



Dare to be ONE

In a world as crowded as today's,
full of energy and excitement, beauty and splendor,
pain and suffering, riches and poverty,
many are looking for their own safe and cozy place.

In a time as busy as now,
many are still seeking their prime moment,
the stage when they finally step out of their cocoon
and into their own universe.

Our search sometimes is curious and intriguing,
and at times anxious and monotonous.
Searching alone, though, raises more questions,
heightens our apprehension, and adds to our confusion.

You are about to peek into the hearts
of genuinely loving and caring people,
to engage their intelligence, listen to their wisdom,
and question their choices.

However, I need to warn you, these glimpses
might leave everlasting impressions on your soul.

If you were to pursue your feelings and thoughts,
you too will see your place and time
in a whole different light and universe,
and your life will never be the same.

Welcome,
spring out of your fears and step into your future;
become one of us, uniquely different and richly blessed,
that is, called and chosen.

Call it not too late; call it for me today I go, for us I make tomorrow

Called by the Power of One, the Will of few,
Call it One, Call it a few, Call it the Difference made only by YOU.

— Raafat L. Zaki —

What does God really expect of me?
How can I hear and distinguish God's voice?
What is it about the ministry that is worth exploring
and merits my future?
What will become of me if I turn God down?
Couldn't I become a good Christian leader
without becoming a Pastor?
What is the difference between a
Christian and a Minister?
Is the ministry truly exciting and fulfilling?
CAN I MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

These were a few of the paramount questions on my mind at the age of sixteen. Central to this most exciting and energizing search to discern God's will was my spiritual inward quest; the quest to know the purpose of my life, and what difference I can make. My family and church had always had a great impact on my life, and were very supportive for they had anticipated my call. I was nurtured even before I started. My soul was being prepared for a vital and a unique call. However, it became my personal commitment and priority to discover and fulfill God's will. God provided the energy to pursue my calling, and fired up my deep desire to love and serve people, and supplied the zest to explore and follow the lead of the Spirit. In my personal spiritual disciplines; Bible reading, prayer life, public worship, mission service, and many learning opportunities; I found the stamina to wrestle with peer pressure to seek a career with a better financial return and a higher social status. Through it all, God always provided the comforting presence and staying power.

Those nearest to me knew me just as well, and sometimes even better than I knew myself. In addition to probing my inner desires, interests, and motivation; family members and close friends helped verify the reality of my thinking, feelings, and expectations.

My search was rewarding and my calling has been fulfilling. In God, I found grace and peace. In the Church, I found fellowship and unity, but in the ministry I have found meaning and purpose for my life.

In my experience I found that God takes interest in who I am rather than what I do. God is always talking even though I am not always listening. God did not call me because I was special; instead I am special because God has called me. God did not ignore my personal needs; rather, God has generously supplied for all my needs, affirmed my talents, and developed my simple faith. God did not force me to conform to a predestined plan nor threatened failure and punishment if I were to seek another vocation, rather God convinced me to joyfully pursue a brighter future, to live up to higher divine expectations. God met me where I was in order to lead me to where I must go.

