



Ask the clergy

by The Pastor Dentora Johnson

Is the job of pastoring for me?

The position of pastor is only right for you if you are right for the position. — and God is the only one who knows whether you are right for the position.

Throughout the Bible, scripture speaks of a divine destiny, a perfect will and God's plan for our lives. To consider becoming a pastor as a job, is ignoring that plan for each life.

This is frequently done, as some with strong mercy gifts sense that they are called to a spiritual work. And since the pastorate is a position that is more widely recognized in Christianity, many gravitate into that field as a job without the call from God. Even entering into seminaries to prepare themselves for the job.

But knowledge of the Bible is no indication that God has destined you to be a pastor. Scripture never refers to pastoring as a job of choice.

The Bible does reveal that those God uses to minister as overseers or leaders of his people are "chosen" by him. It began with Noah, then Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David and many others who led God's people. None of these notable Bible greats decided that it would be a good job or profession to enter into. Quite the contrary.

In 1 Samuel 2:8, God said that he chose Eli out of all the tribes of Israel to be a priest. Then in verse 35, he said, "I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and my mind," speaking of Samuel who replaced Eli as priest in the land.

Jeremiah gives us a picture of when God chooses those who serve him as pastors and five-fold ministry gifts. In chapter 1, verse 4, God said to him, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto nations."

According to this passage, God chooses his ministry gifts (pastors) before they are born. God had Samuel to anoint the one (David) he had already chosen to be king. God chose the 12 disciples, and Jesus sought them out and said "follow me."

In John 15:16, Jesus said to the disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you." As Jesus was praying before the soldiers came to take him, he said in John 17, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me." He was speaking of the disciples.

In Acts 9, when Ananias was reluctant to go minister to Saul of Tarsus, Jesus said to him, "Go thy way, for He is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles, and Kings and the children of Israel."

Scripture shows that God chooses the pastors. We are free to obey the call or deny it. But to consider becoming a pastor as a job puts you in a place where God has not chosen or gifted or anointed you to be.

It is also denying the world the profession and the gift that God has ordained you to be. Suppose that gift is to be the one who finds a cure for a deadly disease, but instead you chose to be a pastor without the call from God?

Also, those who choose to pastor without the call of God cheat the people who will become the sheep of their flock. God said that he would give us pastors after his own heart. We can't give ourselves to the work unless there is first the call of God.

God gives us as gifts to the body, to perfect the saints. You give yourself to God and he, knowing his plan for your life will guide your life into the profession and direction that he would have you to go, that you may glorify him with your life. If it is to be a pastor, he will equip you as you prepare yourself spiritually and naturally, and you will truly be a gift to the body of Christ.

Pastor Dentora Johnson is senior pastor at Victory in Jesus Bible Faith Center in Apple Valley. She has held the position for 10 years, after spending 12 years with her husband, Pastor Willard, in the foreign mission field, primarily in Asia. She is a graduate of Cal Poly Pomona, with a bachelor of science degree in communications and agronomy, and a master's from Cal State Fullerton. She is the author of several books and is particularly interested in the area of prayer.

Woman named leader of Episcopalian church

Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori becomes first woman leader of embattled sect

NEW YORK (AP) — Nevada Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori thought the odds she would be elected to lead The Episcopal Church were "ridiculous" — absolutely against her.

"I was a woman, fairly young, I hadn't been a bishop all that long, and I was serving a diocese that's not part of the Eastern establishment," the 52-year-old Jefferts Schori said.

Then came the surprise — she won anyway, in balloting at the Episcopal General Convention this June. On Saturday, Jefferts Schori will be installed as presiding bishop at the Washington National Cathedral, becoming the first woman priest to lead a nation-

al church in the nearly 500-year-old Anglican Communion.

"The Bible is full of stories of the younger son being called and the outsider being called," by God to serve, Jefferts Schori said in an interview this week with The Associated Press. "I think courage is a central characteristic of leadership. If you're not willing to go into dangerous places, you have no business doing this work."

The perils for anyone leading The Episcopal Church right now are considerable.

The 2.3 million-member denomination is at the center of a worldwide Anglican feud over how to interpret what the Bible says about sexuality and other issues. Jefferts Schori unapologetically supports ordaining gays and allowing blessing ceremonies for same-sex couples. In 2003, she voted to confirm New Hampshire Bishop V. Gene Robinson, the first openly

gay Episcopal bishop. The uproar over his consecration is threatening to split the Anglican family, of which The Episcopal Church is the American branch.

