

Reforming the Local Church for Vocation

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Introduction: Do Our Ideas Match Our Everyday Lives?

In recognizing the divide between our daily vocational existence and our lives within the church, Dorothy Sayers says,

How can anyone remain interested in a religion, which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of life? The Church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables. Church by all means, and decent forms of amusement, certainly-but what use is all that if in the very center of his life and occupation he is insulting God with bad carpentry? No crooked legs or ill-fitting drawers ever, I dare swear, came out of the carpenters shop at Nazareth.¹

Moreover, even when we do get our ideas right, many times our lives do not coincide with our thoughts. As James KA Smith has shared:

A funny thing happened on the way to the grocery store: I discovered a significant gap between my thought and my action. This hit home to me one day while I was immersed in reading Wendell Berry's delightful anthology, *Bringing It to the Table*. As I paused to reflect on a key point, and thus briefly took my nose out of the book, I was suddenly struck by an ugly irony: here I was reading Wendell Berry in the food court at Costco. There are so many things wrong with that sentence that I don't even know where to begin. Indeed, "the food court at Costco" might be a kind of shorthand for Berry's picture of the sixth circle of hell.² James KA Smith

One way we can work to bring our ideas into alignment is to produce rituals and artifacts that embody our best thoughts and practices.

1 Dorothy Sayer. *Creed or Chaos*

2 David Neff's interview of James KA Smith in *Christianity Today* called, *You Can't Think Your Way to God* provides a snapshot of Smith's ideas about how culture forms us through ritual and liturgy. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/may/you-cant-think-your-way-to-god.html>



I. Place

In his profound work, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today*, Craig Bartholomew says,

The earth is “occupied” by vegetation and animals. Similarly, creatures are made to inhabit the seas and the sky. Humankind does not transcend this order but is part of it; as God’s royal steward, humankind finds its place and flourishes through submission to this order.

By working out of a theology of place, Jonah’s Call has chosen to take the place where we dwell, Pittsburgh, seriously. We have named our church with the city in mind.

In our Welcome brochure, we explain:

The name “Jonah’s Call” comes from a book in the Christian Bible’s Old Testament. In the Book of Jonah, God called his servant to travel beyond the limits of Israel to proclaim the message of the Gospel to the city of Nineveh (present day Iraq). In Jonah 4:11 God says, “Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left... Should I not be concerned about that great city?” The name Jonah’s Call helps to define us by being a constant reminder of our purpose— to reach this Great City with the message of the Gospel.

[Download the Jonah’s Call Welcome Brochure](#)

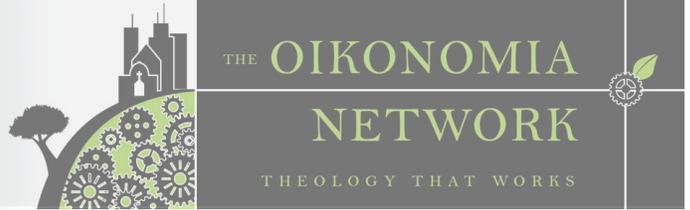
We are placed people. We start in a garden and end in a city. In the Oakland corridor of Pittsburgh, there are many transitory people due to the universities and medical centers in our midst. One of the chief ways we serve this place is by offering permanence to transients. The name of our church, the way we practice church, and our vision statement explicitly states our desire to seek the flourishing of the city (See Jeremiah 29):

Our Vision- Joining in a Gospel movement that brings flourishing to the city as we worship God, love our neighbors and shape culture.

Unpacking love of neighbors in our vision statement, we say:

Love of Neighbors- The inclusivity of the Gospel (God fully accepts us as his children because of the atoning work of Christ on the cross) is so intimate that it restores our ability to know and be known by our neighbors. Therefore, we seek to be a church that offers forgiveness to those who have harmed us, sacrificial love to everyone we encounter, and generous hospitality to all who come into our homes, work places and church. As a Church, we strive to live out our life together by offering permanence to transients, deep roots to established families and belonging in worship and service to others.

[See the Vision for Jonah’s Call Here](#)



II. Participation

At Jonah's Call we use the word participation to begin acculturating our congregation into a biblical understanding of stewardship both as stewards within a corporate setting (the church gathered) and as individual stewards sent out into the world (the church scattered). Within our cultural context in the city of Pittsburgh, consumerism is a major societal problem that has slowly made its way into the church. To bring our congregation into a more balanced understanding of the producer-consumers role God designed for the economy of life, we order our church life (corporately and individually) in a way that leads parishioners to be salt and light by engaging the church & the world.