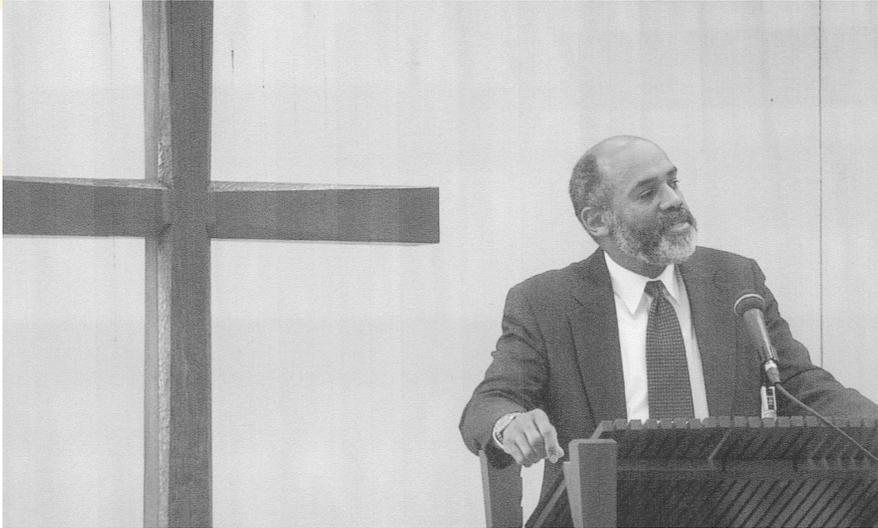


I learned to take the time to listen to God's voice in the Bible, worship, personal prayers, my encounters with people, family, friends, and the Church. Since I am a child of God, I also learned to listen to my gut feelings, heart desires, and everyday experiences. After all, to become a spiritual leader, a healer, and an agent of transformation I need to understand, experience, as well as enjoy God's presence. To become a blessing I needed to trust and act on God's promises. God's invitation to love and serve continues to transform my life, challenge my expectations, and heightens my awareness beyond any human imagination.

Friend, I challenge you not to underestimate your potential and what God can do with your life. God has made an investment in your future. Listen, search, and dare, for God may be calling you to make a difference. I would be delighted to hear from you.

— Rev. Raafat L. Zaki
email: rzaki@ctr.pcusa.org

The process of discerning the call to ministry was particularly difficult for me, not because of any uncertainty about my love for Christ and his mission, but because I questioned whether my talents were suited for the pastorate. I was raised in the church, literally. My father was a Presbyterian minister who served forty years in



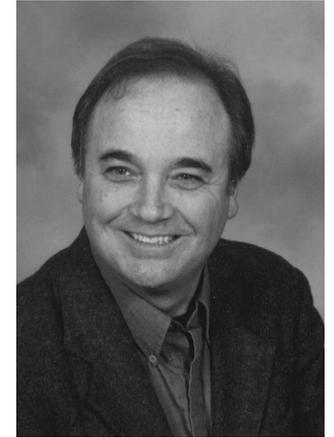
parish ministry. He was both energized and drew great satisfaction from that ministry but early on I thought it was not my calling. Nevertheless, I loved the work of the church, its music and worship life, its religious and moral leadership in the civil rights movement, its compassionate and enlightened involvement in inner-city ministry, its history of faith based organizing, its commitment to realizing the full potential of God's creation especially among all God's children.

This sincere love for Christ and for the exciting ministry of Christ's church was too strong to resist and I answered the call to ministry (not to parish ministry, but to the diverse ministry of God's church).

— Rev. Curtis A. Kearns, Jr., Director
Director, National Ministries Division, Presbyterian Church USA

A good friend once said to me: "When you know in your heart that you cannot do anything else, then God might be calling you to the ministry."

Well, I don't know if that is true or not. It certainly seemed quite real to us since my wife and I were compelled to leave the perceived security of a career, family and friends and packed up our belongings and our three kids in a rental truck and drove over a thousand miles to start seminary!



Could I do anything else besides ministry? Perhaps. Would I enjoy doing anything else besides ministry? Not a chance!

Let me clarify something: vocational ministry is the privilege and responsibility of every Christian. I understood that concept ever since I realized the full scope of God's care and nurture in my life. But vocational "professional" ministry may require a deeper level of . . . humility.

Yes, humility. A minister must be willing to humble herself or himself just like Jesus did. A minister must be able to convey both in word and deed how Jesus lived - feeding the multitudes, healing the sick, befriending the outcast, breaking human-made social and religious barriers, advocating for justice and peace; and how Jesus died - on a cross like a common criminal after a mock trial for shaking the foundations of the rich and powerful.

Can you do anything else? Of course. Can you be humble to the point of giving your life for Jesus? God will give you the strength, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

— Rev. Antonio (Tony) Aja
Associate Director, People in Mutual Mission
Worldwide Ministries Division, PC(USA)

My father was my religious education teacher and my mother was my pastor in Myanmar, where 85% of the people are Buddhists and the rest Hindus and Muslims. They taught me our Christian beliefs and values. They also taught me how to live in harmony with people of other faith.

