

Answering the Call – Mary Miller

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The Merriam-Webster dictionary gives us 4 definitions of work:

1. **An** activity in which one exerts strength or faculties to do or perform something:
2. Sustained physical or mental effort to overcome obstacles and achieve an objective or result.
3. **An** activity that a person engages in regularly to earn a livelihood
4. **A** specific task, duty, function, or assignment often being a part or phase of some larger activity

In my life, and the work I've done, I can easily say I can relate to all of those definitions, as I'm sure you can too.

Why do we work?

When the word "work" comes to mind, I automatically think of "paid" work. Our society is based on money. Money is needed for our basic needs – food, shelter, transportation, medical needs. Other ways we use money is for giving, learning, pleasure, comfort..... Money is one of the main, if not THE main reason we work.

For some of us, however, the work we do is a passion and the money is secondary. For some of us work is a necessity to live – some just squeaking by, some able to have experiences that are greater than just the necessities of daily life.

....Another question that comes to mind is – What calls us to our work?

- Are we simply trying to earn some money to meet our basic needs or care for our families?
- Is it the dream of becoming wealthy?

- Is it a sense of purpose?
- Are we driven by a desire to help others?
- We could be looking for affirmation

Some people realize early on that they are drawn to be healers, some builders, some teachers, some caregivers. Some are drawn to numbers, science, medicine or working with their hands.

Looking back over my life I've had a variety of paying jobs. I started out babysitting for families in my neighborhood when I was 12. From there I participated in my high schools co-op program by working at a fast food place for a semester. My next gig was clerking at the local 5&dime where I learned how to stock shelves and the work the cash register which, at that time did not tell you how much change to give back so you had to figure it out on your own. *That will be \$13.37 please, and they hand you a 20* – talk about a high pressure job at 16!

After high school I held a few office jobs – Kelly Services, Dun and Bradstreet, a few law offices and then I worked for the Michigan Employment Security Commission where I stayed for about 5 years and by then was married. I left there when I had my first child. I loved being a mom and was able to give all my time to my family for about another 5 years. By then I had two children ages 5 and 2 ½. I realized that I needed to earn some money to help meet the responsibilities of our family and I was very torn about what to do. I didn't want to go to a regular job and find care for my children so I decided to open a home daycare and take care of other children as well as my own. I called my daycare "Mary's Little Lambs" and over the course of the 15 years I was in business "Mary's Little Lambs" grew from one child to twelve children, from one employee (me!) to around 12 employees over time. When I started Mary's Little Lamb's my

oldest daughter was in kindergarten and when I closed my daycare she was in college. Since then I have worked some more clerical jobs, a retail job and right now I'm a senior caregiver for two lovely ladies who have been a huge blessing to me.

You might be asking yourself Why is she telling us all this?

The point of my telling you all of this is to say that I have never really had any type of career calling me. I was never drawn to science, building, medicine or numbers. Looking back, I would say the thread that weaves all through my life is a thread of helping others, being a caregiver, just "doing". I fall into the category of having a "desire to help others" and, if truth be told, probably looking for a bit of affirmation (which I get a tremendous amount from you).

The place I have always found my sense of purpose, my calling is in the work of the church. I have a longing, an excitement, a vision that leads me to work in God's Kingdom.

I've always been drawn to the church. My first awareness of God was in the Catholic Church. Back in the 50's and 60's most Catholic churches still held mass in Latin. For a child, the beauty and reverence of a Catholic mass was mesmerizing. I longed to join with the people who were a part of the almost mystical ritual of mass, but as a girl there was nothing for me to do. At that time, there were only altar boys – now there are altar girls! For several years I was determined that I would become a nun. Well, that notion disappeared as soon as I got my first crush on a boy! Even though there was nothing I could do as part of the work of the Catholic Church, I was a faithful attendee and rarely missed Sunday mass. Sometimes my parents would drop me off, go home, and pick me up afterwards.

