

Column – Work is good and from the Lord

A church newsletter announced a “Celebration of Vocations” for the Sunday before Labor Day. Everyone was asked to bring a tool of his or her trade or work. For example, a teacher might bring a piece of chalk; a student, a textbook; a motor car mechanic, a wrench; a fast-food employee, a soft drink cup; a doctor, a stethoscope; a lawyer, a copy of *Black’s Law Dictionary*; a housewife, a rolling pin. Retired folk, meanwhile, were asked to bring something that reflected their activity in the present.

The plan, according to the article, was for worshipers to hold these articles up at a designated point in the service as a sign that they were handing over this part of their life to the Lord. What a splendid and creative idea!

Often in evangelistic meetings one hears the phrase, “Give your heart to Jesus”, and, no doubt, this is good and right. We do need to give our heart - the control centre of our life -- to Jesus. But having said that and in response and as a consequence, we need to give over *every* aspect of our life, our

vocations included. Doctor, lawyer, Indian chief, or street cleaner – it doesn't matter – whatever work we do should be seen no longer as a job, but a calling. This idea of every Christian having a vocation was one of the many positive insights to come out of the Reformation of the 16th Century.

In pre-Reformation times, it had become common to associate 'vocation' solely with going into a monastery or seeking Holy Orders (being ordained). But the Reformers, in particular Martin Luther, said, no. All work, so long as it is honest and honorable, is a vocation from the Lord and should be performed in light of the command to love God and neighbor. One historian has called Luther's insight a "theology of the ordinary."

But actually, this broader idea of the Christian's calling goes back much further. Historians tell us that in the early days of the Church worshipers would bring the works of their hands, the fruits of their labor, to the Supper of the Lord. At some point in the service these items – bread, wine, produce, etc. – were brought to the front and presented. We call this point in the service today the offertory.

It would be strange indeed if this dramatic offering of the works of their hands did not foster in these early worshipers a sense of vocation. After all, it was Paul who admonished believers at Colossi: “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Colossians 3:17).

Regardless if we adopt the practice of the church I mentioned earlier, that of bringing objects relating to our work to church on the Sunday before Labor Day weekend, let us see our labor as part of our calling from God and in mind and heart offer it to Him day by day. Come, labor on!

O God, at whose word man goeth forth to this work and to his labour until the evening; Be merciful to all whose duties are difficult or burdensome, and comfort them concerning their toil. Shield from bodily accident and harm the workmen at their work. Protect the efforts of sober and honest industry, and suffer not the hire of the labourers to be kept back by fraud. Incline the heart of the employers and of those whom they employ to mutual

forbearance, and goodwill. Remember all, who by reason of economic conditions and unscrupulous politicians are unemployed. Encourage and provide for their needs. Give ear unto our prayer, O merciful and gracious Father, for the love of thy dear Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.