

Helping Students to Think about Vocation and the “Ordinary Christian”

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Background

For the last six years Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU) has been engaged in a process of revising its mission statement, developing a vision for the future and taking active steps to develop that vision. The University’s mission statement says:

Point Loma Nazarene University exists to provide higher education in a vital Christian community where minds are engaged and challenged, character is modeled and formed, and service becomes an expression of faith. Being of Wesleyan heritage, we aspire to be a learning community where grace is foundational, truth is pursued, and holiness is a way of life.

A campus conversation that has developed from this mission/vision process has revolved around the question “How well are we really doing in providing a ‘holistic’ education that integrates academic, spiritual and social development?” Our students’ discernment of their vocation is one area where this type of holistic integration is critical. The Mathematical, Information and Computer Sciences Department at PLNU has been actively engaged in helping students to think about vocation on an individual level, at the departmental level, and in the broader institutional context. What follows is a description of our efforts in each of these areas.

Foreground

For a number of years the faculty members in our department have been intentional in helping students to identify a career that is suited to their interests and abilities, but this is just one component of an individual’s vocation. Discussions of “whole life” issues have been informal and “happenstance” often occurring in a faculty member’s office in response to a student’s question or crisis about “what to do with my life” as graduation approached. In the fall of 2005, the department faculty spent a semester reading and discussing *To Know as We are Known* by Parker Palmer. This lovely book, about the nature of teaching and learning, lead us as a community to discuss ways that the department could be more intentional in discussing the multifaceted aspects of vocation with our students.

We began with the very familiar quotation from Frederick Buechner’s *Wishful Thinking*, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” This quickly led to a conversation about how to help students define “deep gladness” and how they might learn about the “world’s deep hunger.” This is an on-going discussion in our department that has reshaped what we do with department chapels, how we talk about vocation in curricular programs and in extra-curricular activities. We realized that many of the vocational conversations in the department were “happenstance.” We have developed some structured ways to discuss vocation in the department and we have all become more intentional about sharing our

own vocational stories and life choices with our students in department chapels, in the classroom and in social settings as well.

Another book that has been helpful in thinking about this generation of student and their search for a meaningful life is Jeffrey Arnett's book *Emerging Adulthood, the Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*. Arnett says "Rather than marrying and becoming parents in their early twenties, most people in industrialized societies now postpone these rites of passage until at least their late twenties, spending these years in self-focused exploration as they try out different possibilities in their careers and relationships." What we hope to provide our majors is a helpful framework and some guidance for that exploration.

Chapel Vocation Presentations

Students at PLNU are required to attend chapel three times each week. Each semester the University sets aside two chapel periods for department use. These department chapels are a time of fellowship and worship between the faculty of a specific department and the students majoring in that department. Over the years the Mathematical, Information and Computer Sciences department has brought in a variety of speakers for these chapel events and has also begun a tradition (that is now self-perpetuating) of a group of our students providing the musical leadership for these chapels.

Thus two times a semester the nine faculty and roughly 90 students in our department gather together for worship. One of these two gatherings is labeled by the University as "advising chapel" – a misnomer if there ever was one. While we do sing and pray together, the bulk of this gathering is focused in what classes that the students in each major are required to take in the coming semester. However the content of the other chapel each semester is left up to the discretion of the department. In last few years we have used the theme "follow us as we follow Christ." We have invited faculty in our department or alumni from our department present their life story with particular focus on the series of influences on and choices about vocation that led them to this place in their lives. These talks focus on vocation from a "whole life" point of view. Faculty members have talked about how family life, service in church and their career have fit into their own understanding of vocation. Many of the faculty members in our department have had careers outside of academia and one faculty member took time off from work to stay at home with young children. Students were surprised to learn that at least one of their professors was not a good student and didn't go to college right away. We hope to give students a sense that discerning one's vocation is a journey.

The opportunity for students to hear our stories has led to interesting one-on-one conversations with students during office hours and advising sessions. It often comes as a shock to them to realize that none of us knew exactly what we wanted to do the minute we finished our undergraduate degrees. We talk with them about discerning the next step, not the whole of their life and also about considering other important factors when making decisions about their careers: Do they want a family? What do they want to do with their spare time? How does involvement in ministry fit into their life?

