

## **Christian Vocabulary: *Vocation and Volunteer***

by Rev. Dr. Susan Martin Taylor

It has been one of my *crusades, pet peeves, soap box issues* for the past five years to educate through preaching, teaching, conversation, discussion, and writing the importance of reclaiming the true meaning of the word, **vocation**, and to abolish the use of the word **volunteer** in the church. Let me explain.

In the U. S. the word **vocation** has come to mean job, work, career--interchangeable and synonymous with each other. This is an awful misuse of the original and true meaning of this word. I am on a crusade and mission to reclaim and use the original meaning for the word especially applying it to 21st century Christians/Followers of Christ in order to help abolish the use of the word volunteer in the Christian church/congregation.

Originally, vocation meant *calling*. The definition was about the calling people had to a particular work, job, or career. It did come to be more narrowly defined as a religious calling, however, the broader definition was and is more appropriate for the past, present, and future in my opinion. If teachers in the secular and Christian religious realm would work to teach this definition then perhaps a generation of people could be brought up that would know and understand that the work that people have a passion for--an energy to do and when doing this work they are joyful and fulfilled most of the time--then the original and true meaning of vocation could be reclaimed.

Vocation for Christians is serving God. For those who follow Christ, serving God is the one and only vocation. Christ followers may serve God in an occupation or career or in any and all roles they have in a family and in all of their relationships and friendships. This is the vocation of Christians.

Notice, I have used the words Christians/Christ followers/Followers of Christ interchangeably. This takes me to the second word volunteer and my belief that the use of this word needs to be abolished in the church/congregation. Christians are not volunteers. Volunteers are not needed.

Followers/disciples/ministers/servant leaders are needed. Followers of Christ--disciples--are needed. Jesus the Christ did not invite the disciples he chose to *volunteer*. He invited them to *follow* him. As Leonard Sweet says in his book *Out of the Question...Into the Mystery*:

*Jesus turned ancient tradition on its head by selecting his disciples. And he chose them with two words: 'Follow me.' This demonstration of the Ultimate Authority, God-in-the Flesh, pursuing his own followers, is absolutely unique in the ancient world. Jesus did not say 'Follow this teaching' or 'Follow this idea' or 'Follow this commandment' or 'Follow this ritual life.' He said, 'Follow me!'*

Jesus did not pursue his followers by choosing them to volunteer. Volunteer is defined\*

as one who renders a service or takes part in a transaction while having no legal concern or interest. Follower is defined as one that follows the opinions or teachings of another **or** one that imitates another **or** the *archaic* use: one that chases (that goes along nicely with Sweet's words about Jesus pursuing his own followers and in return his followers chase after him) It is a holy chase by all those engaged in the process of becoming disciples of Christ.

Christians are called to serve God and to follow Christ. We are not volunteers.

With the help of the Holy Spirit perhaps the use of the word vocation in its original meaning as a calling for all Christians to serve God regardless of the job, career, work and in all of their relationships can become a reality.

With the help of the Holy Spirit perhaps the use of the word volunteer can be abolished from church/congregation language.

Join me in making this a reality!

*Rev. Dr. Susan Martin Taylor is the associate pastor at Simpsonwood UMC in Norcross and is the chairperson of the North Georgia Conference Connectional Ministries Vocational/Career Life Planning Committee. You can contact her at [susan.m.taylor@ngumc.org](mailto:susan.m.taylor@ngumc.org) and you can follow her blog, **Susanssay**, at <http://susanssay.blogspot.com/>*