All the time I was studying, I thought I was being trained to go home to Myanmar to teach again. God had another plan in mind. In 1992, I was called to the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, Maryland to serve as an interim associate for Christian Education and Youth ministries for one year. I did not think I would know how to serve Americans. With fear and a trembling heart (comforting myself saying - it's



only for a year) I went. I learned a lot about ministering to young people and their families. I was permitted to be an Asian that I am. Our cultural differences were strength to the ministering together.

After that year, I was called to do the same kind of work at Red Clay Creek Presbyterian Church. The same thing happened. In January of 1994, I decided to pursue ordination in the PC(USA). The Lord was kind to me. I prayed to God, "Lord, I feel called by you to pursue ordination. It could be just me. If it is truly you calling me to that kind of ministry please make the way clear. If not, I will understand and quit." The way was clear and I was ordained and called to serve as an associate pastor at Overbrook Presbyterian Church in Columbus, Ohio. I served there for four years until I came to Louisville where I am serving in the same capacity at Harvey Browne Presbyterian Church.

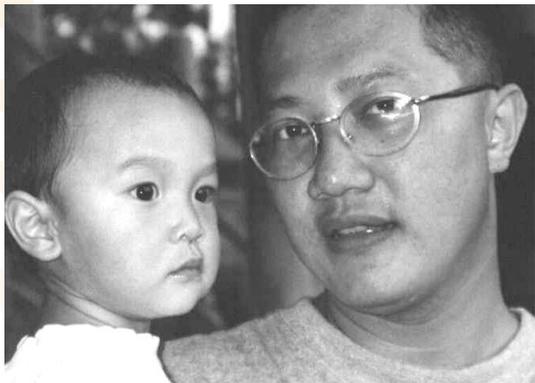
One thing I want to emphasize is that our God calls anyone regardless of our skin color or race or accent. We don't have a choice when the Lord calls us to serve. It works when it is God who wants us to serve him together. I became a pastor by default because it was God who redirected my route. I had originally wanted to continue teaching and become a seminary professor back home.

I am a car and God is the driver. I am glad to be one of God's many cars. God calls everyone for different purposes. It's all in the listening, hearing, and understanding.

— Rev. Dr. Lal Liani



In 1 Kings 19:12 God spoke to Elijah in “sheer silence” (NRSV), a “gentle whisper” (NIV). My being called to a vocation of ordained ministry was a similar experience. No dramatic mountain-splitting winds, no violent earthquakes or fires were involved.



Just a gentle but firm conviction that the One who is “the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction,” had done just that for me through my difficult childhood (divorced parents, death of father, forced immigration) and adolescence (relocation and adoption, living independently at 16), in order that I might, “be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves were consoled...” (1 Corinthians 1:3b)

Recognizing that the timely moments of grace and comfort that had sustained me through a challenging life were too numerous to be mere coincidence, I realized that a step by step process had been leading me into a knowledge of God’s love and calling me to partner with God in supporting others through a life of faith and loving. It has also become abundantly clear to me that, for the time being, the lack of ordained leadership in the Taiwanese American faith community clearly requires me to serve with diligence and creativity the emerging English-speaking congregations. And the imitation of Christ teaches me that inviting colleagues to join coalitions for ministering in teams and sharing limited resources is the best way to reach the largest number of Taiwanese and Asian Americans possible, with and for the love of Christ. So let us press on.



— Rev. David W. Shinn

My call to ministry started in my childhood when I would “see” myself in the pulpit. Whether in a dream or a vision, I don’t know. I was not raised in the church, so this was not a desire that came from admiring a certain person like a pastor or a teacher.

After high school, I attended Cook College and Theological School then known as Cook Christian Training School, wondering and hoping that this would somehow lead to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. It did not. That was back in the late ‘40s when women were not encouraged to enter the ministry. We were led to take classes in Christian Education while the men were given the opportunity to preach on the nearby Pima Indian Reservation.

While at the school, I met and married Carl Dickson who eventually became an ordained minister. For years I assisted him in every way possible until he became incapacitated by a stroke. In 1987, while struggling to care for him and working a secular job, I again “saw”



myself in the pulpit. This happened in the middle of the night. I was excited! Morning came, I felt foolish for thinking such a thought. I told the Lord that if this was really of Him, I would need to know for sure. I continued to tell the Lord that if anyone mentioned my age I would take it as a no. I called each of my six children telling of my plans to prepare for the ministry, fully expecting to be discouraged by at least one of them. To my surprise, every one answered in the affirmative, “Sure Mom, you can do it.”

