disciples, fishermen and family members in tandem and, we may imagine, in tension at times. We can picture the woman responding to Jesus by living her vocation as a mother and a member of her community, affirmed and re-vitalised as a result of meeting him.

Bring your reading to a close by asking yourself:

- If they could step out of the gospels into your world, what do you think the Galilean fishermen and the Syrian woman might say to you about the gifts you have to offer as your response to Jesus - your living vocation?

Summary

This chapter has helped you to explore your gifts, the many ways they have developed in you and the opportunities you have to use them in your everyday life. By seeing your gifts as ways that you can respond to the presence of God and the call of Jesus, you can understand more of what your living vocation entails.

When you meet as a group

You may like to use this prayer:

Loving God,
you bless your creation
with an abundance of generous giving,
and your Son Jesus Christ is your greatest gift.
Open our eyes to the wonder of your goodness,
our minds to riches of your blessing
and our hearts to the joy of your service.

These questions will help your discussion:

- Share what you identified as your gifts in the “Perfect Day” exercise. What would others in the group add to each person’s list?
- What do you notice about the variety of ways in which you exercise your gifts, both as individuals and as a group?
- How do you think your life experiences have shaped the development of your gifts?
- What differences do the stories of the disciples and the Syrian woman make to the way you view what you have to offer as your response to Jesus?

Gather up what you've learned in this session by spending some time in silence together, to allow each person to identify something that you'll take away to think about further, or something that you'll see or do differently in the coming week.

You may like to close with this prayer:

Living Lord,
you know us better than we know ourselves
and see the potential we can easily miss.
Let your faith in us become a wellspring of confidence,
as you renew our desire to give ourselves in your service.

4. The world we serve

The aim of this chapter is to help us to recognise the opportunities we have in our everyday world to offer our gifts in God's service, so that we might become more confident of God's call across the whole of our lives. We make maps of our world and use them to work out what gives our changing lives their shape and stability. We draw on some material from the New Testament that speaks of Christ's presence in the world. By the end of the chapter we will have a clearer sense of where Christ is present in our worlds, and where we might expect to hear his call.

Mapping our world (Map 1)

Following Aristotle, we said that we find our vocation where our gifts engage with our world. There are many ways of representing the world we live in. Conventional maps use symbols to show roads, landscapes, settlements and other places of interest. Diaries show how we spend our time, and indicate the range of our activities. Objects provide fascinating insights into our life story⁶. Photograph albums display the people who matter to us, the places we've visited and the events we want to remember.

What does your world look like? Try mapping it out like this:

- Decide whether you want to map your world according to places, time, objects or people
- Use Map 1 on page 35, or draw a larger version if you prefer
- Write the kind of map you are drawing in the circle: 'Places', 'Time', 'Objects' or 'People'. Along the top or bottom of the frame, show what your map represents. So if you've written 'Places' in the circle, you might write 'the different places I'm in during a typical week' in the frame. Or if you've written 'People' in the circle, you might write 'The people I see during a typical week'
- Fill in the space between the circle and the frame with specific examples of the world you've chosen to map. You can use words if you wish, or drawings, pictures or other items. So if you've written 'Objects' in the circle and 'The different things I use over a week' around the frame, you might write or draw or stick pictures in the space to represent the objects in your world.

Your map shows how your everyday world is ordered by places, times, activities, objects and relationships. The world you live in is not something 'out there', but the reality you regularly engage with, and especially the relationships that matter most.

- What does your map reveal about how far your world stretches?

⁶ See Neil MacGregor, *The History of the World in a Hundred Objects*, Penguin Books 2012, and our own diocese's publication to mark the centenary in 2014, *100 Years 100 Treasures*.

Changing worlds

Road and street maps are regularly updated to take account of new developments. They are snapshots of a changing world. The same is true of the map you have drawn. If you were to repeat the exercise in five years' time, you would produce something different. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman pictures life in a changing world as 'liquid' rather than 'solid'⁷:

Forms such as family, community and employment are constantly changing shape. Our lives look increasingly like a series of short-term projects and episodes with no sequence or connection. We are like nomads, flowing through our own lives like tourists, changing places, jobs, spouses, values and more, increasingly (self) excluded from traditional networks of support. Our fragmented lives require us to be flexible and adaptable, so that we are always ready and willing to change tactics at short notice, to abandon commitments and loyalties without regret and to pursue opportunities according to their current availability. When life is liquid, education is inevitably life-long, helping us to adapt our skills to the rapid pace of change, but also to make our fast changing world more hospitable to humanity.

