### Parish Ministers Day of Retreat

### September 29, 2018

#### Schedule

9 am Mass

9:45 am Refreshments

10 am Introduction

* Part 1. Called By God (40 minutes)
* Part 2. Called As We Are (30 minutes)
* Break
* Part 3. Called to be Followers of Christ (1 hour)

12:10 pm Closing Prayer: “Called and Sent”

#### Program

#### Part 1. Called By God (1 hour with break)

**1. Everyone has a Call: short video clips from movies**

**2. Introduction to Calling (**using the content below**)**

Calling and vocation is a central part of the Christian life, encompassing:

* *who we are called to be*—the core of our identity, as created by God and baptized in Christ, and sent forth to serve by the power of the Holy Spirit;
* *how we are called to live*—our commitments of lifestyle and relationships, including marriage, parenting, or the single life;
* *what we are called to do*—the work, service and activities that fill our daily lives, including paid or professional work, volunteering, homemaking, raising children or caregiving.

We are called *by*God, who is the source of our callings. We are called *to*follow the way shown by Jesus and taken up by his disciples; this calling we share with each other. We are called *as*unique persons with a particular history and circumstance. We are called *from*the losses and grief we suffer over time, so that we can embrace life again. We are called to give our lives *for*others, not simply for our self-improvement or fulfillment. We are even called *in*our deepest suffering to carry out God’s purposes in mysterious ways. We are called *through*the people in our lives, because vocation takes root in community. And, finally, we are called together to live *within*God’s loving embrace, both now and in the life to come. (From: *The Stories We Live: Finding God's calling All Around Us*. Kathleen Cahalan. Eerdmans, 2017.)

**3. Exploring Calling in Images**

Using the visual faith process people will name their experience of calling and vocation. Spread the “Calling Images” on the table for all to see. Organize people into groups of 4-6 people.

Ask people to select an image that reflects their experience of calling and vocation. Then ask them to share their story in small groups:

* How does this image capture your experience of calling and vocation?
* What emotions/feeling surface in you as you look at this image?
* What does this image tell you about your view of God and how is involved in your life and in your calling and vocation?

When all of the groups have concluded storytelling, invite people to share their insights about calling and vocation the emerged from their image experience.

**4. Presentation: Three Images of Vocation**

Presentation, followed by discussion in the same small groups used in the visual faith activity.

Is your calling more like an ACORN, PILGRIMMAGE, or SURPISING DISCOVERY?

**Vocation like an acorn**: experiencing God’s call as a precise plan, or at least having a strong sense from children that God has called you to a particular role, relationship, or gift. Something has been given to people to do. A person’s life could only become one thing like an acorn becoming an oak tree.

**Vocation as a pilgrimage**: experiencing God’s call as a journey. Pilgrims experience a call to follow a particular way and trust that what they need will emerge as part of the journey. Pilgrims must walk to figure it out: to learn as they go, to struggle under difficulty, and even to fail at times. As a pilgrim, being called by God means trusting in God’s companionship no matter what happens along the way. Callings become a response that requires that we discern the path with God’s guidance.

**Vocation as a surprising discovery**: “Aha!” experiences can reveal a direction or purpose that people might not have seen or understood, even though it was right in front of them. People discover an ability or develop a passion; they are awakened to a gift, and they fall in love in way that never leaves them. Regardless of whether that gift becomes paid employment, many people find that callings are rooted in something they are given to do and love doing for others.

Each of these images—acorn, pilgrimage, and surprising discovery—is a key way to experience God’s call. The images tell us that vocation is something we make with God, who can be known and named as planner, walking companion, and gift giver. In these sense our experiences of God and vocation are better understood on a continuum from the highly detailed to the less precise, with everything in between.

Some people experience callings as a choice they make, while others sense that they have no choice but are born into their vocation or given gifts they must use. When you hear God’s call in your life and in the lives of those around you, remember to affirm that God has many ways, not just one way.

God does not create us *with* a vocation (one single plan that God has made), but with the capacity for vocations (that ability to engage in dialogue with God and others to create a plan for our life). Vocation becomes then, a creative act, something we create with God and others, unique to each of our lives.