Today, at the age of 74, I’m still going strong for the Lord. I’m pastoring the Owyhee Presbyterian Church on the Duck Valley Reservation, seeing the church grow by leaps and bounds.

— Rev. Josie Dickson

I am the pastor of the Iranian Church of Hope in Atlanta, Georgia and was born and raised in a Shi'ite Muslim family in Iran. I left my country at the age of 16 due to the Iran-Iraq war. Many families, including my own, were sending their sons out of Iran so they would not be drafted in the military service. By divine providence I was enrolled in a Christian school in Portugal. For the first time, I heard the Gospel. I had never met a Christian, seen a Bible, or attended church before that time.



As a Muslim, my first reaction to the claims of the Christian faith was an absolute shock. Gradually, however, as I began reading the Bible, and experiencing the love in the Christian community, I was drawn to the person of Jesus Christ. It took many months of studying, praying, arguing with my Christian friends and intense soul searching, but I finally surrendered my life to Christ and trusted in Him as my Lord.

Shortly after my conversion, as I was reading John 14:6, I came across the claims of Jesus. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one

comes to the Father except through me." I did not see any visions, no sounds nor any earth-shattering experience, but it was right then that I felt God's call in my life to spread the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ among my Iranian people. If my people are missing out on the eternal life that is found in Christ, then it was obvious that it was my duty and privilege to be involved in making Christ known to them.



Seventeen years have passed since I made that decision as a teenager. Despite many challenges and discouragements along the way, not once have I regretted dedicating my life to God. I truly feel that my life is blessed and fulfilled beyond my wildest imagination.

Every time that I serve someone in the name of Christ, every time that I show love or humility or forgiveness because of what Christ is doing in my own life, or every time that I teach or preach, I feel that my life has significance and purpose because God is using me as an instrument of His love for this world. And I would not trade that for anything else in this life!

— Rev. Sasan Tavassoli

The call of God to ministry was revealed to me in a basic process of elimination. I was born and raised in the church but hated preachers because they were always asking for money. I had a curiosity about people and what made them do the things that they did. I felt burdened by what Paul Tillich later defined for



me as “Ultimate Concern”. What is the bottom line in life? Like Moses, I was gifted with no place to use my gifts. I was a student of life who sought to explore life with others. God’s Presence was evident at an early age. From Sunday School lessons to Mama’s Bible stories, that m y s t i c a l connection of God’s Love in the vicissitudes of

life moved me to seek love in people and love to people. I can even love myself. Ministry has satisfied my hunger and has provided a haven for my gifts.

— Rev. Keith Paige

“The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

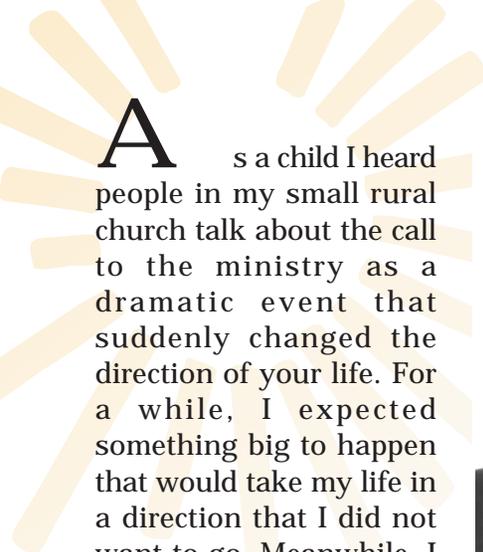
Exodus 3: 9 & 10

When I was seventeen years old, I struggled with myself whether I needed God in my life or not. I remember the night I prayed in tears for God’s will to be revealed to me. I was assured by the voice of the Holy Spirit in my heart that God had a plan to use me to serve Him as a pastor. It was unusual for women to be pastors in Thailand, especially at that time. It was not an easy



decision, but I felt sure of the call and also wanted to be a pastor to work with people and to shepherd and nurture them and to bring people to know Christ. After being a pastor at a village church for five years in Thailand, I then became a pastor of three churches in the Presbytery of Scioto Valley, Ohio.