Curricular Vocation Discussions

In an effort to help students explore vocation, our curriculum has been modified to include three components that are crafted to help students discern a career path that is consistent with their interests, abilities and sense of calling.

1. Sophomore level course work: In each of the three majors, there is a second semester sophomore level course that exposes students to the essence of their discipline. This is presented in an attempt to dispel myths such as “mathematics is calculus” or “computer science is programming.” In mathematics, students take *Linear Algebra* and *Number Theory with Proofs* (one eight-week quad of each). These courses introduce students to the basics of proof writing and structured reasoning with material that is familiar to them. In computer science, students take *Data Structures and Algorithms* where they learn the structured logic that under girds computer science. In Information Systems, students take *Introduction to Information Systems*, where students get an overview of the types of problems that Information Systems considers and the tools used. (See Appendix 1 for course descriptions.) We emphasize that these classes are giving students a clear indication of the coming years of study in their chosen discipline and gently ask if they are still sure that this is the discipline for them. This has greatly reduced the number of students that discover in their junior year that they want to change majors.
2. Integrative Experience: Each student in our department is required to have an “integrative experience” in their junior or senior year. Feedback from alumni pointed out that these experiences gave them an edge in seeking a job and helped them to identify the kinds of projects/work environments that they enjoy. We define an integrative experience as one of the following:
 - a. An internship
 - b. A year-long senior research project under the supervision of a faculty member—we have a solid system for this with roughly half of our graduating seniors engaging in research
 - c. A year-long service learning project—a group project done under the supervision of a faculty member with a non-profit organization as a client

We have recently launched this initiative and what we are finding is that our best students are choosing to do more than one of these three options. The students receive load credit for each experience. Each spring we invite juniors to a dinner with faculty members. At that time we discuss with them the options for a senior year integrative experience and we answer questions. At that dinner faculty members discuss the research areas that they have available for students as well as the potential list of clients for service learning projects.

There is a faculty member who gets load credit to supervise internships and we have a service learning class so there is a faculty member who gets load credit to supervise the 3-4 service learning teams each year. All faculty members are involved in the integrative experience of our students, supervising research, sitting on a research committee, providing advice on a service learning project or helping to make connections in the community for internships. We are also very fortunate to have developed a network of local alumni who have opened the door to internships in their place of business.

A “culture” of integrative projects has developed in our department. What we find is the upper classmen talk to lowerclassmen about research and service learning so the students are already considering possibilities before we begin to recruit them.

3. Senior Seminar. This capstone class includes all of our majors in the spring semester of their senior year. The seminar is an integral part of our assessment program for the department. Each student writes a paper on a topic in their discipline (usually related to their integrative experience) and gives an oral presentation. The students work with a faculty mentor in preparing both items, and the expectation is that they are to be producing a “professional level” product. The paper and talk are graded by a panel of faculty members with that standard in mind. In addition, students are expected to create a resume and cover letter. Alumni from our department participate in the seminar by giving sample presentations to the students as well as by discussing job searches and the interview processes. We have been very fortunate to have several alumni who are in management level positions review student resumes and provide them feedback.

Extra-Curricular Career Discussions

The department keeps a collection of books and other information on careers in mathematics, computer science and information systems. These materials are often loaned to students as a part of informal conversations with their advisors. Long experience has taught us that our students are not ready to give serious consideration to the question “What am I going to do when I graduate?” until their junior year. Junior and Senior students are invited to a series of “career dinners” each year. We host four dinners per year that are held in faculty homes with a simple meal of take-out food. At each event two or three alumni and other professionals present career information in this informal setting. Each speaker is asked to address the following questions:

- What is a typical day like in the profession?
- What are essential gifts/skills needed for the profession? (We want to help students discern if their personality and talents are really suited for the work.)
- What important experiences and/or post-bachelor’s education is needed for the profession? (Do they need to go to graduate school right away? Should they be looking for an internship before they graduate? Are there tests that they should take before they graduate?)
- Tips for gaining entry level jobs
- An estimate of the starting salary

Some examples of the professions discussed include: software engineer, systems analyst, FBI agent, NSA cryptographer, financial planner, defense industry work, middle and secondary school teacher, actuary, IT in retail stores and missionary service in IT. Some of our more mature alumni who are in management positions have been very helpful in discussing the characteristics that they seek when interviewing employees. Some of our recent graduates have been fairly direct about what they learned from doing a job search. In one session we discuss graduate school, the difference between masters and doctoral programs, the pros and cons of going to graduate school directly after graduation and the process for applying.