1. Communion Bread & Meat Ball Sandwiches: The Liturgy of Jonah's Call

Our Sunday corporate worship is comprised of two highly participatory components. First, we center our corporate worship on communion. The Greek word, Koinonia, from which we derive the word communion, means 'a deep unity around a common belief.' In this highly participatory liturgical setting, we model the church at work. Mark Buchanan, in his book, *The Rest of God* explains the power of liturgy to model the work of the church in this way:

Liturgy originally meant a public work. A town bridge, for instance, or a village well, or a city wall: something built by the people and for the people. [The word] Orgy now has sordid overtones. But in the days of the early church, orgy described a public event that produced a private, usually ecstatic, experience. It was the word pagan religions used for their worship... It was all about "me". Not so liturgy. Liturgy is done by me but it is not about me. Its about "us". Its about the Other.

[View a sample Bulletin of our Sunday Corporate Worship Here](#)

After every Sunday corporate worship service, we enter corporately into another profound act of worship as we share a meal. The way we structure this meal is rooted in a biblical understanding of hospitality. The Greek word, philoxenos combines the words friend (philo) and stranger (xenos). Hence, our first act as we move "out of church" is to offer a meal that extends itself in love to all gathered- especially strangers in our midst. This has profound impact in the Oakland corridor of Pittsburgh where transience is common and where the biggest challenges are not need for food but need of friendship around a table where food is the central artifact that tells all gathered- we love you.

These two highly participatory events of our corporate life model the church as salt and light in a way that gives us a biblical view of God's people as active stewards offering corporate worship to the Father of our house.

2. Moving from Consumer to Steward-Participant: The Need to Know Booklet and Dessert

The Idea- Moving the congregation from mere consumer to participant-steward.

Experiencing corporate worship on Sunday's that includes a highly participatory service (80% of our congregation invests in serving in worship from welcoming others to making meals) inevitably leads ¹



to much discussion about the role of our stewardship within the life of the church (within its walls and without). As visitors move toward membership, we host a regular event we call the Need to Know Coffee and Dessert. At the gathering, we take people through the “vibe” and “vision” of Jonah’s Call, laying out our desire to have a church that does not create a sacred-secular divide. As a group, we read the following words in the Need to Know Booklet that we have published:

The word vocation comes from the word *vocatio* meaning to summons or call. The vision and vibe of Jonah’s Call are literally fulfilled through the call of each of our members. The degree to which you and I respond to God’s summons within the church will determine the health or sickness of our church. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12: 26-27, “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”

We then work with potential members in the area of vocational stewardship within the church as well as within their work at home, school or in the marketplace.

In helping people develop a clear understanding of God’s desire for them to act as stewards within God’s house and within the city He has placed them, we ask participants to read the following statement and then discuss it in a break out group that one of our core members facilitates:

How do you see yourself at Jonah’s Call? Are you a consumer of religious services that offers weekly critiques of the goods that you consume or are you an active participant who “owns” your church and has a stake in what we are doing? If you are here for a season, how will you move beyond being a stranger to being a person who contributes to the life of the church and the city in a way that make you a full participant? What would or is keeping you from entering in more fully?

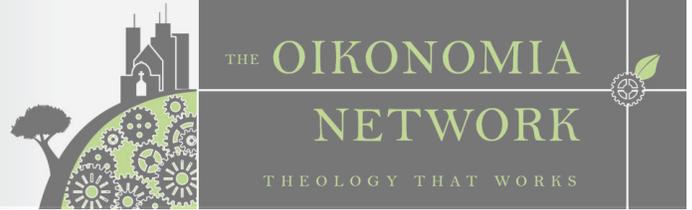
Further, we have potential members reflect upon the following quote from Luther:

God gives his gifts through the earthly vocations, toward man’s life on earth (food through farmers, fishermen and hunters; external peace through princes, judges, and orderly powers; knowledge and education through teachers and parents, etc., etc.). Through the preacher’s vocation, God gives the forgiveness of sins. Thus love comes from God, flowing down to human beings on earth through all vocations, through both spiritual and earthly governments. Martin Luther

[Download a PDF of the Need to Know Guide to Dynamic Membership Here](#)

3. Making Vocation Integral not Incidental to the Mission of God: The New Member Interview & The Directory

When those within our congregation are ready to become members we meet with them for a new member interview. At this point, they will have experienced worship and attended the Need to Know Coffee and Dessert. They will have been exposed to solid teaching about vocational stewardship as a central component to the church gathered and scattered. During this time, we explain that dynamic membership includes participation, prayer, passionate involvement, property (giving), and permanence (embracing place). After acquiring basic information like address, date of baptism and the status of the potential members relationship with Christ, we attain information about where a person works or studies. Why? Because we believe that each place of study or work (whether home or business) is a place of partnership



that we desire to cover in prayer and to visit, when warranted. It is a great moment because it expresses our value, as a church, for the city and the vocational setting to which God has called each of us. Additionally, we include vocational information (school and job) in our church directory so that we can all pray for schools and businesses throughout the year. These artifacts and events embed an integrated understanding of vocation into the life of Jonah's Call Anglican Church.