"I'm clear about this role involving the entire breadth of The Episcopal Church," Jefferts Schori said. "But at some level, I don't think it's appropriate for me to disguise what my own theological understanding is. I'm someone who believes transparency is incredibly important. It's part of integrity."

Yet the bishop also is aware that compromise is necessary to heal the rift with overseas Anglicans — a goal she says is important to her. She believes Episcopalians should fulfill the request of Anglican leaders that the American church stop consecrating any more gay bishops for now, and should refrain from developing an official prayer service to bless same-gender couples.



The Associated Press

Katharine Jefferts Schori gestures during an interview on Tuesday, in New York. Jefferts Schori will be installed Saturday as the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, the first woman to head a national Anglican church.

Keeping Christ in the classroom



The Associated Press

Royal School students, from left, Neil Lewis 11, Kylee Morgan 11, and Tristin Fowler 11, listen as Rachel Hicks 13, right, reads a bible verse during a bible lesson for Royal School students in the school gymnasium before classes begin in rural Royal, Okla. on Friday. The bible study was launched by a group called Kids For Christ USA.

Group encourages school children to meet in bible study clubs

RYAL, Okla. (AP) — As dozens of sleepy-eyed kids make their way to a rural public school, 20 of their peers are already in the gym for a bible-study club, learning about the fall of Adam and Eve.

It's a Sunday-school lesson on a Tuesday, where the kids play a game in which two teams compete to burst red and blue balloons, each containing part of a bible verse on a scrap of paper.

After 30 minutes, the before-school religious instruction ends with a bell for first-period at The Royal School, 60 miles south of Tulsa.

Bob Heath dreams of one day having such a Bible-study club in every elementary school in America.

The 43-year-old former electronics salesman, who sometimes quotes from evangelist Billy Graham, founded the nonprofit Kids For Christ USA nearly six years ago. The Broken Arrow-based group sponsors about 50 clubs across the country, in states including California, Kansas, Oklahoma and Massachusetts, and is looking to expand into New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Heath uses the federal Equal Access Act to get children in the door for weekly meetings. The Reagan-era law permits groups like Heath's to conduct meetings in public schools as long as students initiate and lead the club. Attendance must be voluntary, the

school may not sponsor the club and it must not interfere with regular classroom instruction.

To Heath and his supporters, the clubs are an antidote to school violence, a way to reach a troubled student before a tragedy happens.

But his methods have drawn criticism from those who question whether the children truly are initiating and leading the club.

Heath's critics say he and parents are the ones really pushing the clubs, using the children to violate separation of church and state protections found in a 1963 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that declared school-sponsored prayer unconstitutional.

They're "using the kids like puppets," said Annie Laurie

Gaylor, co-president of the Madison, Wis.-based Freedom From Religion Foundation. "A chronic complaint has been Christian kids who flaunt their religion, that they're better than other kids, going to class with bibles under their arms trying to convert" classmates.

Heath is unfazed, saying children are smarter than many people give them credit for. "If children can understand video games, then they can understand the Gospel," Heath says.

On his Web site, Heath says the law requires children to be the initiators of bible clubs, but he also says it's appropriate for parents to present the idea to school officials.

Indiana mom challenges ACLU suit against religious training

By JIM BROWN
AGAPE PRESS

A Christian mom in Indiana is praying the American Civil Liberties Union will not succeed in shutting down a release-time religious education program in her children's school district.

The ACLU recently filed a lawsuit challenging a program in the Mooresville school district that allows third and fourth graders to leave the classroom for one hour a week to learn about topics such as the creation, the flood, and key figures in the Old Testament. A parent objected to the fact that the classes are held in a trailer on school property and teachers hand out enrollment cards to students wishing to participate.

The ACLU claims it does not have a problem with the release-time program itself. Rather, the civil liberties group says it objects to the fact that the religious classes are held on school property and that teachers are involved in collecting parental permission slips from students who enroll. But according to one of the community parents, the lawsuit is not sitting well with the majority of Mooresville residents.