Preparing a Vocation Seminar for the Institution

In the summer of 2006, the Wesleyan Center for Twenty-First Century Studies at PLNU (<http://www.pointloma.edu/WesleyanCenter.htm>) funded a grant to develop a seminar for seniors on vocation. This funding along with departmental resources allowed us to hire four students to read a collection of works on vocation and respond to the readings. This aided us in identifying some candidate texts for the seminar. It was a very useful exercise, since it highlighted the fact that age and life experience have a significant impact on the understanding of vocation. Many of the texts that the faculty members thought were helpful were actually confusing to the students. Based on the student feed-back, two texts were selected:

- *Forgetting Ourselves on Purpose* by Brian Mahan: Mahan is a philosopher who is a William James expert and has taught in a variety of institutions. His text asks many intriguing questions and provides guidance on how to seek answers, but offers very few. Mahan is Roman Catholic and brings a “big picture” perspective to the notion of “calling.”
- *Living Your Heart’s Desire* by Gregory Clapper: Clapper is a Wesleyan theologian who is the director of the Lantz Center for Christian Vocations at the University of Indianapolis. This book is more “concrete” with a large number of scriptural references. It was a good starting point for conversations of the nature “Do you agree or disagree with his point of view?”

During the course of the summer both of the authors of this article prepared for the seminar. We read several books and articles on vocation (see Appendix 4), worked our way through the resources available on the Lilly Theological Exploration of Vocation website (<http://www.ptev.org>) and began the outline for a short seminar on vocation. The seminar was designed to meet for one hour once per week with a one-day retreat at the conclusion. The Wesleyan Center provided lunch for the students, and the retreat created a time when students could think through what they were learning without interruptions (see Appendix 2 for a seminar outline and Appendix 3 for the retreat outline).

Working Out the Vocation Seminar

In the Spring of 2007, the authors and a staff member from the Office of Spiritual Development ran a voluntary seminar on vocation for a group of eight seniors selected from a wide variety of majors at PLNU (everything from literature to physics, with only one student preparing for pastoral ministry). We began the seminar with a few overarching ideas. The first was the Buechner quotation from *Wishful Thinking* below (this is the full quotation as opposed to the often quoted last line).

Vocation

It comes from the Latin vocare, to call, and means the work a person is called to by God.

There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of Society, say, or the Superego, or Self-Interest.

By and large a good rule for finding out is this: The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world needs most needs to have done. If you really get a kick out of your work, you've presumably met requirement (a), but if your work is writing cigarette ads, the chances are that you've missed requirement (b). On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you have probably met requirement (b), but if most of your time you are bored and depressed by it, the chances are you have bypassed (a), but probably aren't helping your patients much either.

Neither the hair shirt nor the soft berth will do. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

The first session dealt with the assumption that we are called to a life, not just to a career. We told them that this seminar was going to be an exploration of questions and that it was but the first step in a life-long journey of exploring their call. We thus began with a list of questions:

1. How do we identify the worlds "deep hunger?"
2. How do we recognize our "deep gladness?"
3. What do you think you are living for?
4. What is keeping you from living fully for the thing you want to live for?
5. What is the organizing story of your life?

The first two questions arise from Buechner's definition of vocation. Mahan in *Forgetting Ourselves on Purpose* raises the third and fourth questions in his introduction. The fifth question comes from the following quote by John Bennett in *Academic Life: Hospitality, Ethics and Spirituality*.

Our philosophies are related not only to our ethics but also our spiritualities.... [this] reaches out to the broader social and personal interests. Basically, it is the living out of the organizing story of one's life.... The organizing stories of our lives turn around that to which we are ultimately loyal and which we trust for our fulfillment.