Look at the map you have produced, and ask yourself:

- Which parts of your world are more solid, and which parts more liquid?
- What gives the world you know its structure, shape and stability?

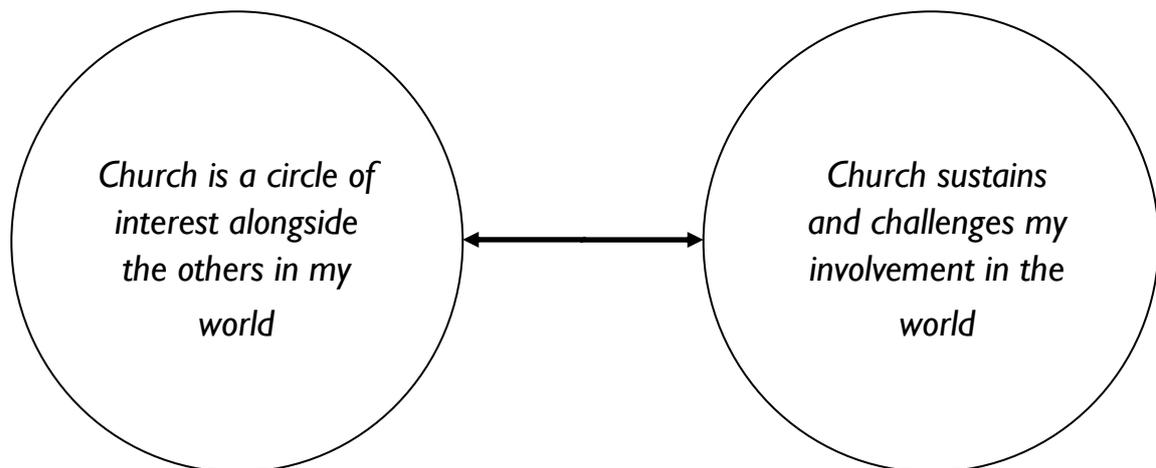
⁷ Zygmunt Baumann, *Liquid Life*, Polity Press 2005

Circles of interest (Map 2)

Your Map 1 shows the range of your interests. These can also be pictured as a series of circles stretching from your inner self to your widest concerns (see Map 2 on page 36). 'Circles of interest' are the various communities that make up the world. They represent the extent of our engagement in life.

Using Map 2, consider:

- Which particular circles of interest are found in your world?
- How far do they stretch?
- How do your circles of interest relate to your involvement in 'church'? One way of answering this is to note which end of the line below your experience of church is nearer:



Being involved in the life of the church can be like living in a parallel world, which can restrict the idea of vocation to 'church activity'. Alternatively church life can act as a resource for a more broadly based approach to vocation. Healthy Christian communities and individuals need something of each approach to church life and vocation.

The presence of Christ in our world

Your body is the way that you are present in the world of place, time, objects and people. It is more than an outer shell, like the bodywork of a car that covers replaceable and disposable parts. Your body is how you relate to others. It is responsible, at least in part, for your identity as a person who is embodied in the various aspects of your world.

St Paul speaks of the 'body of Christ'. He suggests that the crucified and risen Christ is 'one body with many members' (1 Corinthians 12.12). That makes Christ more than 'Jesus of Nazareth brought back to life'. Christ is present in the world as the community of those who have been baptised 'by one Spirit into one body' (1 Corinthians 12.13).

Clive Marsh argues that the presence of Christ is not confined to the baptised community⁸. He prefers to think of the church as *a* body of Christ rather than *the* body of Christ. The gospels allow us to see Christ embodied in other places too.

