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Aging Well: Theological Reflections on the Call and Retirement by Jack L. Stotts

Dr. Jack L. Stotts retired from Austin Theological Seminary in 1996 where he served as president and professor of Christian ethics for eleven years. He had served twenty-two years on the faculty and administration of McCormick Theological Seminary. Published by The Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), January 1999, p. 25 . This information prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

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Introduction

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I. Calling and Call

Calling is the category by which we seek to understand and to elucidate the dynamic and content of God's calling to us and others.

II. Calling

God's calling comes to us out of the past. It addresses us in the present. It beckons us into the future.

III. Calls

We respond to God's calling in and though the calls that come to us. These calls are, at one level, structures of meaning, identity, attachment, contribution, and satisfaction. We create the particular structures--ecclesiastical, political, economic, familial, etc.

IV. Retirement: Re-considering One's Call

We are called to redefine ourselves, to listen and to look for how God is calling us now through all the potential new calls, what we are to do, where we are to do it, who we are and what are the locations for a call or calls that are being sounded all around us.

V. Retirement and the Call: What Constitutes a Good Retirement?

To be at leisure does not mean to abandon the values we have espoused previously. It is to put them in different forms. We continue to ask whether at retirement we continue to engage in practices that are expressive of the comprehensive love of God.

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Introduction

The occasion for writing this essay was the kind invitation to meet with the Retirement Planning Consultants and Regional Representatives of the Board of Pensions at their annual gathering in San Antonio, Texas in December 1997. These folks provide leadership for the Retirement Planning Seminars sponsored by the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for Presbyterian ministers, lay employees and spouses. David C. Rich, Director of Education and Communications for the Board of Pensions, invited me to share some theological musings about retirement and engage in discussion about what is our calling when we don't have a call as retired pastors. My thanks to him for encouraging me to make these remarks available more widely.

The invitation to write about my theological reflections about retirement was in many ways a gift to me, for it provoked me to put in order what had previously been random and fleeting thoughts about the subject. Having retired August 1, 1997, I was and still am a relative newcomer to "retirement land." So some of my thoughts and proposals may be premature. On the other hand, perhaps as a recent arrival I can point to some things that others with a longer tenure simply ignore because they have become familiar and taken for granted. Whatever the case may be, I appreciated the opportunity to think about some of the issues related to faith and retirement.

Thinking While Writing

One element of having to discipline my thoughts is that I think by and while writing. My former colleague at McCormick Seminary, Carl Dudley, when asked what he thought about some issue or recommendation would often reply, "How do I know what I think until I've said it?" I invoke a variant of that. It goes like this, "How do I know what I think about some issue or question until I write it down?" How I envy those who think on their feet. Not the quick retort for me. I

have to put you on hold until my pen and yellow pad tell me what I think about a subject or idea. My mind is connected to my writing hand, not to my tongue. That is one reason I am grateful for this opportunity to write down some theological reflections about retirement. What follows, then, are probings into understanding and a positioning of myself in terms of what I think about retirement, from a theological point of view. I hope you will think along with me about this important issue.

Retirement, initially in its broadest and secular sense, is that period in our lives when we are no longer employed and compensated on a full-time basis. That is not all that one can or should say about retirement. It is a starting point only, waiting for theological content to flesh out its meanings.

A Magical World

My initial conclusion about retirement is that it is a magical world. Now each month checks appear magically in our bank account, courtesy of wire transfers. The economic threat has been tamed, at least for now. In this magical time of retirement, the burden of "dressing up" for work every day is whisked away. I can select my own uniform. Now I can ask, "What do I want to do?" rather than, "What do I have to do for the seminary today?" The boundaries of my little world, small though it was, have collapsed. The terrain has shifted. I am free to erect different boundaries, to rearrange the landscape of my life. And that is just the problem. For in retirement I not only can but must reorder my life. In that sense the magical world of retirement is also threatening.

