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Faith Today

By Dolores Leckey
NC News Service

The Dominican Sisters who taught in my elementary school carefully presented us with a three-part vocational outlook. There was priesthood or religious life, there was marriage and there was the single life.

I remember that single lay life had an aura about it, a bit of mystery and heroism. But, the Sisters assured us, not many would be called to that path. Our likely vocations would be marriage, religious life or priesthood, they predicted.

Later, in an all girls' high school staffed by another order of Sisters, the unspoken but influential assumption was that some of us were surely called to religious life; most, however, were on the way to marriage and to some kind of work in the world. Therefore it behooved us to be knowledgeable, disciplined, well-mannered, articulate, outspoken (but never rude), sure of our facts and grounded in church teachings.

Added to our academic curriculum were private conferences and counseling about our leadership roles in society and in the church.

We went off to college convinced that the world was open to us. Our duty was to prepare well to live out our vocations.

I look back on that foundation as the seedbed for my current concern about the importance of shaping a full theology of vocation for all members of the church. All are called to discipleship, to use Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words.

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The overarching Christian vocation is simply a call to active faith — faith that is lived out, as Father Edward Braxton of the Archdiocese of Chicago suggests.

Interwoven with that overall vocation, I am convinced, is the call for Christians to enter some kind of covenant — a relationship bonding them with others. That means they are called to enter into community. For example, there is:

- a priest's covenant with the people he serves;
- marriage as a covenant rela-



Vocation in a workaday world

Vocations

For most of us, writes Dolores Leckey, God's call is lived out in the world of work. We experience God, she says in the farms and factories, the kitchens and computers of our daily labor.

relationship between two persons;

- religious life as a covenant relationship between an individual and a particular community;
- a single person's network of relationships with family, friends or co-workers.

Within these various community

contexts, individuals find a concrete call to some kind of work.

How will we contribute our work to the welfare of the whole community?

How does work help us grow in the love of God and the love of neighbor?

Those are basic questions for all people. But the questions are especially poignant for the contemporary lay Christian who often is struggling to find meaning in his or her work.

In fact, there is growing interest in the spirituality of work today. Many Christians want to see how communion with God can be experienced in the midst of their ordinary activities.

Throughout the Christian era there have been voices alerting us to the ways the hidden dimensions of earthly labor draw us closer to God. These voices proclaim that one's work, wherever it is — at home, in the church, in society — is the site of vocation, of God's call.

The Christian tradition reminds us that we can learn to see the Lord in the clients or students or patients we serve, to listen to the Spirit who speaks through our children and friends, to touch Christ with our tools and even our word processors. Reflective self-examination and an openness to growth are important here.

Learning to perceive God this way, however, presumes some spiritual formation.

From my experience, small communities of faith are likely settings for spiritual formation. The actual work of church ministry is another setting for spiritual development. People serving on parish liturgy teams and committees, in religious education programs, on parish councils and social concerns committees can discover that their ministry strengthens their natural gifts. This might be seen as one way the institutional church prepares its members for mission to the world.

If we can begin to think of each person as called by God to some form of mission, I think we have the possibility of forging a broad vision of what the word "vocation" can mean.

Can we learn to listen deeply, to act courageously, to support one another?

If so, the way is open wide to new adventures in community and ministry.

Such are the ways of vocation.

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