

Thinking About Working For God Sunday

October 9, 2011



All congregations within the Connecticut Conference are invited to Celebrate TAWFG Sunday. We have selected October 9th but you can feel free to choose any Sunday within the month of October to celebrate. You may choose from any of the resources listed below to celebrate this day. Please send a note to DaVitaM@ctucc.org and tell us about your **TAWFG** Sunday Celebration!

Ask the Question

The direct question regarding a Call may come in several ways. You may include it in the midst of the sermon or you may ask it during the time of communal prayer. In either case, it is important to give people an opportunity to respond to the question that you have posed. We suggest allowing people to raise their hands and then to complete a small interest card. The formats for the TAWFG Cards and Envelopes for the offering are also available for download. Listed below are three samples of the explicit "Ask".

Option 1 – For a congregation that has a TAWFG member

Have you ever thought about working for God? Has it ever crossed your mind? Maybe you thought about it for a few minutes or maybe you are still considering it today. If you have ever thought about it, would you raise your hands? I'll start by raising my hand, are there any others who would join me? (*Wait a few seconds to see if others raise their hands*). I am asking this question today because there are a few people in our congregation who ARE Thinking About it. They have joined **TAWFG** or the Thinking About Working for God program of the Conference and I wondered if there were others in our midst. I thought about it and it led me to ministry, but not everyone who has ever thought about it becomes a minister. The Conference wide **TAWFG** program has over 100 youth and young adults who are thinking about working for God. I was amazed that so many of our young people are thinking about it. Today is **TAWFG** Sunday and we

are going to pray with and lift up those among us who are thinking about working for God. If you raised your hands earlier, the ushers would love to give you a **TAWFG** card. It doesn't matter if you are young or young at heart, we simply want to pray with you as you discern what God maybe doing next in your life. If you do fill out one of these cards please place it in the offering basket.

Option 2 – For Congregations Who have Members in Discernment

Have you ever thought about working for God? No, really have you ever thought about it? If you have EVER considered even for a moment, the possibility of working for God for a living, would you raise your hands? Wow, look around the room. If you are still thinking about it would you raise your hand? You would be surprised at the number of people who have thought about working for God. Some of us are still thinking about it and that process is called discernment. It can be a very scary time and it can be a time of joy and anticipation. I would like to offer a word of prayer for those in our church and across the conference who are discerning a call from God. Some of them are Members in Discernment, while others are members of the Thinking About Working for God program. In either case I hope you will join me in praying with and for them as they discern. If you happened to raise your hand because you are still thinking about working for God, I invite you to fill out one of the **TAWFG** cards. Doing so will insure that the prayers continue as you discern what God maybe whispering in your ear.

Option 3 – For Congregations with no Members in Discernment or Members of TAWFG

I have a question to ask and some of you might find it a little peculiar. I am wondering if any of you have ever thought about working for God? It may have been a momentary thought or it may have been something you considered for years. If you have EVER thought about, even for just a moment would you raise your hands? I ask because we have a program in the Conference called Thinking About Working for God or **TAWFG** and over 1/3 of our churches have at least 1 young person who is a member of this program. Think about that for a moment. Over 100 young people within our conference are thinking about working for God for a living. I think that is something to celebrate and I wanted to ask the question today just in case there are others who are thinking and no one has asked you the question. So if you have ever thought about it and you are interested in giving it a little more thought, I am going to ask you to fill out one of these cards and return them in the offering plate. If you have never thought about working for God, I am going to ask you to join me in praying for those who are.

Invocation

God who calls and God who listens...Hear our prayer this morning. Come into this place and whisper a word of love, joy, peace and hope into our ears. Speak into our lives with purpose and meaning. Enliven our hearts with commitment and care, for those who are around us. We call on Your name and listen for Your response. Amen

Opening Prayer

Who is calling my name, is it You God! Many people call my name, those who are older than me and those who are younger; those who work with me and those for whom I work; those who are my friends and those who are my family. Many people call my name. Help me to hear when You call my name. Help me to listen! Amen

Litany of Listening

One: Who's Calling my name

Many: Maybe it is God

One: Why would God call me?

Left Side: Maybe God has need of you

One: Of me, what could God possible need from me?

Right Side: Your hands, your feet, your mouth, your ears

One: Why does God need that?

Many: To touch those who are hurting, to walk with those who walk alone, to speak to those who are in need of a kind word and to listen to those who are often unheard.

All: God, Help me to listen for your voice.

Prayer for Discernment

Dear Lord we ask for your gentle care and your still speaking voice to whisper into the hearts and minds of these your people. Each of them in their own way has heard You calling them to service. Your call comes to each of us to live a life of faithfulness, of service, of kindness and of joy. Yet there are a few whom You call to serve in a unique way within the body of Christ. Those who receive this additional call are often unsure of Your voice and need additional care to hear You clearly. The world in which we live is filled with many voices that call us to action. Our prayer today is that You would walk with these Your people as they seek to discern Your voice amidst the other voices. Help them to hear You and listen. Help us to stand with them as they listen, help us to be voices of support and care. Amen

TAWFG Sermon Seeds

There are a number of stories that you can select to preach from on TAWFG Sunday. The call stories of any of the prophets or disciples will create a foundation to build a conversation throughout the service that is centered on Call. Listed below are two options that may be used together or separately along with a few notes.

