

March

Lesson: *Listening, Vocation, and Compassionate Justice* *Listen, God is Calling*

Learning Objectives

1. Participants will understand the gospel as that which sets us free to serve our neighbor's real needs, this freedom as "vocation," and vocation as something that is more spontaneous and local than profound and universal.
 2. Participants will be able to listen attentively to their "neighbor" in order to clearly hear his or her needs.
 3. Participants will value listening and simple acts of service as legitimate ways of living out one's faith.
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Supplies:

- Radio (opening ritual)
- Candle (opening ritual)
- Mural Paper (Intro)
- Painter's Tape (Intro)
- Markers (Intro)
- Index Cards (learning experience)
- Writing Utensils (learning experience)
- TV/DVD (reflection)
- "Listen" Video from 2008 Minneapolis Synod Gathering (reflection)
- Bibles

Preparation:

- Place the radio and candle on a small stool or table in the center of the gathering area
 - Use the tape to hang 3 long (5-foot) strips of mural paper in 3 different parts of the room. At the top of one piece write **Vocation**. On the next write **Listening**. On the last write **Compassionate Justice**.
 - Place a handful of markers at the foot of each strip of paper.
 - Choose locations around your meeting area that youth can safely go to in groups of 2-4 and listen. If conditions permit, allow youth to go outside as well as inside. Write a location at the top of each index card. These are the Location Cards used during the Learning Experience. You will need one location for every 2-4 participants.
 - Make sure the video is ready to go.
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Opening ritual

Begin with a radio and an unlit candle in the center of the room. Tune the radio to a station that is barely coming in so that all you hear is static and you can't make out what's being said. Turn it up to a volume that makes it hard to hear a normal conversation from across the room. Once everyone has arrived go to the center of the room and without trying to speak over the radio say, "God, you are calling us. Teach us to listen. Lead us in your ways." Turn off the radio. Light the candle. And again say, "God, you are calling us. Teach us to listen. Lead us in your ways."

Check-in

Go around the room and give each young person a chance to share the best thing, the worst thing, and/or the most surprising thing they heard this week. Make sure everyone has a chance to share, including leaders.

Introduction

There are three sheets of paper on the wall. You'll be working together to write a definition for each of these words: Listening, Vocation, and Compassionate Justice. Think of it like Wikipedia where you can each add to what's been written, but you can't erase what's already there. Allow a few minutes for person to go around to each paper and add to it. Feel free to ask leading questions, but don't give any answers. There will be time at the end of the lesson to revise the definitions.

Learning experience

Divide youth into groups of 2-4. Give each group a Location Card (see prep) and a writing utensil. *At the top of your card is a location. In a few minutes your group will be going there and writing down all the sounds you hear. But before we divide up, take one minute and write on the front of the card all the sounds you think you will hear. Allow one minute for writing.*

Before sending them out decide on how they will know when it's time to come back. If each group has a cell phone they could set the timer on it for 4 minutes, or you could designate one group to go out and collect people. Just make sure you have a plan for gathering back before you send them out.

When you go to your location, flip over the card and write down any and all sounds you hear on the back of the card.

Reflection

Once everyone has regrouped, go around the room and let each group share what they thought they would hear and what they actually heard. Note the differences between what they thought they would hear and what they heard. Discuss discrepancies between expectations and outcomes.

- What surprised you with this activity?
- How does this activity relate to our ability to listen to others?
- How do our ideas of what we think we will hear get in the way of what we will hear?
- How do these preconceived notions affect how we listen to people that are different than us?
- Or those who we think are just like us?

Watch the video "Listen" from the 2008 Minneapolis Synod Gathering.

Respond to the following quotes from the video. You may read them, go back and watch them, or pause and discuss them as they come up in the video.

- "There are people in this world who are mute, but not because they cannot talk. But because we have closed our ears to their voices" Pastor Luisa Cabello Hansel (9:35 in the video)

- "...We need to lose our life in order to find it. Listening has to do with an initial process of losing yourself in the words, the ideas, the excitement, and the passion of another person. So when we give ourselves to that other person in those kinds of settings we can do great things together." Bishop Craig Johnson (10:07)
- "Listen and then see if God leads you to act." Bishop Craig Johnson (11:00)
- "Listening is how we show love" Pastor Nancy Bence (11:08)

Scripture

Have the group look up [1 Kings 19:11-13](#). Read through it together, and then follow it with this retelling. During the retelling, youth should be quiet, relaxed, and have their eyes closed. Read it slowly and pause often to allow them to visualize it.

Close your eyes and imagine this scenario.

You're standing on a street. There are houses all along it. Some are in poor condition, some are condemned, and some are in the process of being rebuilt.

A large dump truck comes by. Its diesel engine is rumbling and the debris in the back rattling.

A news helicopter flies overhead with the thump thump thump of its propeller blaring down on you.

Then a group of 30 youth about your age go walking down the other side of the street, laughing and yelling and singing songs.

Now all of a sudden everything stops. Silence.

It takes you off guard. You look around. Not a sound.

*Then you hear a voice say, "What are you doing here, (**insert your own name**)?"*

*"What are you doing here (**insert a young person's name**)?"* Continue adding names of the youth present. Pause briefly between saying their names.

End in a moment of silence before continuing with the discussion.

Discussion

- What motivated Elijah to listen?
- What did Elijah expect to hear?
- What prevents us from listening?
- What frees us to listen?

We've been talking a lot about listening. Now let's look at the other two words we've put up and figure out how these are all connected.

First look at **Vocation**. Use some of the following questions to help youth understand the importance of being free to listen.

- What does it mean to be called? How is every person's call unique?
- How does understanding who God has called us to be set us free? How does this freedom allow us to be better listeners?
- What are examples of call in this room?
- If we're trying to be who we aren't, will we hear what God wants us to hear, or what **we think** God wants us to hear.
- If we go to New Orleans to hear what we want to hear, we'll probably hear it; if we go there as God's children free to listen, what will we hear?

Now move to **Compassionate Justice**. Revisit the quotes taken from the video.

- How do we know what people need? Who knows what is best in any given situation?
- Are we agents of change or agents being changed? When we minister to others does that ministry only move in one direction?
- How is the term compassionate justice different than simply saying Justice?
- What might *uncompassionate* justice look like in New Orleans? What might compassionate justice look like in New Orleans?
- What role will Compassionate Justice play in our life as a faith community upon our return?

Wrap up

Go back to the definitions. Facilitate a brief discussion to find out what youth think works and doesn't work with each definition. Key elements to each definition include, but are not limited to:

- **Vocation** -- God's call that frees us to listen.
- **Listening** -- Putting aside our preconceived outcomes to hear and comprehend the needs of others
- **Compassionate Justice** -- Our response to the needs of others, discovered through listening, and accomplished through the freedom of God's call.

Vocation, listening, and compassionate justice are three vital and beautifully interconnected pieces of our Christian life. They shape not only how we approach our time in New Orleans, but also how we live out God's promises here at home.

Prayer

Have a volunteer stand by each definition to read it as indicated.

God you are calling us (pause to read vocation and the definition). Teach us to listen (pause to read listening and the definition). Lead us in your ways (pause to read compassionate justice and the definition). Amen.

Please send your Getting Ready resource comments and suggestions to rod.boriack@elca.org. Your comments and ideas will be helpful for adjusting and improving the materials in the following months.