Over the next ten weeks we read the two texts (Mahan and Clapper) and discussed these key questions along with many others. The class was conducted in true seminar format with a conversation leader but without lectures. The two texts were merely launching pads for our conversations. Some weeks we stayed close to the issues discussed in the text and in others we moved from them back to some version of the five questions above. One of the key lessons that we learned, is that it takes roughly five to six weeks for a sufficient level of trust to be built within the group for the members to be willing to openly discuss difficult or confusing aspects of discerning vocation. Because this meeting included lunch, we found that we spent the first 15 minutes of each gathering getting food, eating and checking in with each other. That left 30-35

minutes for discussion about that week's readings. After about 30 minutes the students seemed to have hit their limit for discussing difficult topics at one sitting so the timing worked well.

In his book Mahan discusses "moments of recruitment" or "epiphanies." He tells the story of Dickey, a middle school student who began to ask some hard questions about the all white student body at his exclusive school. His peers were scornful of his desire to change to a racially mixed public school. Mahan says:

Dickey's confusion and disillusionment do not mean that he did not experience a call, an "epiphany of recruitment." Dickey was called. He was drawn beyond himself. He saw and felt something his friends did not. And for a moment he thought he had found himself too. An epiphany of recruitment is a significant experience, often remembered and sometimes repressed. It is not mere sentimental reaction or the product of emotional manipulation. The experience is often interpreted as an invitation to see things differently, to live a different kind of life, to embrace one's unique vocation. The events that give rise to these experiences are ordinary enough. They are more often than not, described as "no big deal."

As part of the seminar we asked the students to keep a personal journal that we would never see and jot down these moments of recruitment as they happened or as they came to mind. The freedom in this sort of journaling is that all that is required is to write the thought down. The writer is not required to analyze it or understand its meaning, but merely to record those things that have moved them in heart or mind. For the scientists in the group, we encouraged them to treat it like observational data and let the analysis come later. Even at the age of 20, many of our students came to recognize that the seeds of who they are and the general direction of their calling is already known to them. One student stated rather honestly that what she had liked about her major was the diversity of topics studied but in fact did not like the subject matter and had no desire to pursue a career in that field. This was a frightening thought but also a freeing one. Another student talked about how much she felt at home on international mission trips and that she now wanted to see if she could shape a career that would involve international relief work.

What we learned was that our students have a collection of experiences that have had a meaningful impact and that what they need is to be given permission to not have to determine what it all means at this precise moment. Parker Palmer in *Let Your Life Speak*, talks about some of these same ideas. He describes the Quaker process of forming a "clearness committee" where a group of trusted friends are gathered to aid you in making a decision. Their role is to ask you questions but not to give you answers. Palmer clearly describes the twists and turns of his own vocational journey (including a battle with depression) and affirms that God calls us to a life that is consistent with who we are. Unfortunately, Palmer's book does not resonate well with college students – Mahan's book seems to be a good substitute.

As we met and talked, the group continually came back to many of the same topics. Some of the essential issues were:

- The task is to figure out the next step, not your whole life. We repeatedly asked students to think of what they might do next to test the general sense of direction that they were discerning.
- There needs to be a willingness to be comfortable with uncertainty, we can not lock down our future in advance
- God will not ask us to do something that is fundamentally contrary to our nature. The place to where we are called is a place of deep gladness. That does not necessarily mean that it is easy, but it will be a source of joy and fulfillment. In fact, that is Buechner’s test for identifying if we have found our call.
- Our call needs to be discerned apart from what others (parents, professors, peers, etc) think that our call should be. Over and over Mahan emphasizes that many scripts are given to us and we need to learn the difference between following a script and following a call (Buechner’s description is “many voices”). This was an issue for many of the students in our group as they came to identify the family scripts that were are work in their lives (one student was the first member in the family to get a college degree so was the bearer of many hopes and dreams of other people).
- How does our calling address the fact that by the very nature of earning a university education in the United States of America, we are some of the richest people in the world? What obligations does that bring with it? What guilt comes along with that fact? Are we all called to live in poverty?
- God uses us where we are. Vocation is not as simple as finding one right path for our life and if we make a mistake our life is then ruined. This fear of making an error seems to be at the root of many students’ paralysis—that is, they think it is better not to choose than to choose wrongly.
- The need for all of us to be “story tellers”—students need to hear that the lives of those older than them are messy and that rarely is a vocational journey a straight line. Much of what faculty shared in the discussions, was simply the product of wisdom gained by life experience (mistakes and all).