A Threatening World

As threat, retirement forces me to examine again such basic questions as, "Who am I?" and "What am I to do" as a citizen of this magical world? These queries demand answers, for my self-understanding, my sense of worth, my identity and my community have been wrapped up with fulfilling what I have believed to be an appropriate and vital response to God's calling, to serve God by serving the church, and more precisely to do so in the field of theological education. Now that call is no more. I have no specific call to order my day and night, at least no call in the sense of an ecclesiastical call to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Previously my work has been the primary sculptor of my life, giving shape and form to "fill up my time," giving those hours and days a pattern of familiarity. Now that is gone. What now will sculpt my days, giving them order and meaning? Those are the starting points for our theological reflections about the issues of calling, call, and retirement. What is my calling when there is no call?

The first two words--calling and call--are elusive and suffer from definition sprawl. The range of understandings goes from the trivial and common place "give me a call when you have a

chance"--to the profound--"God's calling is to a life of servanthood"--to the arresting and provocative, as when Dietrich Bonhoeffer asserts in *The Cost of Discipleship,* "When Christ calls a person, he bids that person to come and die."

My first task is to clear away some of the definition clutter, and provide a pathway through the forest of possible meanings. Lodged in the understanding of theology as reflection upon how we are to order our lives in response to God's ordering and reordering of our lives, individually and corporately, these theological definitions are somewhat arbitrary, though not without being informed by the tradition. They are not taken down from the shelf of agreed-upon definitions, but custom-made for our reflections. As theological definitions they are provisional and tentative, open to correction, but they may provide some common ground for thinking together.

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I. Calling and Call

Calling is the category by which we seek to understand and to elucidate the dynamic and content of God's calling to us and others. We begin with an affirmation about God, whom we have known in and through Jesus Christ and by the power of the Spirit.

Calling

God is the one whose very being includes calling. The creating God calls the world into being, and all that is in it. God's calling is to Abraham and Sarah, to David and to Solomon, and to the multitude of generations of the Hebrew people. In the New Testament God is calling through Jesus Christ--among others--fishermen, those with leprosy, a tax collector, a Samaritan woman, and Marys and Marthas by the score. Through Paul, God's calling is addressed to the Gentiles. God is the one calling the creation to remember the source and end of all that is and will be. God as the calling God initiates the relationship that is our destiny and our hope. We are, individually and corporately, invited and compelled to answer that call. The calling God reorders all that is so that individually and corporately we can be those people, individually and together, that God intends. In theology we seek to discern more clearly the content and the consequences of God's calling. The initial focus is on who God is and what God does.

Calls

In contrast to calling, calls are those channels through which God's calling comes to us. The initial focus is on the social, cultural, and ecclesiastical structures that provide conduits through which God's calling is mediated. We hear God's calling not abstractly but through the concrete challenges and opportunities that surround us. Through these transactions God's calling and our response may and do converge. To respond to the calling God is to respond to calls in the

world. We only respond to God's calling through mediating structures. These calls give shape and form to God's calling and therefore to our response to God's calling.

The calling is God's calling to us and to others. The call or the calls are the concrete and specific (though not unambiguous) locations for hearing and responding to God's calling. For example, a call to a professional ecclesiastical office is one form of hearing and responding to God's calling. But it is not one that excludes other calls--parenting, being a citizen, etc. Calling is singular. Calls are plural. Calling is enduring. Calls are provisional. Calling is universal in scope. Calls are geographically, socially, temporally, and culturally specific. Calling is of ultimate significance. Calls partake of the ultimate. Calling gives integrity to the multiplicity of calls. God's calling cries out for specificity in calls. Through calls God's calling is "embodied."