**Reflection**

Ask people to reflect on the following questions and share their responses in small groups:

* Consider your callings: Are you more like the acorn, the pilgrimage, or a surprising discovery? Share a story that illustrates why you chose your type of calling.
* What images of God and vocation come to mind from your callings?

#### Part 2. Called as We Are (45 minutes)

**1. Introduction**

God calls you as the person you are in the particularities of your life. You can only live our your vocation as the person you are; I can only become the person I am called to be in the context of my life. God’s call to you is not a generic calling, but is specific to your time in life and place in the history of the world. Vocation is God’s call to your life’s particularities as you know them, that which is a given in your life (gender, family, ethnicity, time in history) and what you can make of it (education, opportunities, relationships). Even your understanding of faith, vocation, and God arise from these contexts. You have been given this life, and you have to discover God’s call *as* you are.

Vocation is about the whole of your life, your whole life long. How was God calling you as an infant or child? And now, how might God’s call relate to your development as youth, young adult, adult, and older adult?

We develop in two ways: First you become a person, with a sense of who you are, through relationships with others; through in-between-ness of relationships, you construct yourself. Making meaning is the central way in which you form a sense of self, identity, and purpose.

The second way you develop is obvious: you change over time. You make transitions over the course of your development which require you to make new meaning from experience. Transitions disrupt your sense of self. Life is motion, and the motion of development requires you to make meaning with each new life phase. The way in which you negotiate each transition in the life span can determine how well or how poorly you live into the new situation.

Vocation, then, is Christian meaning making. It refers to the ways we “take in,” construct, reconstruct, critique, and identify what is significant in relationship to God and others. God’s call comes to use from birth till the end of our days in multiple and varied ways. You experience God’s call anew through particular developmental tasks that emerge in each part of the life span.

**2. Explore: Chapters of Life**

God’s callings are multiple and varied in your life, emerging in different ways, given your age and the life tasks you task. Vocation is not static or linear, but dynamic, sometimes fluid and at other times more stable. It is complex and multifaceted and is not determined once and for all in your life. Across the life span, God calls us as infants to gaze and behold, as children to play, as youth to begin exploring identity, as young adults to ask big questions and dream big dreams, as adults to love and work, in later stages of adulthood to step back and then step back in, and in elder years to give and to let go.

**Activity**

Invite the participants to image their life as the chapters in a book that is still being written. Using the chapters imagery, ask them to name the key chapters in their life that reflect stages—as a child, teenager, young adult, midlife adult, mature adult, older adult—and the transitions in their life—growing up, education and graduations, first job, changing career, first house/apartment, marriage, becoming a parent, raising children, becoming a grandparent, retirement, and more.

Ask the participants to give each chapter a descriptive title that names their experience of calling and vocation at the stage or transition. For example: “Living into the call and challenges of being a parent” or “Embracing the joy of being a grandparent” or “Starting a new job.” Give them examples from your own life so they can see how the activity works in practice.

**3. Reflect: Callings Over Time**

Ask people to reflect on how they experienced God’s calling in the different chapters of their life and how they have seen God’s callings and their vocation emerge at different stages of their life. Conclude their reflection with: ***How do you experience God’s callings at this age in your life?***

In small groups have people share their insights how God’s callings and their vocation emerged at different stages of their life, and how they are experiencing God’s calling today.

#### Part 3. Called to be Followers of Christ (1 hour)

**1. Introduction**

Jesus called his disciples to follow him rather the disciples choosing to follow him. Jesus’s “way” was radical, requiring disciples to give up loyalty to job, family, friends, and nation in order to embrace Jesus’ way of life. As disciples of Jesus today, we are called in the following ways: to be a follower, a worshipper, a witness, a neighbor, a forgiver, a prophet, and a steward.

We have a common, shared calling as Christians. Discipleship is our most foundational and fundamental identity and vocation—we are called *together* to be a community of disciples.

**2. Explore: Called to Be a Follower**

Read the story: “Jesus Calls the First Disciples” in Matthew 4:18-5:2:

*As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying. . . .*

Share with the group:

The opening scene of Jesus’ ministry after his baptism is all action—he walks, calls, teaches, proclaims, cures, hikes, sits down, and speaks. If you are going to follow, you have to get and get going even if you are in the middle of something. If you don’t follow immediately, you are going to miss it: you won’t hear his teaching or witness him cure the sick or see the great crowds coming or finally sit at his feet to listen.