Jacoba Ballard has lived in Mooresville all her life, and one of her children attends the release-time program at Neil Armstrong Elementary, the school at the center of the controversy. She says many people in her community are deeply involved in this issue, as they believe in God and support the religious education program.

"Most of the people here do," Ballard notes, "and it's just pretty sad that one person is going to change that for all of us — and hopefully they don't." She says the release-time program is helping to teach her son moral values and the importance of loving God.

Besides, the Christian mom contends, the ACLU has no legal standing to interfere with or to protest the program, she contends, because the school is not subsidizing it. She points out that those providing the religious instruction even offered to pay rent for the use of school facilities.

Religious Perspectives

Peace beyond all understanding



By JEAN THOMAS

Late one night when I was about 12 years old, someone came into the house I lived in with my mother and stole her purse. My mother reported the theft the next day and the police came to our house to take a report. They later found my mother's purse disposed of in a neighbor's yard and we were told other robberies had taken place in our neighborhood.

I remembered seeing someone walk past my bedroom during the night, but in my sleepy state, thought it was my mother because the person appeared to be wearing a nightgown. We were giving the report to the officer when mother left the room to get something. He told me I should be

very careful and suggested getting on "the pill" just in case someone was to come in again and rape me.

I lived in fear for years, thinking someday I might be raped. At times I wished it would happen just so I could get it over with and stop living in fear. At night while I was in bed, every creak in the house scared me and I had many sleepless nights.

I realize now that my mother's purse wasn't the only thing that was stolen back then. That officer robbed me of my sense of peace because of what he'd said to me. For years I searched for a sense of protection, wanting desperately to find my peace.

On the outside I was a fun-loving, happy person. But on the inside I nev-

er truly had peace in my life. I was constantly gripped by fear. I longed for that sense of protection even after I was married and knew my husband would always protect me.

It wasn't until I came into another, closer relationship, that I truly found ultimate peace. That happened when I came to know Jesus Christ. I had finally, after all those years, found my ultimate protector. I knew that no matter what happened to me that He would always be there for me. His word says I will never leave you or forsake you.

I am happy to say that I no longer live in fear. I have since forgiven that officer for saying such a horrible thing to a young child because what he said led me on a quest to find peace. In some

strange way, what he said led me years later to a relationship with Christ.

Are you gripped by fear from someone or something? Do you long for a sense of complete peace in your life? Call on the ultimate protector, call on the name of the Lord. He is here right now waiting to hear from you. He will give you peace beyond all understanding.

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Do you have a religious perspective on a current issue to share? If so, please write to Justin Beckett at jbeckett@vvdailypress.com.



Haitians pack cemetery for Day of the Dead

Thousands of Voodoo followers come to remember relatives during celebrations

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Bearing rum, flowers and candles, thousands of Voodoo followers flocked to Haiti's largest cemetery on Wednesday to rouse sacred spirits and remember lost relatives in raucous Day of the Dead celebrations.

Followers passed beneath a crumbling archway adorned with a black skull-and-crossbone flag that read "Everyone is welcome." As dark rum flowed freely, they placed flowers and candles at the graves of relatives while revelers danced and sang to thumping music designed to awaken Baron Samedi, the god of the dead, and his mischievous offspring, Gede.

As part of the annual two-day ritual, followers stumbled around in a trancelike state and rubbed hot pepper on their bodies. Others dripped melted candle wax on their faces and sang racy songs — an offering to Gede's lascivious side.

"I came to pour some rum, light my candles and call the dead," said Delis Charles, a 39-year-old Voodoo priest, or houngan.

Two-thirds of Haiti's 8 million people are said to practice Voodoo, a blend of

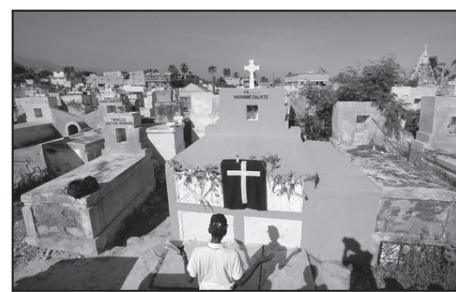


Christian tenets and African religions brought over by slaves. In 2003, Haiti's government officially sanctioned the faith as a religion, allowing priests to legally perform baptisms and marriages.