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II. Calling

God's calling comes to us out of the past. It addresses us in the present. It beckons us into the future. The content of this calling is theological. It is illustrated by a multiplicity of biblical accounts. Abraham and Sarah are called into a new future. Samuel hears and responds to God's calling by anointing David as king. For Christians, Jesus Christ is the primary agent of calling. Through him God's calling comes to us: "Follow me," and, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness." This calling is a gift of grace and a challenge which comes in unlikely places: to those repairing nets on the Sea of Galilee, to tax collectors, to sinners, and to those who are up a tree and out on a limb.

Naming the Call

Theologically, there are diverse ways of giving more definition to this calling--for naming the calling. For some the calling is to salvation, for some to liberation, to others, including the confession of 1967, to reconciliation. This naming of the intent of God's calling seeks to clarify both who God is and what God does and who we are and what we are to do.

Paul Tillich describes the content of God's being, doing, and therefore calling to us as love. Love is the reuniting of the separated. Separation, isolation, and enmity are the conditions of our sinful lives. God's calling to us is an invitation and an empowering of us to be participants in God's work in the world of overcoming fractured and/or severely strained or sagging relationships and building up healthy relationships of mutuality, respect and caring--that is, of love. Such participation rests on the dual conviction of present and ongoing brokenness, and, primordially, persistent, present, and future power of God as known in Jesus Christ to overcome and to repair such brokenness. Nothing this side of the Kingdom stays fixed. But God's love perseveres.

Leonard Bernstein, the extraordinary composer and conductor, composed as a tribute to the fallen John E Kennedy an oratorio entitled *Mass.* As the title suggests the work is patterned on the Roman Catholic mass. In a scene near the climactic elevation of the cup, the presiding priest, who himself is infected with doubts and confusion about the faith, elevates the ceramic chalice filled with wine. "The blood of Christ, poured out for you," he proclaims. But his hands tremble, and the chalice falls to the floor, breaking into a hundred pieces and catapulting the wine over those sitting in the first pew. There is silence, prolonged silence. Finally, the priest laments, "Things get broken so easily." The world and nations, peoples and individuals are fragile, easily broken. And the priest is referring not only to the chalice broken and the wine spilled, but to his own inconstancy of faith. And to the broken body of Christ, whose blood was spilt over the lingering women who accompanied his dying.

Things get broken so easily. And to put them back together is costly indeed. Yet God's calling to us and to all is to seek the healing of separation, of enmity and of isolation. It is costly because one's blood may be spilt in the endeavor. Yet we are to put back together that which has been separated.

Yet God's calling to us and to all is to seek the healing of the nations and of persons, indeed, wherever there is separation, enmity, and isolation, God is at work and is calling us to seek those conditions that make for peace and that build up communities of mutuality.

This calling is characterized by several elements.

Calling is Comprehensive

God's calling is comprehensive. As God is Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of the whole of creation, so God's calling to us is comprehensive. At the interpersonal level, love, as the reuniting of the separated, includes forgiving one another and the restoring of broken relationships. As individuals, God's calling is a gift and challenge to us to live at peace with one's self. This peace is not without conflict and struggle. But it is to live as a self with integrity, uniting our warring parts, overthrowing the ongoing evil imaginings of our hearts. Love, as reuniting of the separated, heals the wounds of our psyches, whether self- or other-inflicted, enabling us to accept and to love ourselves as creatures of God.

At the social and political level, the reuniting of a people means to seek justice for all, the exclusion of none, and the search for shalom for warring peoples and nations.

Perhaps the most remarkable outcome of the end of apartheid in South Africa has been the establishing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the national government, led by an Anglican bishop, Bishop Tutu. The commission has been charged with hearing alleged wrongdoers who appear before it, confessing their remorse and desire for forgiveness from

those whom they so wrongly oppressed. Where there is in the hearing honesty and regret over both the subtle and horrific actions in which they participated, the commission may grant amnesty and a return to full citizenship.

Similarly Pope John Paul II has sought forgiveness from the Jewish people for what the Vatican did and did not do to exacerbate enmity and hostility over the centuries to persecute the Jews. The Holy Father was enacting love as overcoming, at least to a degree, the brokenness of the relationship between two religious communities, their coming together under the flag of peace and justice.

