

# Celebration of Calling

**Peter Rhea Jones**

Senior Pastor

First Baptist Church, Decatur, Georgia

As a sympathetic outsider I want to register that I'm impressed by the professional aspect of ASBCM. I have perused the publications and have sensed the dignity and the depth. You will succeed in heightening the visibility of campus ministry and eventually will educate the constituency to the magnitude of ministry contributed by the campus ministry.

As a sympathetic outsider I would also register personal intrigue that you did Sunday afternoon cluster groups by years of tenure. With all our sensitivity to the stages of adult life and phases of faith development you are recognizing implicitly that campus ministers themselves may go through changing ministry styles and personal boredom and/or renewal and that years of service alter a person's being and attitude. While an individual campus minister may have more in common with a less experienced campus minister or someone with a more similar style or outlook, significant interchanges between peers in tenure could be an exceptionally valuable sharing and stimulation. One cluster group caught my eye especially because it was for those with twenty years tenure. They have stayed long enough to see some results. An old seminary professor, "Prof" Johnson, spoke of his later years "when your ships start coming in."

By now you have listened to the stories of several of your fellow ministers, heard from NSM, and participated in practical ministry cluster groups. The Sunday evening topics and facilitators looked enticing. You listened to creative Clemmons' keynote about calling. Now after the respite and refreshment of an adjournment you return to celebrate your calling at a climactic banquet. I am privileged to celebrate our common calling to the ministry but especially your calling to campus ministry.

The calling to campus ministry is not a trivial pursuit. The ministry to which you are called is eminently worthwhile. In my seminary teaching days I was out there as a resource person on student retreats. I have given a part of my being to BSU. I recall plebes at the Point, intellectuals at Vandy, assemblies in Ala-

bama. I especially remember a snowball fight in Arkansas with a group in which *koinonia* was actually occurring. I have seen firsthand the ministry of availability you perform, how you are there for students when the windmills of their minds are moving. I believe in what you are doing. I admire and appreciate you and recognize the high calling to which God has called you. Many of you are underpaid, and none of you is generously rewarded monetarily. You have been among those on the cutting edge who have played a major role in leading our denomination to support world hunger. You have given up weekends and week nights. You have also enjoyed your calling through your students. There is a certain gladness in giving and being spent. Let us first give passing attention to understandings of calling.

### Concepts of Calling

Carlyle Marney in a lecture once asked, "How do we love God and love the neighbor?" And then he answered as Martin Luther might have done, "We serve God, we love God, we serve and love our neighbors *in community, through vocation.*" You are serving and loving God in a special community through the vocation of campus minister. Let us turn to the Bible for a normative understanding of calling.

In the Old Testament vocation is the calling of Israel to be the people of God. R.L. Scheef defines the biblical doctrine of vocation as "God's call to his people to become instruments of his purpose at work in history. . ."<sup>1</sup> Through the campus minister comes God's call to students to be his people in the university and to become instruments of his purpose at work in history. In the Old Testament individuals are also called to particular tasks (Ex. 3; Isa. 6; Jer. 1), and I believe you are so chosen.

In the New Testament vocation is the calling of people to follow Christ (Mt. 4:21-22; Mk. 1:19-20). The usages of *kaleo* make it evident that the primary calling shared by us all is to be a Christian and to bear witness to Christ. Even before your calling to campus ministry stands the priority to be a Christian, an exciting obligation not to be lost amid our professional responsibilities. As long as we live falsely in sin we are separated from God and are "uncalled." Part of the calling of campus ministry is to incarnate and model personal discipleship. Another part lies in calling others into the fellowship.

James Fowler in his book *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* says that "we shape a purpose for our lives that is part of the purposes of God by means of proposal and counterproposal, by means of inclination and the nudges or the real lures or shoves of the divine calling."<sup>2</sup> Your calling to ministry, as you have discovered, is not to some static, ideal form. Rather you are put in the position of negotiating the shape of your work as your opportunities and your understanding of the will of God grow.