This year's Day of the Dead celebrations come amid ongoing turmoil in the impoverished Caribbean nation, which is still struggling to recover from a bloody February 2004 revolt that toppled former president

Jean-Bertrand Aristide. "We're calling for peace now," Charles said, as followers danced and chanted around him in the huge municipal cemetery in Port-au-Prince's downtown.

Voodoo followers integrated some Christian rites into their practice before Haiti won independence from slave-holding France in 1804. The slaves, prohibited from practicing their African rites, dis-



guised their gods in the trappings of Roman Catholic saints. The Catholic church frowns on Voodoo and, in the 1940s, tried unsuccessfully to eradicate it. Practitioners believe in a supreme god and spirits linking the human and the divine. Many believe their spirits will return to Africa when they die. The bodies of slaves were buried without ceremony.

HCJB World Radio celebrates 25 years

By ALLIE MARTIN
AGAPE PRESS

As political landscapes change around the globe, an evangelistic radio network is establishing hundreds of independent Christian radio stations worldwide.

For years, HCJB World Radio broadcast shortwave Christian programs to other parts of the world from its facilities in the Andes Mountains of Quito, Ecuador. When communism began to crumble in many countries, however, the evangelical ministry began looking for new ways to spread the gospel.

Since the early 1990s, through an outreach called "radio planting," HCJB has worked with local ministries and churches to establish more than 300 radio stations worldwide. David Johnson, president of HCJB World Radio, says the broadcast ministry's strategy has been effective as its workers have "moved from just doing it all ourselves to really empowering believers around the world to be involved with us."

Also, Johnson notes, as the radio ministry has grown and attracted more partners in its evangelistic outreach, this has allowed "us to be a major part in their training," showing local Christians in various areas "how they can reach out to their own communities" by taking the gospel to the airwaves.

"It was incredible to us to discover that it's in some of the most enclosed countries that people listen the most," the HCJB World Radio spokesman observes. The ministry has found that this is the case "because the government controls information," he says, so people are seeking reliable "outside sources" of information — that is, reliable and non-government-censored information — "and then we become a major source for them to listen to."

Radio is one of the most cost-effective methods of reaching large numbers of people with the good news about Jesus, the Christian broadcaster points out. "And the letters we get are absolutely incredible," he adds, "from people who want more information about Christ or what it means to be a Christian or what it means to have a marriage that works," to name a few examples.

HCJB World Radio celebrates its 75th anniversary this year, and Johnson says the broadcast ministry is still making an impact after all these years. Today, independent radio stations established through HCJB are operating in some 100 countries worldwide.

Letters to the editor

By VICTOR R. CLAVEAU, M.J.
of Hesperia

The movie "The Departed," directed by Martin Scorsese was described by one critic as "exciting, preposterous, dazzling, occasionally outrageous — a police thriller with never a slow moment and with plenty of reasons for displaying all that star power."

I, too, found the movie outrageous, interspersed in the dialogue were attacks on the Knights of Columbus, as being a corrupt political organization, and the Catholic Church, specifically in scenes where one priest is accused as a molester of altar boys and another is accused of having sexual relations with a nun. The priest's hang their heads and refuse to answer back, in effect admitting guilt.

This movie is typical of the anti-Catholic misrepresentation of the Catholic Church and the numerous devout priests and religious, who sacrifice everything in the service of God.

Anti-Catholicism is the last acceptable prejudice. Hollywood would not dare to disparage any ethnic group, race, or other religious group they way they attack Catholicism. As a result, there are

millions of people who rarely, if ever, receive favorable information about the Catholic Church. Many Hollywood and television productions go out of their way to ridicule the teachings and/or practices of the Church. No other religious group in America is as unjustly vilified as the Church.

If the Catholic Church were what she is represented to be by her opponents, there would not be over one billion, seventy million worldwide members. The Church would have died out long ago.

Converts to Catholicism soon recognize that the Catholic Church is "fair game" for those who wish to attack her. They quickly become sensitized to the anti-Catholic bias found in the secular media.

History is now being rewritten. Scholars who go deeply into the matter are unanimous in their verdict that the Catholic Church has been consistently and blatantly maligned during the past five hundred years. History has been distorted in order to uphold groups opposed to the Church.