[Download a PDF of the Jonah's Call Membership Form Here](#)

III. Partnerships

1. Sharing Influence In Order to Steward Our Vision of Gospel Partnerships: Jubilee Professional
Because Jonah's Call is committed to bringing flourishing to the city, it supports the work that I do as a member of the Board of Trustees at (PLF) Pittsburgh Leaders Foundation. PLF is deeply committed to whole life vocational stewardship and has done a wonderful job of partnering with the church and the business community to bring faith and work together. One expression of this is their yearly conference, Jubilee Professional, hosted by Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation. This conference features high level leaders and authors in the church and the market (Amy Sherman, Andy Crouch, etc.) that have proven themselves capable of communicating a four-fold Gospel: creation, fall, redemption and consummation. By purchasing a table each year at this conference, we use our partnership with PLF and other institutions to leverage opportunities that bring talented workers (from house wives to executives) more opportunity to hone their understanding of vocational stewardship or to be more exposed to the idea that God wants to restore life through the work we offer to Him in worship.

[Find out more about Jubilee Professional and Pittsburgh Leadership foundation](#)

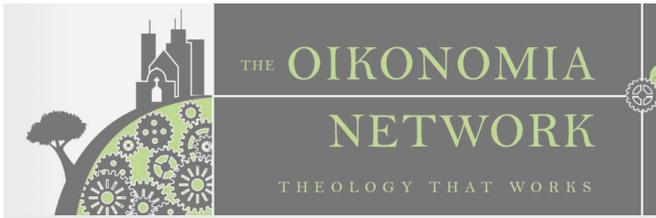
2. Celebrating Vocation Inside Jonah's Call and Inside the City: Our Monthly News Publication (The Calling)

At Jonah's Call, we purposefully celebrate vocational successes and challenges inside the church and inside the city by placing stories side by side in our monthly news publication, The Calling. This allows us to model a whole life understanding of vocation instead of merely celebrating world missions or church happenings while simultaneously ignoring the home, the city, the culture, etc.

[Explore an Issue of The Calling at jonahscall.com](#)

3. Using Institutional Resources to Partner in the Spread of the Big Gospel: Acton- FLOW
Alongside other church leaders and marketplace experts, leaders from Jonah's Call recently had the privilege of previewing Acton Institutes latest DVD Curriculum, For the Love of the World. Out of that preview a new way of partnering emerged. It is our hope that from March to June, Jonah's Call and four other churches in Pittsburgh will be able to host events where all seven of the sessions will be viewed with discussion to follow. At the end of this season, we hope to meet along the river in Pittsburgh's Downtown, and release hundreds of Chinese lanterns as a way of expressing our desire to bring flourishing (light) to the city.

Forming partnerships are a vital way of leveraging resources that institutions have the ability to create and churches such as Jonah's Call have a desire to steward.



IV. Production

The vision of Jonah's Call is to join in a Gospel Movement that brings flourishing to the city as we worship God, love neighbors and shape culture. One of the chief ways that we have been able to be used corporately to shape or make culture is in producing high quality materials that communicate God's desire to restore all aspects of life to their fullest potential. I share three of these resources below:

[Teens- The Apprentice Series as a Way of Catechizing Our Youth](#)

We have written a curriculum designed to help adults apprentice teens in navigating life from age 12 to 18 with the telos being students who love and serve Jesus by bring flourishing to the world beyond their high school years.

[Parenting- The Economy of Parenting Includes Every Stage of Life](#)

We hold seminars for parents that address both the value of the vocation of parenting and the stewarding of that vocation in every stage of life.

[Spiritual Gifts Class Reimagined: Vocational Infusion 1.0 & 2.0](#)

With an abundance of resources that help congregants determine their spiritual gifts, we determined that there was a great need to develop resources that looked at all of the gifts that God has resourced us with as called people and have developed a seminar and booklets called Vocational Infusion 1.0 & 2.0.