We celebrate then the fact that you are called by God to do his purposes. We celebrate the fact that in hearing the Word and in obeying you have responded to his calling. Let us all commit ourselves afresh to our calling, see the grand design of participating in the purposes of God, and accept the dynamic, open-ended aspect of religious vocation.

### Challenges of Your Calling

Among your demanding challenges are three I want to single out and celebrate.

You are *challenged by the mild rebellion of the alumni* from the local church youth group who saunter off to college, enjoy their new-found freedom, devotedly attend Bedside Baptist, or stumble into worship at 11:05 at a variety of different churches. Most of them are relatively invisible to your purview because they don't show at BSU. Many of them find their primary group in a social fraternity or an informal group they knock around with or play soccer with while recording unlimited cuts at church. Many are not permanently lost to the church. Many of them assume that BSU is for the "real religious" or for those who do not belong to a sorority or for those who are going to seminary. The clinical truth is that these temporary alumni lessened their attendance in Sunday School prior to graduation from high school. They missed the last one or two summer youth camps because they had a summer job. They reduced regularity in Sunday School because they stayed out late on Saturday night and were drinking beer and trying to be cool. Only a couple of music types and the pastor's daughter kept singing in the youth choir during the twelfth grade. Local churches like ours seek aggressively to intervene later and reach singles in the early twenties when two-thirds are unmarried or to bring them back with a newlyweds class, but you have a chal-

lenge to appeal to some of these alumni during campus years.

There are potential BSU Council presidents out there who may not even do a look-see through your center if you have one. There are some neat students out there who could liven up your program and inject it with fresh ideas and impetus. More often they need BCM during direction setting days. I challenge you to envision these alumni "out there" and intervene. I challenge you. It is worth doing. You may even be accused of building a larger BSU. I celebrate your calling to reach the alumni.

You are *challenged by the seekers*, like Nicodemus, yearning for life. Some of the students with whom you interface are struggling to find a faith of their own or any faith at all. The secular university manages without the God hypotheses and mandates an enlightened humanism, an axiology predicated upon scientific positivism. Many students are confronted by this cold vision of reality challenging not only traditional faith and values but any previous lust for life. They may be disillusioned by the impersonal universe to which they are introduced or set on a spiritual odyssey by their dissatisfaction with life as they have found it.

I ran across an articulate expression in one of Hans Kung's books, penned by a young person yearning for life. It struck a chord within me. It speaks wistfully in the first person in the name of a few students you have counseled. Listen.

I wanted parents  
and got a toy,

I wanted to talk  
and got a book,

I wanted to learn  
and got reports,

I wanted to think  
and got knowledge,

I wanted a survey  
and got a glance,

I wanted to be free,  
and got discipline,

I wanted love,  
and got morality,

I wanted a calling,  
and got a job,  
I wanted happiness,  
and got money,  
I wanted freedom,  
and got a car,  
I wanted a meaning,  
and got a career,  
I wanted hope,  
and got fear,  
I wanted change,  
and received sympathy,  
I wanted to live . . .<sup>3</sup>

These strugglers, seekers after a mature faith, sometimes in a rare moment disclose their yearning to a campus minister if they sense she or he is an open person and a friend. In the privacy of your office you affirm the struggle and confess your own yearnings and give a glimpse of light. You treat personal revelations as sacred and express an empathy from your heart.

I believe a friend is someone who is interested in your story and a Christian friend is genuinely interested in your religious pilgrimage. I agree with Henry David Thoreau when he wrote the inspired words about friends:

They cherish each other's hopes.  
They are kind to each other's dreams.<sup>4</sup>

You are called as friend to cherish student hopes and be kind to their dreams.

I challenge you to minister to the seekers. You may be accused of being an intellectual. I encourage you to celebrate your calling to the seekers.

You are *challenged by the MBA mania*. The Big Questions are on the back burner. The Big Pursuit of the gold is on the front burner. Some of your students are far more interested in marketing than missions, more focused on social climbing than social ministry, more motivated toward the gold card than toward the godly life.