I left the Catholic Church and became a Protestant at the age of 19. Going to a Protestant church threw the "work of the church" doors wide open to me! Over the next several decades I found

plenty to do. I've taught various adult and children's Sunday school classes, sung in several church choirs, served as a youth group volunteer, gone on high school work trips, been on prayer chains, was a children's leader in BSF (Bible Study Fellowship), got certified as a Stephen Minister, worked at funeral luncheons and church wide rummage sales. Even though there was a lot of work involved, I can easily say that I truly enjoyed all those experiences .

Our "Holy" dictionary, the Bible, also has something to say about work:

Proverbs 14:23 – All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.

Proverbs 16:3 – Commit to YHWH whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.

Matthew 9:37 – Then Jesus said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

And my favorite – Ecclesiastes 9:10 - Whatever you choose to do, do with all the drive you have. There will be no sense of accomplishment, pride, learning or wisdom in the grave. And the grave, after all, is where you are going.

In a regular job, there is more structure. You are given an assignment and expected to accomplish it in a certain way and if you do so, you will earn a paycheck.

Work of the church involves many different aspects. There are different personalities, different learning modes, different degrees of time available, different attitudes about the specific work, different talents.

At church, most everything is done on a volunteer basis, so the expectations may not be taken as seriously. When a call goes out we don't always even hear it. We receive e-mails with

requests and, depending on what is going on that day, either give the e-mail our full attention or just do a quick speed read and file it away thinking someone else will answer the call, so, sometimes the call is answered and sometimes it isn't.

As individuals, most of us are involved in some type of caring work that involves making someone's life better. In our private lives, people here at Shalom are working to better the lives of refugees, people are teaching others how to use their resources when providing for their families, people are spreading the word about restorative justice and prison reform and being financially supportive of a myriad of social programs. Those are just some examples of individuals working for God's kingdom.

So, what about the work of Shalom Community Church as a family community? Our life here in our church family is very rich with a diverse set of beliefs. We show each other unconditional love and support. We dream of sharing our wonderful community with our neighbors.

At this point in the life of Shalom Community Church, we are also in the process of rethinking and reorganizing the way we do "church". We are learning about our strengths and we are discovering our weaknesses. We all have a vision of what we would like Shalom to "be" and are beginning to take steps toward fulfilling that vision.

We have concerns to figure out:

Some of the things I've heard people say:

- What if we had more money.....
- if only we had a bigger space.....
- I wish we could be a presence on the college campuses.....
- It would be wonderful if we could open our doors and host community events....

Nevertheless, we have been working very hard over the past months with a myriad of meetings, brainstorming, wordsmithing

our proposals and then having more meetings. We are taking the time out of our daily lives to formulate our plans for Shalom and its future.

Not only have the past months been a lot of hard work, they have also included the lofty, dreaming part of what we want Shalom to be. Now, we need bodies to do the work, to see the vision through. We need people who are passionate, we need people who have ideas that can pull us toward our goals. And, in order to get to where we want to be, we need people who will commit to do the work.

Dreaming and coming up with ideas is grand but without the workers to implement them, the dreams die.

Each of us has a gift that can be used to further our vision. Each of us can do something at Shalom to help smooth the road so that no person is carrying too much.

I remember being young and naive in my early adult years. If there was something I was interested in doing I would wait to be asked because I felt that if no one asked me they didn't really want me, not thinking that if they don't know I'm interested then how can they know to ask me? **SO - Don't wait to be asked** – tell someone how you wish to help Shalom work towards the place you want it to be. Keep asking and talking about how you want to fit in. If there is no one to tell then just start something!

You are the key to making Shalom Community Church a more visible presence in the community, you are the key to our being a presence on the area campuses. You are the key to giving our kids the kind of spiritual awareness you want them to learn.

This fall, our transitional pastor Steve Thomas, will be working with the adult education Sunday school team to provide some teachings on discovering our individual Spiritual gifts.

But, don't wait! Step out of your comfort zone, listen to that small voice beckoning you, say "YES" to the call because it could be

that YOU are the person God needs to fulfill the vision of Shalom Community Church. Thank you.