Reuniting the separated means to restore the positive relationships with nature, where we care for each other and for future generations.

God's calling comprehends all of our life and all that is around us. God's calling is comprehensive of personal, interpersonal, and societal relationships.

To be our True Selves

God's calling is to be our true selves. It speaks to the deepest levels of our self-understanding. Our calling is rooted in the fundamental nature of who God created us to be. It speaks to the dimension of depth about who we are. We may flee from it but we cannot escape from it, for it defines who we are and who we are intended to be. To seek reunion with our separated selves, our neighbors, nature, and God is who we are and what we are to do. This primordial quest and need ricochets down through the centuries. The psalmist writes: "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God" (Psalm 42, NRSV) and "Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your right hand shall hold me fast" (Psalm 139:7-10).

St. Augustine, centuries later, echoed the theme, "Our hearts are restless till they rest in thee." The poet Francis Thompson joined the chorus when he penned "The Hound of Heaven."

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,

and unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat and a Voice beat
More instant that the Feet--
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.'

And Jesus cries from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:24). The problem that we have is to become what God calls us to be, a forgiven and forgiving people, individually and corporately. Forgiveness is the glue that heals relationships and enables us to seek to reunite the separated, to heal brokenness. Forgiveness is the restoration of previously broken relationships. This struggle to forgive, to mend the broken is an ongoing possibility through Jesus Christ. We are proto-human, growing toward God and our neighbors in such a way that atonement, for example, is not concentrating on the blood of Jesus but on the healing of broken relationships despite blood spilled.

To Overcome Brokenness

God's calling to us today to overcome the broken is the same today as it has been. Calling is a way of articulating the relationship between God, self, and neighbor that is rooted in creation and moves all reality toward its consummation. Calling is the grace of God in the form of an address to move toward the future wholeness promised in Jesus Christ. God's calling is the invitation to participate in God's being and work. It is a dynamic cause into which we are invited to enroll. The writer of Ephesians reminds us that we are to "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Ephesians 4:1 5b*).* We acknowledge that we are to grow into our baptismal vows. God's calling is comprehensive and fundamental to who we are. We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and our neighbors as ourselves. God's calling is to the depth of our selfhood.

To Respect our Freedom

Calling is to freedom. It is a freedom that is a gift. We do not earn it. So we confess that it was a power beyond our self that led us to consent to our self's enrollment in this cause of reuniting the broken. Freedom, for the Christian, mysteriously unites creative agency and the sense of its being a gift. Our freedom commingles our agency and our sense of having been provided for. Our search for ourselves and God's search for us unite in the calling. Annie Dillard, in a book of essays entitled *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, puts together the gift and struggle for the calling to ground our lives. "We can live any way we want. People take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience--even of silence--by choice. The thing is to stalk your calling in a certain skilled and supple way, to locate the most tender and live spot and plug into that pulse. Seize it and let it seize you."

To Enjoy and Serve God

God's calling ennobles each person who responds affirmatively. The calling that has preceded us, grips us now, and beckons us into the future is of cosmic proportions. To participate in such a calling is a noble and ennobling enterprise. It is the highest calling, highest in the sense of enduring, because it always goes beyond us in the sense of going ahead of us. There is no greater calling than God's calling to reunite the separated. There is no greater calling in terms of consequences, urgency, and significance.

Brown Barr, now retired from the deanship at San Francisco Theological Seminary and professor emeritus of preaching has reflected on the turbulent days of the '60s. He was at that time pastor of a congregation in Berkeley, California. In the midst of the struggle for civil rights and for the ending of the Vietnam War, Barr said it was easy for a pastor to fall into the trap of moralistic scolding of those who disagreed with one's own position and to reduce the sermon to moralizing. He later wrote that it was in those days that he came to the conclusion that too often such preaching rests on inducing guilt but not repentance. Or it provokes ardent self-justification. Such blaming and dwelling on what one has not done diminishes the self. But an authentic worship service, Barr contends, always enlarges the self, calling forth that true self that beckons us, underwriting who we are in the light of God's calling us in Jesus Christ.