On the day of the retreat, we took students to a quiet place where we could have a nice meal and they could spend time in the gardens alone thinking. The location was fairly near the school, but going on the retreat did take them off of the campus. We asked the students to spend some guided time looking at their journals (the prompts can be found in Appendix 3). Our goals for them for the day were fairly simple:

1. To give them the time away from school to think in a concentrated way about what they had been learning about themselves and their own sense of vocation.
2. To ask them to think through what a next step might be. We had them write letters to themselves that we never saw, but mailed back to them three months after the end of the seminar.
3. To reflect on what some wise people have said about vocation. We read a sermon of Buechner’s together and discussed what insight might be gained from it.
4. To be there as mentors should they want someone to talk to as they read and thought through their own journal.

All of the students said that the time was helpful and meaningful.

Next Steps

The general consensus of the students in the seminar was that thinking about vocation in an “abstract sense” rather than tied to a specific discipline was helpful. We believe that adding this component to the discussion about vocation in our department will be an important supplement to the things that we are already doing in the department which are predominantly focused on professional discernment.

We want this to be a valuable experience to students, yet do not want to add one more “to do” to their very full senior year, thus we want to see if we can incorporate some aspects of the vocation seminar into our already existent senior seminar. Because of the need to build up trust over time, we are considering including a 15-30 minute segment on vocation in each of our senior seminar sessions and a one day retreat. We learned in the senior seminar that 30 minutes is about the right amount of time to discuss each reading but that needs to be balanced with the other things the need to be accomplished in our senior seminar. This will be tried in the Spring of 2009 when Maria Zack will be in charge of the seminar. We hope to create a model that can be used by other academic departments at PLNU.

In addition, we are beginning the development of a “vocation” webpage that will house resources for students and faculty. This will be an on-going project for much of 2008 and 2009. Our hope is to incorporate many of the good ideas that we discussed in the Vocation Panel Session at the ACMS meeting in June of 2007. The site can be found at <http://www.pointloma.edu/MICS/Vocation.htm>.

References

Arnett, Jeffrey, 2004, *Emerging Adulthood, the Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*, New York, Oxford University Press.

Buechner, Frederick, 1993, *Wishful Thinking*, San Francisco, Harper Collins.

Clapper, Gregory, 2005, *Living Your Heart's Desire, God's Call and Your Vocation*, Nashville, Upper Room Books.

Mahan, Brian, 2002, *Forgetting Ourselves on Purpose, Vocation and the Ethics of Ambition*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Appendix 1

Sophomore Level Introductory Course Descriptions

Computer Science

CSC254 Data Structures and Algorithms (4 units)

Standard data structures, including queues, stacks, trees and graphs, as objects defined and illustrated with associated dynamic storage management mechanisms; computational complexity is explored through the design and analysis of searching, sorting and graph algorithms. Lecture three hours and laboratory two hours each week.

Information Systems

ISS234 Introduction to Information Systems (4 units)

This course is an overview of the field of information systems and is intended to give the student a summary of the topics to be covered in the IS major. The topics covered include an introduction to the computer-based information system, information use in the marketplace, product and service quality, system theory and methodologies, the ethical implications of information technology, and the fundamentals of computer processing and database management. Further topics are the computer based information system in accounting, decision support and office automation, organizational information systems and information as a managed resource.

Mathematics

MTH232 Linear Algebra (2 units for first quad)

A computational introduction to linear algebra with applications. A study of linear equations, matrix algebra, Euclidean spaces and subspaces supported by the use of a symbolic computer algebra system.

MTH242 Number Theory with Proofs (2 units for second quad)

An introduction to proofs using the study of natural numbers, integers, prime factorization, divisibility, congruence, multiplicative functions, continued fractions, quadratic residues. Methods used include investigation, conjecture, inductive and deductive proofs.