The state university itself is an educational-training con-

glomerate in which only a small minority of students engage in classical education. Some do learn about quantum mechanics and quatrains, ancient history and astronomy, categorical imperatives and objective correlatives. But liberal arts faculties sense a diminishment in their perceived cultural value because most contemporary students are there to learn trades albeit complex trades. Some sensitive campus ministers struggle with frustration. Where have all the dreamers gone, long time passes. Yet sixties rhetoric fails to ignite a pragmatic generation bound for yuppyland. As I perceive it ours is a time when many nominally Christian students do not see the issue as vocation but rather making money by setting goals. That is what life is about. Finding the will of God may still be a burning priority with a tithe of the crown, the in-group, the highly motivated who attend Student Week at Ridgecrest or Glorieta, yet it is assigned by most to the seminary bound.

Perhaps a new kind of campus minister is required by changing times, one with a new sensitivity to a changing job market and mentality, yet able to assume a prophetic posture as well. Some students will eventually search for something more meaningful a few years out. Some are born entrepreneurs God can use in the corporate world, and influential campus ministers will inspire them to do the Love Command and the Great Commission in the marketplace. Other students do not belong in business and are not being called to do vocation there though they go with the flow and drift with the current tide. They need an interpreter of life, and sometimes they turn to a campus minister. They need to rediscover the adventure of having a vocation. A couple of years ago I was out in the Philippines speaking at a mission meeting. One evening several missionaries and I were perched on a picnic table solving the problems of the world. A former student of mine was talking animatedly about missions and the appeal of a venturesome vocation. There was an unmistakable sense of risk and adventure and the excitement of being alive doing vocation. Several young missionaries worked in a refugee camp for boat people out in the boonies "twenty miles beyond the Great Commission." Others may win the keys to the executive washroom, but these young adults were fondling the keys of the Kingdom.

I challenge you to minister meaningfully during the MBA mania. You may be accused of selling out to the Establishment or of being counter-cultural but risk it in your unfolding voca-

tional adventure. Celebrate your calling to minister during the MBA mania.

### **Creative Moments in Your Calling**

You do have the privilege of relating to college age students during teachable moments. They are more open-minded and impressionable than they will be again. Some of them are open to you because they sense your personal interest in who they are and might become. You may share Big Time decision times like declaring a major or dropping The Romance or getting engaged. You may be the one they sit down with when dad and mom split up because dad is involved with this other woman. You may be the one who supported their dream to be a summer missionary. You may have been teaching a Bible study when the lights went on and a whole new world opened up for a student. You may have taken the crew to Ridgcrest for a week and they experienced a close fellowship that felt incredibly like koinonia. You may have been the one whom they came to when they felt their first adult doubts after a philosophy class or a science class or simply as an effect of existing in a highly secular university setting. You may have been the one they called in to referee when a conflict broke out in the BSU Council as a power struggle erupted.

There were times when Jesus was with his young disciples at growing moments. Jesus really seemed to enjoy the fellowship of his friends around the fire. He taught them formally in specific situations and casually in teachable moments. An argument broke out among them as to which of them was the greatest. "Great" evidently meant power and place. Jesus redefined and revised the definition of greatness as the one who is "least" among the disciples (Luke 9:48).

You have the privilege of being there during the teachable moments when the transitions happen. Yours is a calling to celebrate because your ministry touches, blesses, and changes lives. I believe in you and affirm you and your calling. Let the joy of your calling happen in you.

One day as I walked down the hallway of a college I saw a large sign with the startling words, "Will it matter you were?" It matters to God, to the Kingdom, to the people of God, to the needy world that you are. God bless you and your ministry.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>R.L. Scheef, Jr., "Vocation," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Volume 4 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 791.

<sup>2</sup>James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 126.

<sup>3</sup>Hans Kung, *Eternal Life?* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1984), pp. 195-96.

<sup>4</sup>Henry David Thoreau, "On Friendship," *One Thousand Inspirational Things* (New York: Spencer Press, 1948), p. 377.