To Affirm the World as Good

God's calling affirms the world as good, very good. The goodness is not only a moral goodness of reuniting broken relationships, but it is goodness in the sense of beauty, of awe, of magnificence. The world is to be enjoyed as well as served. Our spiritual ancestors elevated this understanding when they made the lead question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism this: "What is the chief end of man?" And the answer given was: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. "God's calling to us is to participate in the goodness of creation in the sense both of reuniting the broken and enjoying the beauty that shines through even the ugliness and horror of brokenness. Each person and each people are chosen agents of God's working in the world. We are to enjoy the earth's crevices and its magnificent canyons, the glorious fact of life even in the midst of death, the beauty of love and the beauty of nature.

To claim that the world was created good is not to deny evil and the tragedies that stalk and distort ours and others lives. It is to recognize that not everything that is good is right. Relationships originally given and intended are broken. We have and do continue to disfigure the goodness through wrongdoing, through failing to order the world as God intended. It is to see God's gift of the creation as not only a word about the earth "in the beginning," but also the affirmation that God is present now through the spirit, overcoming brokenness among people and their habitation.

To Servanthood

God's calling is to servanthood, a servanthood marked by both suffering and joy and demonstrated most fully in Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ who by his living, dying, and resurrection gives content to God's calling to all. In God's calling there is a nobility of serving and rejoicing. In the spacious heart of God service and joy are united. In the power of reuniting the separated, we find the joy of imaging God. In the power of the crucified Christ, we see the suffering that often is involved in following him. In the sign of the resurrected Christ we know the presence and the sign of hope for us and for the creation. This servanthood is not the activity of a lonely, individualized person. It is the servanthood of a company of believers called the church.

God's calling comes to us through very human and everyday media. One of those is religion and for us it is the church of Jesus Christ. The church is a response to and an agent of God's calling to those in the church and beyond. It is the church which seeks to articulate and proclaim the calling of God to every creature. It is that community which seeks to fortify all who will hear and follow the Christ with the grace, forgiveness, and challenge of God's calling. But the call that the church proffers is also to the particular offices of the church. These are the ecclesiastical calls to participate in the professional leadership of the church.

God's calling to us is to heal brokenness, to reunite the separated, whatever the cause of separation, wherever it appears. This calling is comprehensive, including all of life personally and corporately. This calling addresses us at our deepest levels. This calling respects our freedom. The calling is to a nobility of enjoying and serving God. The calling is through the church, though not exclusively there. This is the enduring calling to which we are to respond in and through our calls.

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III. Calls

We respond to God's calling in and though the calls that come to us. These calls are, at one level, structures of meaning, identity, attachment, contribution, and satisfaction. We create the particular structures--ecclesiastical, political, economic, familial, etc. For example, we create a political form of governing ourselves that seeks to provide for justice in how we do things and in what we do as a nation. Thus, we have a call to political rule which is in response to God's ruling of the world. Similarly, we have a structure of teaching called school or schools. These are responses to what we believe about God's intention for us as learners. Structures of the world are structures in response to God's calling. In turn these structures shape us. Our intention is to embody in all such structures those values which faith affords.

Calls to Particular Tasks

Within the structures there are calls to particular tasks or functions. There is the call to be a teacher in structures called education. There is a particular call to be a political leader and to exercise one's responsibility as a citizen in the structure called political. Participation in these calls as structures and in and though particular locations provides a sense of identity for selves, enables each to have meaning in relation to their and others' lives, and to be a location for satisfying engagements not always pleasing or delightful or fun.