— Rev. Krisana Poontajak



As a child I heard people in my small rural church talk about the call to the ministry as a dramatic event that suddenly changed the direction of your life. For a while, I expected something big to happen that would take my life in a direction that I did not want to go. Meanwhile, I was actively involved in the youth activities of the church and discovered that I particularly enjoyed helping others and working with issues of justice. I developed my public speaking skills and had a great time competing in and winning public speaking events. One evening, after speaking at a youth event at the church, an elderly woman said to me, “One day you will become a preacher”. What did she know that I didn’t, I wondered? Was some cataclysmic event about to change my life? Frankly, I was a little frightened as my desire was to be a medical doctor one day, not a preacher. I was afraid I would have no choice in the matter. So, I went off to college and then to the Peace Corps as a college teacher.



One evening, as I was preparing lectures in tropical Botany, I remembered the words that the elderly lady had spoken years earlier. “One day you will become a preacher.” I sat puzzled for a

while, for I was now a biologist, teaching in college and loved it. Weeks later, I came to the conclusion that my love for teaching was much larger than departing knowledge about the science of biology.

I had a deep desire to help students become better people through teaching. Could this be a call? No, I thought. But, in the end it was. I came to realize that the call for me was not a dramatic event in my life. It was connected to things I loved doing most, helping people through teaching. What a surprise! I never thought that a call to ministry could be so deeply connected to something I enjoyed so much. And now, for almost forty years, I have been involved in ministry.

While there have been many challenges along the way, I am still surprised by God and the joy of my call. And yes, I still get a charge out of helping people. I just do it in many different ways including teaching. The beauty of my faith journey is continuing to discover so many of the surprises, challenges and joys of being in ministry. God is indeed full of surprises.

One day I gave some pistachio nuts to Reza so that he would permit me to join in their games. His mother was soon informed, and she suddenly appeared in her black Chador (a long veil). While cursing and calling me “dog, pig, the son of Satan and the son of infidel”, she forced all the nuts out of his pocket, threw them at my face, spat on me, and violently dragged her son away. Reza was rebuked and beaten for accepting my delicious bribe and allowing me to play, before receiving a special ritual washing. One day at school, when I was seven years old, a classmate inquired why I missed the afternoon Islamic prayers. “Because I am not a Muslim, and I do not like your prayers,” I frankly replied, while I was actually acting on my father’s advice. As a result, I was forced to break the ice covering the pool, and to keep my hands in the icy water while I was publicly rebuked for my offensive statement and for missing prayers. After the lengthy speech, I was allowed to remove my numb hands out of the pool to receive a dozen beatings with a stick.



When I was fifteen, I accepted an invitation from a Presbyterian Missionary from the United States, to travel to Tehran for a Christian retreat. I was mesmerized by my encounter with children and people so different from all others I have met before. I left Tehran with the conviction that I had to become a little Jesus in my own town. I became a Christian and had a great interest in the ministry, so I studied theology in India, served as Pastor in Iran, studied Business, and then served as a Business Manager in a Conference Center, and later at the Worldwide Ministries Division of the General Assembly.

— Rev. Mehdi Abhari

Ever since confirmation, my first and ultimate call has been to say “yes” to God’s will for my life. The “yes” part is probably the hardest, because I’ve never been sure where God would lead me next.

My anchor verses have been Isaiah 65: 17-25 and Luke 13: 10-17.

As a community social worker and family counselor, I believed God was working through me to make a difference in the lives of women, children and families in crisis. As a pastor, I prayed God was using me through the preaching, teaching, administration of sacraments, counseling, moderating, visiting, praying, and leading to witness with a community that believes in the awesome power of God’s love and liberation. Now



as an Associate Stated Clerk and Director of the Department of Ecumenical and Agency Relations for the Presbyterian Church, I believe God has called me to be a small part in the business of seeking shalom — wholeness for the body of Christ and humanity.

I guess I do know where “yes” leads me . . . into the center of God’s will and the awesome blessing and joy of being a servant of the Most High God.

— Rev. Robina Marie Winbush