Mark's gospel ends with the young man at Jesus' tomb telling the women that his disciples will see him in Galilee (Mark 16.7). For the readers of the gospel, Galilee is the place in the gospel story where Jesus first meets and calls his disciples. If we go to 'Galilee' by re-reading Mark's gospel, where do we 'see' the presence of Jesus? These passages in Mark show something of the impact of Jesus:

- Mark 1.40-45; 2.15-17 (where outcasts are brought back into the community, and prejudice is challenged and overcome)
- Mark 2.1-12 (where there is forgiveness)
- Mark 5.1-20; 5.21-43 (where lives are transformed)
- Mark 6.30-44 (where the hungry are fed, and hospitality overcomes hunger)
- Mark 7.24-30 (where the truth is told, however painfully)
- Mark 8.27-9.1 (where people discover their true identity, however costly it may be)
- Mark 10.1-22 (where people renounce their reliance on the power of patriarchy and wealth)
- Mark 10.35-45 (where the abuse of power is challenged)
- Mark 14.3-9 (where creativity blossoms in beauty and extravagant generosity)
- Mark 15.33-41 (where faith speaks and acts in places of darkness and despair).

Stories like these – and there are many others like them elsewhere in the gospels – invite us to see God's presence and activity in Christ in terms of the patterns of living they reveal: inclusion, forgiveness, transformation, hospitality and so on. Christ's hidden presence is embodied in today's world in what Marsh calls 'communities of practice', where people come together and learn what it means to be human, as God intends. He identifies five such communities:

Family, where ideally love takes shape in unchosen relationships which help us to learn about emotional security, hospitality, forgiveness, handling conflict;

Friendship, where relationships are chosen and characterised by equality, affection, loyalty, shared interest;

⁸ See Clive Marsh, *Christ in Practice. A Christology of Everyday Life*, Darton, Longman and Todd 2006.

Church, a local community that explicitly sets out to embody Christ, a formative community that prepares us for life and enables us to live better;

Work, regular, purposeful, meaningful activity, paid or voluntary or domestic, crucial for human wellbeing and at best contributing to our formation as persons in relationship;

Education, where learning communities impart knowledge and what we are capable of becoming is drawn out, as the new humanity to which we are called in Christ waits to be discovered.

For Marsh, each of these communities is in some sense a ‘body of Christ’, where God carries out his unfinished work of creation. We might say that God gives the body of Christ that we call ‘church’ the spiritual resources that open our eyes to his presence and activity elsewhere in the world.

Christ’s call in our world (Map 3)

Look again at your world, represented by Maps 1 and 2. Set these alongside Marsh’s understanding of Christ’s presence in the gospel story and in the communities of practice in today’s world. Spend ten minutes using Map 3 on page 37 to identify:

- which communities of practice you are involved in
- where you might expect to see the presence of Christ in them.