In the church we respond to God's calling in and though many calls. We respond to God's calling to reunite the separated or the broken as well as the calling to provide for our families, to be a parent, to be a member of voluntary associations, to be an employee. We find ourselves immersed in now one and then the other. We have a plurality of calls, not one. God's calling is one. Our calls are multiple. They vary in time and place, in intensity and priority. They are "human constructions" and therefore subject to change. And they invite our responses.

One structure that we create in response to God's calling is the church. We seek to shape it so that it reflects as clearly as possible the religious contours of a fitting response to God's calling. Within these structures there are particular calls, locations of responsibility. And one of the calls within the church is the call to professional leadership.

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IV. Retirement: Re-considering One's Call

One call in responding to God's calling comes in and through the structure called church. It is the call to become a Minister of Word and Sacrament. The temptation among many, both those who occupy or have occupied ecclesiastical calls and also among those who are "ordinary" members of the church, is to collapse calling into call when it comes to the ministerial offices of the church. Yet what excited or gripped those of us who occupy or occupied those positions was not initially the call to a particular role, to a professional call, but to participate in God's work in and through both church and world. To say yes to the ecclesiastical call was subordinate to saying yes to God's calling, the calling to give thanks for God's reuniting in Jesus Christ of the separated, including ourselves, and the privilege and responsibility of participating in that calling.

Calling and Ecclesiastical Call

However, we and others so often invest our ecclesiastical call with such meaning, importance and commitment that we equate calling and ecclesiastical call. We make the penultimate ultimate. This is not what we would say or want to say, but it is what our behavior often reveals. It is, of course not just clergy who make that unhappy identification. It is rampant as a temptation among all the professions. When that occurs, the subordinate or secondary call becomes what defines us, gives our lives meaning and standing, identity and community.

But when calling and calls are understood as one, when it comes to retirement, we descend into a state of anomie, a sense of displacement, of loss of standing, of meaning. Slowly or quickly we acknowledge that we have over-depended on our filling a particular call as a source for identity and satisfaction. We can become disoriented because we have no settled place of authority and power, with all the accompanying benefits, financial, social, emotional, and spiritual. When we retire we may have a title, but it is disconnected from the power and status

generally associated with a call. Our lives may be deconstructed. If we are fortunate we may still have a title as a last remnant of official identity. So we become, for example, a president emeritus of a seminary, which gives us something we can put on our "business card." But we have no business, as such. And when we are introduced it is often by referring to what we used to do. We become the person who used to do something worthwhile. I personally cannot count the number of times I have been introduced as the former president of Austin Seminary.

Our identity anxiety is closely aligned to community anxiety. Our work companions--staff, colleagues, church members, students, etc.--have been in large part our community. Now they are gone, with only the memory lingering on. That memory can be, though it need not be, a polluted memory of remorse and regret. That is an unfortunate way of holding on to the past, and specifically to the last remnants of a particular kind of a call. It may also be symptomatic of our hunger for identity and community. So we are called to redefine ourselves, to listen and to look for how God is calling us now through all the potential new calls, what we are to do, where we are to do it, who we are and what are the locations for a call or calls that are being sounded all around us.

Identity and community are, of course, two sides of the same coin. The malaise and depression that often accompany retirement may be just as difficult for other members of one's family as it is for the retiree.

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V. Retirement and the Call: What Constitutes a Good Retirement?

What is our calling when there is no call? What constitutes this magical world of a "good" retirement? For not every retirement is a good retirement, any more than a particular call to serve a congregation can or will be inevitably and necessarily a "good call."

A Context for Selfhood

Retirement is not a condition of our selfhood; it is a context for our selfhood. We must adapt, even as we have adapted to new contexts when we have moved from one physical location to another. The late Dr. Joseph Haroutunian, professor of theology at McCormick Seminary and later at the University of Chicago, dropped this pearl in class one day: "Our bodies precede our spirits and our spirits must catch up with our bodies," referring to those who move geographically from one place to another. We find ourselves having to grow into a new culture as well as into a new house. Those of us who have moved many times can agree that it takes our emotions and our spirits longer to feel at home than it does our bodies.

