

CONFORMED TO CHRIST

### ***Some things are up to us***

by Mary Sharon Moore

*This column appeared originally in the Southwest Kansas Register, Oct 2009.*

“This life is no dress rehearsal,” I recall my professor of systematic theology teaching us with great passion. We were young—well, some of us still somewhat young—and we had dreamy notions of how God would use us valiantly in service to the Church. Even then I was clueless about God’s willing for my life, how to recognize it, how to discern it, and what to do with it.

“Use me in whatever way you will,” I remember praying. My prayer was wide open, free of reservations—and equally free of specifics. I didn’t want to place any obstacles between myself and what God might have in mind.

I had no picture of what God had in mind for my life because I was afraid to actually jump in and make decisions for my life, express preferences, and welcome the experience of living inside the skin of my life. What if I get it wrong, I remember thinking. What if I choose something that’s too small, or too big, or that goes against God’s will? Life became a guessing game, a waiting game, and I opted to play it safe, waiting for God to clearly reveal the divine master plan for my life. I wanted God to be completely free to shape my life. Unknowingly I had imagined God the Helicopter Parent, hovering to rescue me from stupid decisions.

Seventeen years later I still hadn’t wrapped up my graduate studies. I had drifted off into one job or another, and lost track of those dreamy notions of valiant service to the Church. I had given God unfettered freedom to act in my life, all right, but I failed to realize one small detail: I have to show up,

take action, and live boldly and imaginatively, as though the Holy Spirit were the gift, the fire, and the guiding force. I have to actually participate in my life, embrace it, pour it out as the unexplainable gift it is. I have to give God something worthy to work with.

In answer to my prayers—“Use me in whatever way you will,” and “Whatever you have in mind for my life, let it be”—God oftentimes simply replies: “Do whatever brings you joy.”

Really? First, I protest, this vocational thing can’t be that easy. And second, this much freedom makes me nervous, if not downright suspicious: Do whatever brings you joy. And what if I get it wrong? What if I misread what God has in mind for me?

Joy is one of the keys to unlocking the mystery of vocation, the mystery of God’s eternal calling and my personal response. If I understand Jesus’ prayer correctly, he did not pray, on the night before he died, for some small private happiness for my life. Rather, he prayed that his joy might be my joy, and that his joy in me might be complete (see John 17). True spiritual joy is the soul’s experience of communion in the divine banquet, feasting on the love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Real joy cannot be interrupted by life’s obstacles or challenges. Real joy, vocational joy, is the experience of being who God desires you to be, engaged in the work of love you have been called upon by God to do. Jesus does not suggest that this joy is reserved for the next life but that it is for our lives now.

Prayer, I have learned, puts the desire to please God out there. But the answer to my prayer most often comes not in prayer but in the course of my action. “Pray, and then get up and do the next obvious thing” is wise

counsel. God, after all, is Incarnational to the core, and seeks from us real Incarnational living. It’s convenient to think that everything is up to God. But in fact, some things are simply up to us.

**MARY SHARON MOORE, M.T.S.**, is founding director of **AWAKENING VOCATIONS**, author of *Touching the Reign of God* (Wipf and Stock, 2009), and creator of the L.A.S.T. Workshop for workteam development. Her work in vocation discernment spans from Church ministry to animating organizations for work that touches the soul of the world. For more, visit [www.awakeningvocations.com](http://www.awakeningvocations.com).