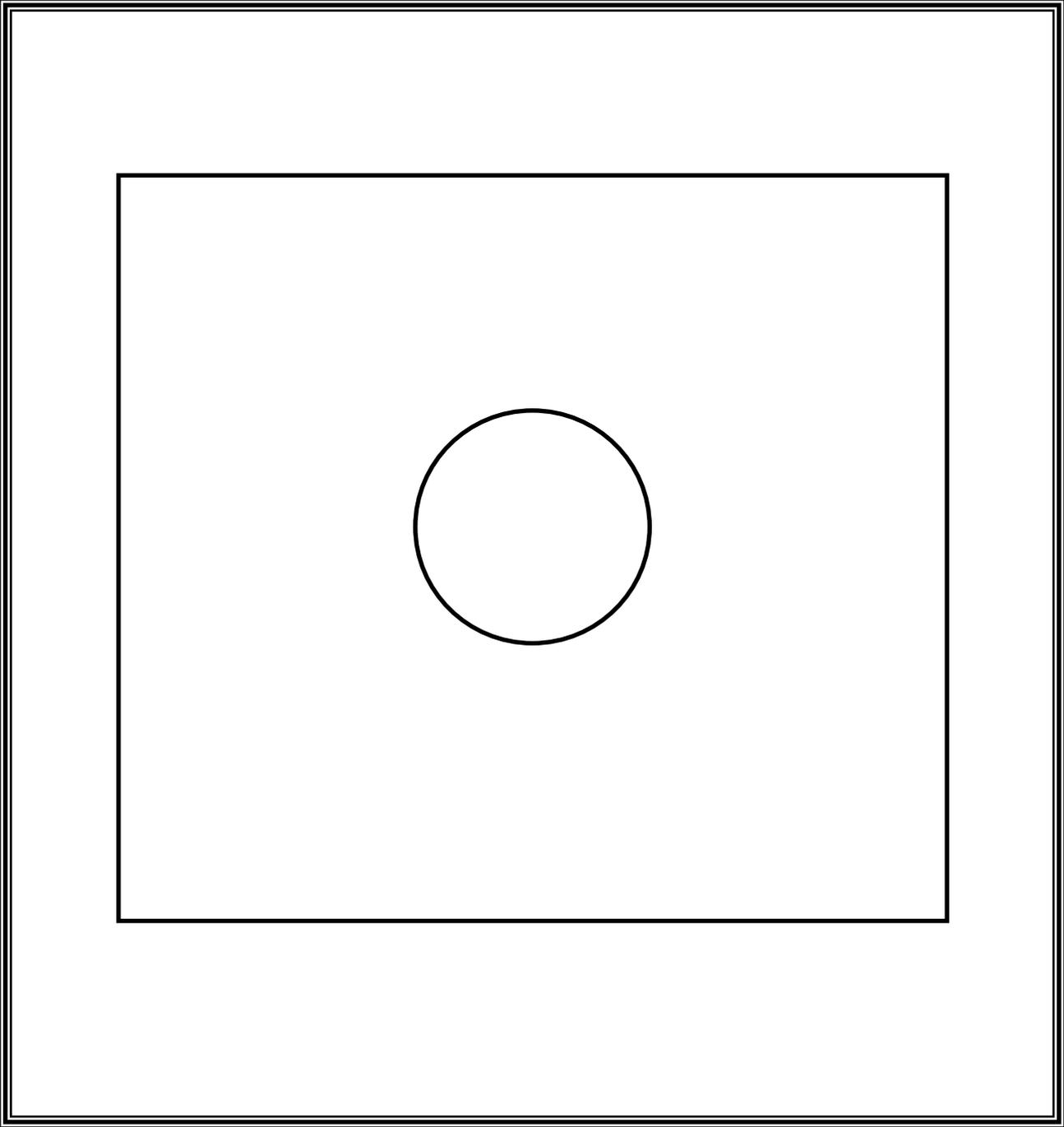
Consider:

- what the call of Jesus might sound like as it comes from these places where he is particularly present to you.