In retirement our spirits follow our bodies as we enter into a new context. God is still calling us. What we have to do is to discern those calls and accord them different measures of importance and significance. However we do so, we retain the calling as what is central for our own integrity. As we put down one call, we pick up another or others. Retirement as a context, not a condition, reminds us that we will not be defined by our age or our setting in life.

Our call is to respond to the ultimate calling of God, but now in a different context. There will not be, nor should there be, the expectation that we will be altogether different people with altogether different calls. What there will be is a change of priority or emphasis with some

characteristics that endure.

No Retirement from Church

There is no retiring from the church. What there is is finding other ways of exercising that call: interim pastor, parish associate, stated supply, teaching church school, worshiping always, serving on presbytery committees, being volunteers in mission, and by being a participant as an "honorary layperson" in the ongoing life of a congregation--all these and more are ways by which we respond to the enduring calling by God through the church. A good retirement includes some ongoing relationship with a local church. That is, not surprisingly, a very difficult task for pastors and for spouses, who are used to a leadership position.

From Paid to Volunteer

We move from being paid to being a volunteer. Freedom, that characteristic of God's being and doing, is a part of retirement. To be free is to be released from certain constraints and restraints inevitably associated with a community of faith, as with any person who gives leadership to any organization. But assuming that we have retirement incomes that allow us choices in such areas as housing, geographic location, etc., there are prospects of options not previously available. "I got my week-ends back," one retired pastor exclaimed. This freedom will always be limited. But the emphasis is on this freedom as being freed from the clutches of institutional demands and requirements placed on ministers, or to which we allow ourselves to yield. One has the freedom to act with a greater range of opportunities, with a wider latitude in deciding. The criterion shifts from, "Is it good for the institution to do this?" to "Is this something that I really would enjoy doing?"

An example of a new venue where gifts and talents are applied to a new situation came to me last spring. Out of the blue I received an invitation to be the keynote speaker at the annual Texas Cattle Feeders Association. They wanted to hear something about ethics and how it applied to them. Not having any idea what I would say to about 500 cattle feeders, I said yes to the invitation. I would never have done that prior to retirement. But I took the invitation as an occasion to see if I could relate a Christian ethic to a religiously diverse group, including even those who at least professed no religious beliefs. It was a call not only out of the blue, but to a strange world where I was to talk about values in a non-religious environment. It was not my usual turf. But I had a lot of fun both preparing my remarks and in meeting with this group of cattle feeders. And I could astound them by asking them that in lieu of an honorarium they make a donation to the Austin area food bank. But the point is that I could use my gifts and talents in a very different arena than was for me usual. It must have gone all right because a professor of agriculture at Texas A&M came to the podium afterwards and asked if I would do a seminar for U.S. Department of Agriculture agents who were responsible for grading wool. I foolishly said yes but had an equally satisfying time. I discovered that I could indeed use some

of my talents in unlikely settings. I had the time and energy to launch out into uncharted waters, at least for me uncharted.

Further, I have freedom to volunteer to work with my wife in filling orders at a local food bank and making sandwiches for the homeless. Instead of the hungry and the homeless being an abstraction that I could and did speak about, they became real people. The Jesuit activist Daniel Berrigan wrote:

"When I hear bread breaking, I see something else; it seems to me as though God never meant us to do anything else. So beautiful a sound; the crust breaks up like manna and falls all over everything and then we eat; bread gets inside humans. It turns into what the experts call "formal glory of God," but don't let that worry you. Sometime in your life, hope that you might see one starved man, the look on his face when the bread finally arrives. Hope you might have baked it or bought it--or even kneaded it yourself. For that look on his face, for your hands meeting his across a piece of bread, you might be willing to lose a lot or suffer a lot--or die a little, even. "Formal glory?," well yes. Maybe what we're trying to understand is what they're trying to say, who knows? I don't think they understand--or every theologian would be working part time in a bread line. Who knows who might greet him there or how his words might change afterward--like stones into bread?"