Catholics everywhere should not only boycott this film but should demand an apology from Director/Producer Martin Scorsese, who, while supposedly was

raised in a devout Catholic home, also produced the 1988 film The Last Temptation of Christ which was based on Nikos Kazantzakis' 1955 novel in which Jesus appears as a tormented, fearful young man confused by sex and uncertain of his path in life. The film was condemned by virtually every Christian denomination, both here and abroad, was protested, picketed, subject to boycotts and bomb threats, and excluded from the titles carried by the huge Blockbuster Video chain.

I would be willing to bet that there will not be a similar outcry against "The Departed" as it simply bashes Catholicism, rather than Christianity in general.

By TONI KAY
of Victorville

I read your commentary in the Daily Press regarding Halloween and I must disagree.

Regardless of Halloween's origin, the fact remains that the modern day holiday is now decidedly American, and not Celtic or Pagan.

Certainly most people can see that any vestige of its pagan roots has been stripped. What remains now is a happy holiday celebrating fall and the harvest of pump-

kins, apples and fall crops.

Children look forward to Halloween parties, families come together to walk with their children as they trick-or-treat; communities put on festivals. The beautiful world God gave us is changing and we Americans seek to celebrate fall and offer thankfulness for the bountiful harvest.

It always bothers me when sour pussies like the author seek to dampen the American spirit with their guilt-ridden, judgmental religious agenda. American holidays have lost a good deal of their historical significance and are seen as times to get together as families, friends and communities. They are seldom seen any more as a time to celebrate pagan rituals.

Why can't America just celebrate Trick or Treat?

If I were in this position, I'd be grateful that these same individuals that are insulted with your judgmental rhetoric return on Sunday to put dollars in your collection plate.

The Daily Press is always happy to hear the sides of our readers on issues appearing in the religion section. If you have a letter to share, please send it to Justin Beckett at jbeckett@vwdailypress.com.

Teach or punish, that is the question

As Greg paces the floor, waiting for his 17-year-old daughter Sandy to return from a school event, he feels two conflicting emotions: fear and anger. Fear that something terrible has happened to her: Anger because he thinks his fear is probably unfounded and Sandy is not hurt, simply irresponsible.

Finally, Sandy calls. She's all right. She just lost track of time. Greg's fear disappears, but his anger grows.

The love that motivated his worry is overwhelmed by a growing sense of outrage, and he begins to rehearse what he will say, what punishment he will inflict. Unless he intercepts his anger, it can easily turn to rage, an emotion likely to produce foolishly impulsive conduct that's likely to alienate Sandy and widen the rift between them.

Here's the character challenge: Can Greg stop the runaway train of anger long enough to think about his objectives? His immediate goal is to vent his fury and frustration and teach Sandy a lesson. His long-term goal is to strengthen — not weaken — his relationship with his daughter



Character Counts

by Michael Josephson

and help her become more responsible and respectful.

If Greg stops and thinks about his broader goal, he will want to turn this event into a positive teaching moment. To do that, he will have to choose his words and tone carefully.

Good managers don't yell at or demean employees because it would be ineffective and unethical. Parents have no less duty to be tactful and respectful when dealing with their children.

Michael Josephson is the founder of the nonprofit Josephson Institute for Ethics and the Character Counts Coalition, a school-community partnership that develops character-building programs. For more information, go to www.charactercounts.org

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BY JOHN LEHTI

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This is a dramatized version of facts taken from the Book of Joshua, intending to show some of the customs of these ancient and traditional times

OTHNIEL'S TRIUMPH

HAVING REACHED THE TOP OF THE WALLS, OTHNIEL'S MEN ARE BESET UPON BY THE FIERCE GIANT DEFENDERS...

WE CANNOT LAST LONG — IF OTHNIEL HAS A PLAN, PRAY @OD HE PUTS IT TO USE!

DEATH TO THE ISRAELITES!

AND, UPON THE HEIGHTS OVERLOOKING THE CITY, THE MEN OTHNIEL PLACED THERE EAGERLY AWAIT HIS SIGNAL!

THE BATTLE IS JOINED — BUT WHERE IS OTHNIEL'S SIGNAL?!

NOW, YE MEN OF JUDAH, SEE MY SIGNAL!

AT OTHNIEL'S SIGNAL, THE BEARERS OF THE HIGHLY POLISHED BRAZEN SHIELDS SPRING INTO ACTION!

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