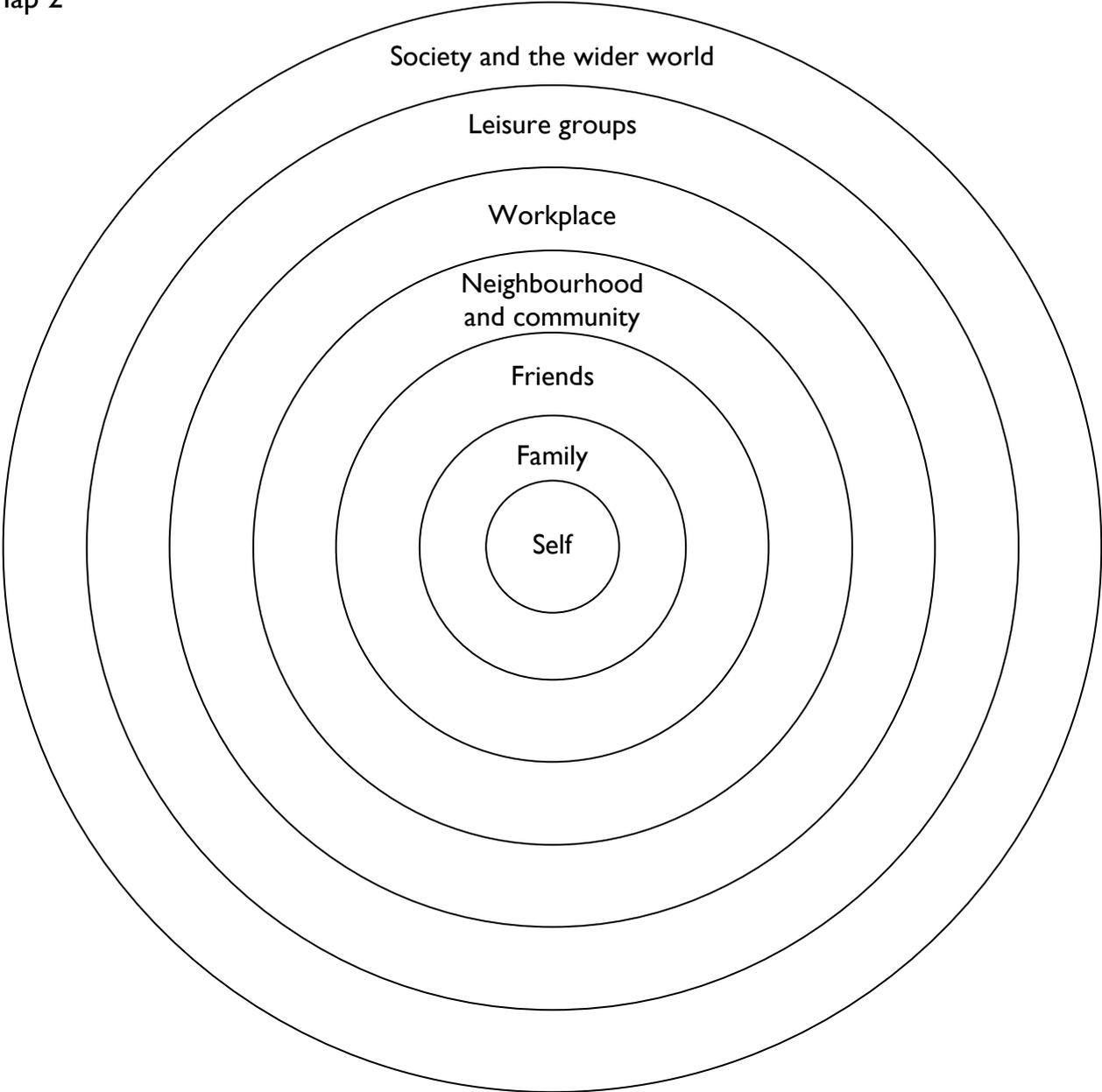
Summary

This chapter has enabled you to map out your world and see it as the theatre of God's loving presence and activity in Christ. The maps you have drawn invite you to ask how best you can use your gifts to serve God in the world of your everyday experience.

Map 1



Map 2



Map 3

	Family	Friendship	Church	Work	Education
Welcoming outcasts, overcoming prejudice					
Forgiveness					
Lives being transformed					
Hospitality					
Truth-telling					
Discovering true identity					
Renouncing the power of patriarchy and wealth					
Challenging abuse of power					
Creativity, beauty, extravagant generosity					
Faith alive in hope-less places					

Where Christ is present in our world, and calls us to follow him

When you meet as a group

You may like to use this prayer:

Creator God,
whose living Word became flesh and blood
and assures us of your presence in our lives.
Expand our expectation of where we might meet you
in the world we know,
and help us to find the grace to serve you there.

These questions will help your discussion:

- What do you notice when you compare your Map 1 with those produced by other members of your group?
- Looking at each person's Map 2, to what extent is church more like a circle of interest or a resource for your involvement in the world?
- What does Map 3 suggest about where you might hear the call of Christ in your world?

Gather up what you've learned in this session by spending some time in silence together, to allow each person to identify something that you'll take away to think about further, or something that you'll see or do differently in the coming week.

You may like to close with this prayer:

Generous and ever-present God,
we give thanks for the people and places,
objects and activities that make up our everyday world.
Teach us to trust your presence
as the rock on which to build our changing lives.
Open our hearts and minds to your call,
especially when it takes us by surprise.

5. Growing Vocation

The aim of this chapter is to explore some possible next steps in your response to God's call, so that you can identify for yourself how vocation might grow in you. We begin by reflecting on what has been learnt so far. We then use a version of the marks of mission to help us to assess the current shape of our discipleship, and go on to open up some ideas about how vocation might grow and develop. Finally we commit ourselves to doing something in the next week to take further what we have learnt through this course.

Reflection

Remind yourself of what you learned about your spiritual styles in Chapter 2 and your gifts in Chapter 3, and give yourself time and space to be open and receptive to God.