Old Testament: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

¹Now the boy Samuel was **ministering** to the Lord **under** Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. ² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he **could not see**, was **lying down** in his room; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was **lying down in the temple** of the Lord, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the Lord called, "Samuel!" Samuel!" and he said, "**Here I am!**" and **ran** to Eli and said "here I am, for **you called** me." But he said, "**I did not call** lie down again." So he went and lay down. ⁶ The Lord called again, "Samuel!" "Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am for you called me." But he said, "I did not call **my son**; lie down again." ⁷ Now **Samuel did not yet know the Lord**, and the word of the Lord had **not yet been revealed** to him. ⁸ The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli **perceived that the Lord was calling** the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down and if he calls, **you say**, 'speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel **went** and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" and Samuel said, "**Speak**, for your servant is **listening**."

New Testament: 1 Timothy 4:12

Let no one **despise** your youth, but set the believers **an example** in **speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity**. Until I arrive, **give attention** to the **public reading of scripture**, to

exhorting, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Sermon Seeds:

“Very few people who become pastors have ever heard the voice of God calling them to ministry. Rather, many who become clergy have heard the voices of the people of God calling them to ministry.”

Rev. Rick Kirchherr,
First Congregational Church of Western Springs

Rev. Kirchherr, a pastor and member of the Calling Congregations Community of the Fund for Theological education, offers these sobering words at the beginning of a resource for developing Pastoral Internships. His words stand as a stark reminder of our unique role in the life of one who is discerning a call into ministry. The two texts selected for **TAWFG** Sunday are also reminders of our unique roles as communities of faith in God’s call to individuals. I have highlighted words and terms in both texts for our review. The terms highlighted in red are intended for those who are themselves discerning a call. The terms highlighted in purple are for communities of faith.

Each text has a host of terms and phrases to consider. The Samuel text is a guide for our roles as mentors, shepherds and supporters of those who are discerning a call into ministry. We are NOT the one who CALLS; it takes perception for us to recognize that God is calling; and we must trust youth within our church to serve within the community of faith. One additional thing stands out for me in this text, Samuel is serving under Eli. He has a mentor, someone who is walking with him and close enough to help him perceive of what is going on in his life. For some of us, this role of mentoring or Shepherding a young person who is discerning a call maybe informal, but for others of us this is an intentional relationship that has to be developed.

The Timothy text maybe a bit harder to sift through to discover the responsibilities for our communities of faith and congregations. In this text we are called to read scripture, to teach and to exhort within the presence of youth; to provide opportunities for them to teach and to lead; the elders are called upon to prophecy into their lives and to take note of their progress; and we are called to do these things because are salvation is connected to their development. Each of these phrases could be explored and developed into a sermon seed of its own.

Yet, both of these texts also offers words of direction to the one who is yet discerning a call. This process of “listening” for a call from God is complicated and intentional work. The Old Testament text reminds us, that those who are being called may not have a relationship with God; they may not be able to discern the voice of God from other voices in their lives; and yet they are still eligible to serve in the community of faith. What is required of them is that they are paying attention to what happens in the community of faith, offering their gifts faithfully and that they are open to others perceptions and their development as believers. They are warned right from the onset in Timothy, that others may despise them because of their age, and that this should not discourage their pursuit of knowledge. Even though they may be despised or distrusted by the elders among them, they are drawn together with the elders in Timothy through prophecy and to the Elder Eli through mentorship. The elders in the community are the ones who will provide the Word or at the very least an interpretation of the Word of the Lord that will allow them to serve in some capacity.

Rev. Kirchherr’s words and that of these texts point to a collaboration in the Spirit. Where the voice of God is translated by the community of faith, yet it does not replace the voice of God. In this collaboration, the one who is called, is attentive to their community of faith while holding fast to the development of a relationship with the divine. Each of us has a role to play and all are vitally important. These texts along with countless others can be used to lift the conversation regarding Call into the consciousness of our congregation. Blessed Sunday and happy Preaching!!!!

Invitation to Support Discernment and TAWFG

You may be wondering what you can do to help support and encourage those among us who are ***Thinking About Working for God***. Your prayers are the most important thing that you can offer for this time of discernment. I hope that each of you will join me in praying for them as they listen for the still speaking God to whisper a word of direction and clarity. I also hope that you will join me in giving to this effort in our Church. Envelopes are available for anyone who would like to donate resources to support this effort. The funds raised in this offering will help to support discernment opportunities. Funds may be used to support Scholarships at Silver Lake, resources for internships, books for seminary and discernment retreats through the Conference. Every prayer and every penny counts. I hope you will give generously.

Benediction

In the day to day moments of our lives, Speak to us God. In the rush to go here and there, Speak to us God. In the quiet moments before we sleep, Open our ears to hear you, God. Along this journey walk with us and talk with us, now and forever. Amen!