**Reflect**:

Ask each person to take a few moments to reflect on the question below and share their responses in small groups.

***How has Christ called you to follow him today?* OR *What does it mean for you to be a follower of Christ today?***

**3. Explore: Six Ways of Following Jesus**

Introduce the “six ways of following Jesus.”

Invite people to form groups of 4-6 people around one of the six ways we follow Jesus—worshipper, witness, neighbor, forgiver, prophet, and steward. They should select a “way” that reflects how they see their service or ministry in the parish or in the community, e.g., catechists as “witness.”

Ask each group to read the read the Scripture passage, and then reflect on the focusing question and commentary.(The commentary for each question is adapted from *Living Your Discipleship: Seven Ways to Express Your Deepest Calling* by Kathleen Cahalan and Laura Fanucci.)

1. How can we follow Jesus as a ***worshipper***—one whose heart is filled with adoration and love for the source of life, the One on whom we depend?

* Suggested Scripture: Matthew 8:1-13

Traditionally, Christians have worshipped God through different types of prayer: praising God in adoration, seeking God’s forgiveness through confession, thanking God for blessings, and petitioning God for our needs and those of others (ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication).

1. How can we follow Jesus as a ***witness*** to what God has done for us?

* Suggested Scripture: Luke 24:36-49

To be a witness means to give testimony, to proclaim, or to announce a message. Witness is to give testimony to the truth about what God has done for us, in and through Jesus Christ. When we live our callings, when we tell each other how God has called us, or when we admit how hard it can be to figure out what to do and what God wants—that is be a witness. It is tell a truth about our lives , about our certainties, and our doubts, our fears, and our joys.

1. How can we follow Jesus as a ***neighbor*** to those around you?

* Suggested Scripture: Luke 14:12-14, Luke 10:25-37

Jesus neighbor ethic is built on the Great Commandment that unites love of God and love of neighbor. Jesus expands his teaching on neighbor to the point of embracing love for one’s enemies. Jesus tackles the question of who is the neighbor in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Neighbors are neighbors (people we know), strangers (whether near or far), and enemies (critics and opponents). By stretching our instincts past our comfort zone to include these widening circles of neighbors, strangers, and enemies, we enter into discipleship’s view of “neighbor-hood” as a state of being in which all are drawn together in the household of God.

1. How can we follow Jesus as a ***forgiver***—to forgive those who harm us and seek forgiveness when we harm others.

* Suggested Scripture: Luke 7:36-50,

Learning to be a forgiver begins with first recognizing that I am a sinner and that my actions hurt other people. I have to start with seeking forgiveness. When I am forgiven, then I know love and I can learn to practice forgiving others. Forgiving others for their sins against me requires great love.

1. How can we follow Jesus as a ***prophet***—to declare what is wrong with our communities and world, and call people back to right relationship through justice and mercy.

* Suggested Scripture: Matthew 21:10-14

To be a prophet is to see what is wrong, broken, missing, or unjust in our society and to speak a word of truth that shines light on the situation. Prophets see the world as God sees the world and seek to share their vision with others. Acting prophetically is at the heart of what it means to follow Christ. To be a prophet can be an uncomfortable part of the call to discipleship. But it is also what I cannot *not* do as a follower of Christ. What is unjust about our time and place? How are we complicit in systems that contribute to the oppression of others? Where do we need to help call people back to God’s ways of mercy, forgiveness, justice, and peace?

1. How can we follow Jesus as a ***steward***—caring for God’s creation and the goods of the household.

* Suggested Scripture: Matthew 25:14-29

The call to stewardship means receiving gifts gratefully, nurturing their growth, and sharing them with others. The call to stewardship is the call to take care—of people, of places, and of talents and skills we have been given to share. Like the stewards in Jesus’ parable, we have been entrusted with God’s gifts in the expectation that we will allow them to grow over time. So we are called to be steward with our whole lives: stewards of our work and of our world around us.

**4. Conclusion**  
The program closes with application and reflection:

* How are you experiencing God’s call in your life today?
* How do you see you ministry or service in the parish or in the community/world a way to follow Jesus?
* How has you experiences today deepened your faith?