Sit prayerfully before your maps from Chapter 4, like someone praying with a passage from the Bible or a significant object or symbol. Remember that we find our vocation as we allow our gifts to engage with the world, and that Christ calls us from wherever he is present. Where might that be?

Listen for Christ's call, as you hold your gifts and your world before God. Depending on your spiritual style you may find it helpful to:

- find somewhere to be quiet before God
- meet with a friend or spiritual guide
- read slowly one of the passages from Mark's gospel on page 32
- engage in an activity that benefits others.

Mission, vocation and discipleship

What is mission? Here are two recent definitions:

Mission is the creating, reconciling and transforming action of God, flowing from the community of love found in the Trinity, made known to all humanity in the person of Jesus, and entrusted to the faithful action and witness of the people of God who, in the power of the Spirit, are a sign, foretaste and instrument of the reign of God (National Council of Churches in Australia).

On this understanding, mission is divine rather than human activity, God's initiative not ours. But we have a part to play. The church is called to be a people of mission, rather than to 'do mission' as one among many of its activities. Mission, then, is an essential ingredient in the character of the church, as it is of God.

This is a more concise definition:

The mission of God is to form communities that reflect and embody the life of the Trinity (Cameron Harder, *Discovering the Other. Asset-based Approaches for Building Community Together*, Alban Books 2013).

Notice that there's nothing here about the church at all: the emphasis is entirely on God.

It is clear from these two definitions that 'mission of God' language speaks of God's loving and transforming engagement in the world. Since the 1980s several churches have produced statements of various 'marks of mission' to set out their understanding of what the mission of God looks like. Here are three of them:

Mission is ...

- Proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom
- Teaching, baptising and nurturing new believers
- Responding to human need by loving service
- Seeking to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
- Striving to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Anglican Consultative Council

If we are called to be a people of mission, then the marks of mission can also be seen as marks of living vocation – God’s call to be disciples of Jesus in the whole of life. But they are not templates or prescriptive statements, more a series of outlines of the shape of vocational living.

We can use marks of mission to get the measure of our own discipleship. Read through them again and consider:

- Which of the marks of mission remind you of what you are already doing in your everyday life as a Christian? What does this look like in practice?

- Which of the marks would you like to know more about or develop further? How might this happen?

Appreciating vocation

As we have been saying throughout this course, we find our vocation where our gifts engage with our world, in response to the call of Jesus. One way of appreciating your vocation – where you believe that you are already living vocationally and where you might be called to develop this further – is to use the chart on the next page. Take ten minutes to complete it for yourself, and use it as the basis for further discussions about what happens next.

Summary

This chapter has enabled you to identify the marks of your vocation as a disciple of Jesus, and suggested some ways in which this might develop.

Where I have a sense of vocation in my life at the moment

What would improve my sense of vocation

What gets in the way of my sense of vocation

Some new directions I would like to explore further

When you meet as a group

You may like to use this prayer:

Lord of all being,
your creative Word calls us into life,
your Word in Scripture calls out a servant community,
your Word made flesh calls followers to be salt and light.
Renew us in our desire to listen for your voice,
that we might walk the way of Jesus in justice, compassion and love.

These questions will help your discussion:

- What do you notice when you compare your reflections on the marks of mission and discipleship with others in your group?
- Share with others in the group what you found encouraging, surprising and challenging when you completed the chart on page 42.
- Discuss your next steps as a result of completing this course.

Gather up what you've learned by spending some time in silence together.

You may like to close with this prayer:

Creator God, you give us the gift of life every day
and entrust us with your world as a home for all living beings.
You invite us to live joyfully in the company of your Son
as a people who bless and make peace and sow seeds of hope.
Guide us by your Spirit as we seek your will for us.
Give us humility to live faithfully from your call,
and courage to live with the cost.

What happens next

Discerning God's call is not something we can do alone. Others inevitably see our gifts and the world we serve from perspectives that shed a different and sometimes fresh light on our own perceptions of what God wants us to do with our lives. Throughout your participation in Living Vocation, your prayers and thoughts have been informed by a number of conversations with people you trust. These will continue as you work through what you have been learning about yourself and God.

You may wish to talk further with someone who has particular expertise in helping people to discern God's call. If this is the case, please contact lesley.steed@cofesuffolk.org who will suggest someone to you.