For further details, see the PLNU Mathematical, Information and Computer Science Department's website (www.pointloma.edu/MICS.htm). Course syllabi for each class can be seen on the web pages of various faculty members.

Appendix 2

Vocation and the Ordinary Christian Seminar Schedule for Spring 2007

Texts:

Forgetting Ourselves on Purpose by Brian Mahan

Living Your Heart's Desire by Gregory Clapper

The assignments are to be done after we meet. At the meetings, the assignments will be described in more detail. We will be asking you to do some journaling through out the seminar, but these journals are private, they are not something that we will ask you to turn in.

Preparatory reading:

Mahan - Preface

January 25

Why Vocation?

Buechner quotation

Mahan Introduction

Assignment: Start an epiphany journal (see p 32 of Mahan for help)
Read Mahan Chapter 1

February 1

Ask Me What I'm Living For

Mahan Chapter 1

Assignment: Continue recording epiphanies
Add recording distractions (p 34 of Mahan)
Read Mahan Chapter 2

February 8

Failing at Success

Mahan Chapter 2

In class sentence completion activity (see p 62-64 in Mahan)

Discuss Ignatian Discipline (p Mahan) and demonstrate

Assignment: Continue with epiphany and distraction journal
Ignatian Discipline activity (p 55)
Read Mahan Chapter 3

February 15

Ivan Ilyich, John Dean and I: How We Deceive Ourselves

Mahan Chapter 3

Assignment: Continue journaling
Think through one of your own rationalizations (p 87 of Mahan)
Read Mahan Chapter 4

February 22

If I'm Really Something, You Must Be Nothing Much

Mahan Chapter 4

Assignment: Continue journaling
Family resemblance activity (p 120 of Mahan)
A subtle shift activity (p 121 of Mahan)
Read Mahan Chapter 5

March 1

Forgetting Ourselves on Purpose

Mahan Chapter 5

Assignment: Continue journaling (think a bit about rationalization vs. reason p 166 of Mahan)
Fowler vocation reflection (p 177 of Mahan)
Read Mahan Afterward (Mahan Chapter 6 is optional)
Read Clapper Introduction and Chapter 1 over Spring Break

March 8 – Spring Break

Casablanca Movie Night sometime March 12-14 (optional)

March 15

I'm No Good at Being Noble: Christian Vocation in a Cynical World

Clapper Introduction and Chapter 1

Assignment: Continue journaling
Reaction to Jayber Crow's calling (Chapter 5 and 6 of Wendell Berry's
Jayber Crow)
Read Clapper Chapter 2

March 22

The Gospel and Work

Clapper Chapter 2

Discuss Jayber Crow's calling

Assignment: Continue journaling
Answer #5 p 47 of Clapper
Read Clapper Chapter 3

March 24

RETREAT (Saturday from 9-5)

Forrest Gump Movie Night (optional)

March 29

Freedom and Obedience: The Paradox of "Calling" in the Christian Tradition

Clapper Chapter 3

Assignment: Continue journaling
Answer #4 p 65 of Clapper
Writing response to Forrest Gump's "it's both"
Read Clapper Chapter 4

April 5 – Easter Recess

Babette's Feast Movie Night sometime April 9-11 (optional)

April 12

Living and Working From the Heart

Clapper Chapter 4

Assignment: Continue journaling
Answer #4 p 87 of Clapper
John Henry Newman essay "Divine Calls" (from *Callings* by William Placher)
Read Clapper Chapter 5

April 19

Fulfillment in Vocation: A Christian Vision

Clapper Chapter 5

Discuss Newman's essay

Assignment: Continue journaling
Answer #4 p 103 of Clapper
Read Clapper Chapter 6 (note Chapter 6 is his own winding journey of discernment)

April 26

Story Telling

Leaders share our stories

Closing discussion

Appendix 3 Vocation Day Retreat

- 7:00 Gather at PLNU and depart
Coffee Break at Starbucks
- 8:30 Arrive, find room and get settled
Pray
- 9:00 Perfect Day questions (time alone)
- 9:45 Buechner sermon “The Calling of Voices” (from *Secrets in the Dark*) – read and discuss
- 10:30 Timeline of moments of recruitment/significant events
Present distractions – where does your mind keep drifting?
- 11:15 Gather – discuss pattern analysis
- 11:30 Read through the piles of notes
What do they learn about themselves?
What might be the implications for vocation?
What is the next step?
- 12:00 Gather – write note to themselves about one important impression from today and one concrete thing that they are going to do in the next three months. Seal the envelope.
- 12:10 Lunch
- 1:00 Depart
- 2:30 Return to PLNU

