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*to make my life
count for something*

WHY I WENT INTO CHURCH WORK • 8

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SOMETIMES I wonder why this has happened to me. Why should I be in the kind of work that is so wonderful, so frustrating, so exhilarating, so exhausting—and so hard to describe in terms that make sense to anyone? Why did I go into church work? Who can clearly put down the facts, the chain of events, the personalities, the moments of realization that led along a certain road, that caused this decision instead of that one? I wonder at times—which perhaps is good.

We Offer Our Selves

BUT along with the questioning, there is the trust that this is the vocation to which I am called. And there is the constant prayer that this be not a role nor a static condition, but that in the work there be an ever-increasing awareness of the knowledge of self and ability to use one's time and talents and being more and more fully. *We offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee.*

Where can you really use what you have, become the self that you have the God-given right to be? This is something that each of us can answer only for himself in relation to the other people with whom he lives, and in relation to God. The personal impact and influence of a succession of people who through themselves communicated a kind of deep joy, a sense of purpose and certainty, a conviction and a commitment to God, radiated a kind of wholeness, would be one of the chief reasons for my working in the Church. The collection probably was one of the zaniest, frankest, and best-adjusted

people I had ever met in my life. How did they get that way? I wanted to know. For they had something that looked good to me, and I wanted to be one of them.

Something Was Missing

WHEN did you get to that point in your life where you felt something was missing? For me it happened during senior year in high school when my whole world was very complete. I was on top of the class academically, elected most athletic and versatile, and very active in all aspects of school life. I was a "wheel," as they say. But this didn't seem to be enough. Something was missing. I tried to find out if the Church had anything to fill the gap. I visited almost all the churches in the home town, and finally I stumbled into the Episcopal Church.

At first I wondered how intelligent people could keep using the same Book of Common Prayer week after week and not get bored. My curiosity brought me back again and again to see, and, gradually, I was captured. A response to the quiet, and the reverent atmosphere, and the simple beauty of an altar-centered Church compelled me to return again and again searching for the something that I could not define.

A New World Unfolded

AND then the doors of the fellowship began to open one by one. People within began to reach out and draw me in, though I was reluctant. A feeling of obligation and pressure brought me to a meeting of the Young People's Fellowship. These wonderful young people took me in, and through them a whole new world unfolded,

working with young people and leaders in all kinds of conferences within the district and diocese, and later within the province and the nation.

During the three years after graduation from high school, I worked as secretary in an insurance company in Boston. One day en route to the office, I found myself facing some of the roughest questions of life: *What was I doing with my life? What did I want to do? How could I do it?* It seemed as though the previous years of working experience and active youth work in the Church had been a kind of quiet preparation for a next step, and that was to take the plunge, quit work, go to college, and prepare for the only type of work that seemed to make sense. The field that called strongly was the one in which the people whom I had come to respect, envy, want to be near, and want to be like, worked. It was the Church.

I had become increasingly dissatisfied with spending eight hours a day, working to get money to go back to work again: the old treadmill existence. Helping to write fire insurance policies has some worth, I'm sure, but I could not see giving this the best hours of my life for the rest of my life.

There are No Short Cuts

I RECALLED that at a conference one of the women leaders had said, "If you want to work in the Church there are no short cuts." You have to give it all you've got. You burn the bridges behind you. You have to go to college and learn to use your mind, develop all you have to the

fullest. The Church needs more than willing workers. It needs trained people. In other words, all or nothing; no compromise. So there was no answer but to try.

Maybe I chose the Church, but the Church received me, and is taking what I can offer. Perhaps the basic motivation was selfish. What did I want for me? To make some sense out of my life, to find meaning and purpose for it, to be part of something worthwhile, to make my life count for something. How far we have to go to learn how to give of ourselves unconsciously, fully, responsively, and without demanding recognition or reward. But is this not a lifetime process? As we grow older, we become more honestly aware of ourselves and our desires, and more willing to face what we are. Consequently we are more free to give ourselves because we are not so bound by our limitations. If we can accept ourselves, we can forget ourselves, somewhat. And we know more and more surely that God can use fools like us if we will let Him.

Every year, six preparing in college and graduate school and seven working fulltime in the Church, has been a continuing revelation. You dig to deeper levels, hit bottom harder. On the other hand, you climb into new realms and catch glimpses of the real nature and feeling of the redemptive fellowship of the Church. Each of the four years as college worker at Oregon State, and the succeeding three traveling in the Leadership Training Division of the National Council's Department of Christian Education has helped me realize more fully the meaning of vocation in the Church.

These are the Treasures

As each new year comes along, it seems as though I spent the last one with blinders on and, more often, with ear plugs, too. Sometimes things happen that make me feel like running away or getting lost in a crowd, for the work I do hurts because it is so inadequate, and that which I do not stings as I remember my omissions. But then there are those moments when you know that in some measure you are finding a kind of fulfillment, and this is right. It might be when you learn that a two-year-old used the word "friend" for the first time and he was talking about you! Or when someone at a conference says, "Thanks for your understanding," when all you had done was listen and ache inside, because you wanted to help and did not know how. These are the treasures. They tell what can and does happen through the grace of God to even such as us, the wonder of communication and relationships with people from two-year-olds to one hundred and two, in and through the community of the Church.

Yes, sometimes I wonder why I should be so lucky to find myself in the work of the Church. I pray that it may be given me to be the kind of person through whom God can speak to others as He has spoken so forcibly to me through all kinds of people.

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