The freedom to do what I had talked about and urged people to undertake became more real. In retirement we are free to venture into practices untried and even avoided, unable to claim "too busy." I know a retired man who was a vice president for personnel of a large and prestigious corporation who now works in job placement with those unable to find employment. In retirement he is free to do what he chooses to do. A good retirement includes the gift of responsible freedom.

Enjoying

God Forever

We move from glorifying God to enjoying God forever, from usefulness to enjoyment. Such a move represents technically a shift from an instrumental measure of our lives to the intrinsic measure, or from a focus on achievement to a focus on delight and beauty. We have been told to stop and smell the flowers, but found little occasion to do so. Now we can. And that can be a gift that need not be measured by its contribution to some particular goal.

We are production-oriented as a society and as a church. No matter what size the church, the pastor measures him- or herself, as do his colleagues and parishioners, by whether a person has achieved something or other. In retirement the temptation to fall into quantitative measurements recedes but never departs from our spirits. The instrumentalist view of the self shouldn't and

doesn't drop away. We are to seek to glorify God in all that we do. But now there are prospects for a fuller life than we have allowed ourselves to entertain as a possibility. Now I can read books without the instrumentalist scale of testing them by whether the harvest of sermon illustrations or class room applications warranted the expenditure of so much time. Now I can take delight in enjoying a novel, in writing a poem, and not feel so guilty when there on my desk sits the latest theological study on a particular issue.

Filling Our Time

Retirement offers an opportunity to fill our time, not think we are wasting it, in taking delight. We can give attention to different sides of ourselves that have been perhaps malnourished. Now I can spend more time with children and grandchildren. Friendships may be seen as worthy in themselves and to be cultivated. There is time with one's spouse to explore what we have put on hold. Now we can ask ourselves, "What do we enjoy doing?" instead of, "What do I have to do to accomplish this goal?"

The instrumentalist view doesn't disappear. At times its ruthlessness seizes our souls. But in a "good retirement" it is no longer defining of my worth or value. We can honestly say to the person who says to us, "I can't do anybody any good anymore. I need to die and get out of the way." "No. You are worthy of affirmation as a human being, no matter your condition. For the self is of intrinsic worth."

This characteristic that rejects the imperialism of the instrumentalist view of life can be seen as we struggle with how to respond to the inevitable question, "What are you doing now that you have retired?" "I am enjoying myself and my family." That can sound like and can be self-indulgent. But it may be a recovery of values earlier submerged or relegated to the sideline of the real game of usefulness. A proper proportionality of activities and sources of satisfaction can be affirmed. A good retirement includes the enjoyment of God, our neighbors and the world around us.

Life at Leisure

A good retirement is a life at leisure. Michael Welzer, in *Spheres of Justice*, writes: "for most people, leisure is simply the opposite of work; idleness its essence. ... But there is an alternative understanding of leisure. ... Free time is not only vacant time; it is also time at one's command. That lovely phrase 'one's own sweet time' doesn't always mean that one has nothing to do, but rather that there is nothing that one has to do" (p. 185). By "has to do" I take it that leisure time is time open to what we decide belongs there. That doesn't mean jettisoning our earlier commitments and values. It does mean that the proportionality of values can and should shift. We can fill our time with enjoying what we have passed by in our too busy engagements.

To be at leisure does not mean to abandon the values we have espoused previously. It is to put them in different forms. The criteria given by the Lordship of Christ continues, including concern for the world around us. We are not recipients of any call to self-indulgence. We continue to ask whether at retirement we continue to engage in practices that are expressive of the comprehensive love of God.

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