Exercise #1: Perfect Day

1. Think about your last two years and think of a day that you thought was near “perfect.”

- What were the qualities of that day? e.g. What were you doing? Were you alone or with others? What was the weather like?
- What about that day makes you think of it as a really good day?

2. Think about one incident in the last two years when you felt like you had really done something well. This could be anything from writing a good paper to listening to a friend in need. What about that incident did you find fulfilling? From where did your sense of “good job” come?

3. Now imagine your life in five years.

- What would a perfect work day look like? Think in terms of qualities not a particular profession – e.g. How would your day be structured? What kind of people would you be interacting with?
- What would a perfect non-work day look like?

4. Look at the answers to those three questions. Do they provide any insight into what makes you feel fulfilled and in which you find joy.

Exercise #2: Timeline of Moments of Recruitment

Pull out your journal if you have been keeping one. If not, just work your way through the questions.

It is often helpful to think about your life by dividing it up into chronological periods. The most information is going to come from the last two periods of your life, but there will be things from your childhood as well. For each of the periods below think about “moments of recruitment”.

These can be events large or small that:

- Left you with a feeling that you had done something important or meaningful
- Left you feeling like you needed to do something (even if you didn’t know what)
- Moved your heart, even if you can’t explain how or why
- Changed the way that you see the world or see yourself
- Helped clarify what is important to you

Periods:

- Elementary School
- Middle School
- High School
- Years at College/University

Distractions

1. What are the things to which your mind keeps wandering lately?
2. Think of the small things (remember to get the oil changed on the car) and the big things (what happens after graduation?)

Exercise #3 Look for Patterns

Read through all of the writing you have done today two or three times. Page through your journal if you have been keeping one.

What patterns do you notice?

What does it tell you about who you are?

What does it tell you about the things that give you joy?

What does it tell you about the issues that tug at your heart?

What does it tell you about the qualities of life that are important to you?

What might be the implications of this information on your sense of “calling?”

What is one concrete thing you can do in the next three months to test a sense of direction (this could be anything from seeking a mentor, to taking a trip to applying to graduate school)?

Appendix 4 Resources

Reading List:

Core Texts:

Forgetting Ourselves on Purpose by Brian Mahan

Living Your Heart's Desire by Gregory Clapper

Other Books and Articles (background reading and potential sources of excerpts for the course):

Jayber Crow by Wendell Berry

Life Together by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons by Frederick Buechner

The Sacred Journey by Frederick Buechner

Hearing with the Heart by Debra Farrington

A Dresser of Sycamore Trees by Garret Keizer

The Spiritual Life of College Students produced by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA.

College of Character by Warren Bryan Martin

A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life by Parker Palmer

Let Your Life Speak by Parker Palmer

To Know as We are Known by Parker Palmer

Callings by William Platcher

Who Cares? Rediscovering Community by David Schwartz

Vocation: Discerning our Callings in Life by Douglas Schuurman

Exiles from Eden by Mark Schwehn

Leading Lives That Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be by Mark Schwehn and Dorothy Bass

The Will of God as a Way of Life by Gerald Sittser

Courage and Calling by Gordon Smith

Websites:

American Mathematical Society (career website):

<http://www.ams.org/employment>

Association for Computing Machinery (career website):

http://campus.acm.org/crc/crc/categorylist-crc24-crc.cfm?cat_id=61

Lilly Endowment Program for the Theological Exploration of Vocation:

<http://www.ptev.org/>

Lilly Endowment Vocation resources (includes books, movies and syllabi):

<http://www.ptev.org/indexer.aspx?sect=resources&tid=-10&iid=3>

Mathematical Association of America (career website):

<http://www.maa.org/students/undergrad/career.html>

Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) website on Spirituality in Higher Education

<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/spirituality.html>

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