

Vocation: A Calling for Your Life

- ❖ “Calling”
- ❖ not job or career;
but work and purpose, what we produce with our lives
- ❖ Recognition that self is doing what it is “meant to do”
sense of purpose and commitment beyond or outside the self
- ❖ Points to the journey or quest of the self to grow and expend itself in productive work and loving relationships over the life span
- ❖ connotes one’s uniqueness: background and origins, personality, gifts and abilities, purpose and contributions
- ❖ experienced frequently as a spiritual calling and commitment to family, community, and the divine
- ❖ “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” – Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*
- ❖ “The given, the ground of identity, has become the imperative to do the work. The ground of commitment is experienced, not as a struggle to do something that one would prefer not to, but rather a response to a call that one ignores at peril to one’s soul.” – Laurent Parks Daloz, Cheryl Keen, James Keen, and Sharon Daloz Parks, *Common Fire*
- ❖ *Common Fire* describes the purpose of higher education: “At their best, colleges provide space and stimulus for a process of transformation through which students move from modes of understanding that are relatively dependent upon conventional assumptions to more critical, systemic thinking that can take many perspectives into account, make discernments among them, and envision new possibilities. The deep purpose of higher education is to steward this transformation”
- ❖ and suggests ways to encourage that transformation . . .
 - Develop the Institution as a Mentoring Environment
 - Cultivate Habits of Mind Leading to Practical Wisdom
 - Create Opportunities for Constructive Engagements with Otherness

Module: Characteristics of a *Calling*

Preparation

- Readings: *relevant reading(s) could be excerpted from Bolles, Buechner, or Figler.*
- Assignment: Based on the readings, what are some of the differences in meaning between the terms “job,” “career,” and “calling.”

Meeting

- Begin with Small Group Exercise (10 minutes)
Begin the class by breaking students up into pairs or groups of three. Have them discuss their answers to the following question: “If you could do one thing for the rest of your life, what would it be?” *Have each group member take notes on what the others say; this will give each student something that she can take with her to, hopefully, hold on to for the future.*
- Class Discussion of Exercise (10 minutes)
 - After the allotted period of time, call the class back together.
 - Ask the small groups to share some of what they talked about
Highlight some of the similarities and differences among the kinds of things that students identified. Instructor may wish to frame these as student “passions” or as the things that captivate them.
- Define a “Calling” (15 minutes)
 - Share with the class a definition of calling that emerges from the prepared readings. Once example is from Bolles
 - Outline the characteristics of a calling
 - Discuss with the class some of the distinctions they jotted down (in preparation for class) between a “calling” and a “job” or “career.”
- Small Group Wrap Up (10 minutes)
 - Have the members of the small groups talk to each other about how they might use the “one things” they mentioned to find their callings. *Again, have them take notes for each other. Have students exchange notes with each other so that each student can take home a set of notes on what she shared with her group members.*
- Assignment Overview (5 minutes)
 - Complete an assessment inventory of interests, values, etc.
 - Consider two academic and two nonacademic routes you may want to explore to discover your calling
Instructor should prepare to debrief students about the outcomes of these assignments. This may be done best in individual meetings.

Module: Intentionally Reflecting Upon Calling (Yours, or Someone Else's)

Preparation

- Readings: *Bolles, Figler, or Buechner would be appropriate*
- Assignment: Write a letter to yourself (or to someone close to you) in which you explain why you have chosen to go to college, and why you have chosen Mercer University. Seal the envelope, and on the outside, write your Mercer Box number or a mailing address to which your letter can be sent in two years. (*Instructor should provide envelopes to student.*)

Meeting

- Begin with Small Group Exercise (15 minutes)
Begin the class by breaking students up into pairs or groups of three. Have each group select a faculty or staff member at Mercer. Then, have the groups discuss the reasons that they believe that faculty or staff member came to Mercer and why he or she has chosen that profession. *This exercise might work best if students do not know the individual well that they have selected. Encourage students to talk about the specific individuals they selected, as well as their positions at the university.*
- Class Discussion of Exercise (15 minutes)
 - After the allotted period of time, call the class back together.
 - Ask the small groups to share some of what they talked about.
The trick is to get students to talk about their perceptions of what it means to be a professor or a person in different staff positions. The instructor could even make a list on the board for each of the kinds of staff or faculty members that they name. Try, also, to get students to think about the individuals they selected. Why would those people, in particular, choose to take those positions? What is it about those jobs that they may find fulfilling?
 - Link the things the students generate to possible “life missions” or vocations.
- AN ALTERNATIVE
The instructor could share his or her “story.” Why did he or she become a professor? Why teach UNV? What led to his/her being here at Mercer University, at this date and time, with this group of students? How does this role at Mercer contribute to his/her sense of vocation? With what sorts of things does (s)he still struggle in fulfilling his calling? *It seems important to point out that working on vocation is a lifelong process, with struggles as well as successes. Instructors can model for students the sorts of ways that people deal with “forks in the road,” or the like.*
- Does Being a Student Mean Putting Your Calling on Hold? (15 minutes)
 - Ask students to get back together with their small groups.
 - Ask students to share one reason that they have come to college/Mercer. *Try to encourage students to frame their discussions in light of their own purposes, “missions,” or vocations.*
- Assignment Overview (5 minutes)
The same sorts of assignments could be given as for “Characteristics of a Calling”

Module: Vocation as a Sacred Journey

Preparation

- Readings: Buechner's *The Sacred Journey*, or excerpts from the text
- Assignment: Have students make a list of some of the mundane, ordinary things that have occurred in their lives in the last couple of weeks. Have them include positive, negative, and neutral things.

Meeting

- Begin with Small Group Exercise (10 minutes)
Begin the class by breaking students up into pairs or groups of three. Have them do the following: "Make a list of some of the ordinary things that happened in Buechner's early life which, at the time, didn't seem to have any special significance but (he later believed) shaped the direction of his life nonetheless."
- Class Discussion of Exercise (10 minutes)
 - After the allotted period of time, call the class back together.
 - Ask the small groups to share some of what they talked about
Highlight Buechner's assertion that God speaks to us in the mundane, humdrum details of our lives. Also, that discovering who one is, and what work one is to do, is a lifelong journey on which we should learn to listen to God speaking us in our daily lives. The Introduction in Sacred Journey provides some good examples. This is Buechner's way of saying that God, and faith, are inextricable from our callings or vocation.
- Thinking of "Calling" as a theme (30 minutes)
 - The theme that seems to tie all of Buechner's experiences together is listening and writing. Discuss how this thread is interwoven throughout his early life.
 - Have the students review, individually, the lists that they prepared for class from their own experiences. Have them reflect on one or two of these experiences, imagining how Buechner might describe them. Then, have them try to list some themes that they might see in their own experiences.
Instructor could have students complete "one minute papers" in which students write, in class, a very brief reflection upon the experiences they selected and what impact these seemingly mundane experiences might have on their lives (in the past, the present, or the future).