The following meditation was written by Paul Koch, Luther Seminary student in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Education I.

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**Introduction**
The following group exercise, including meditation and follow-up questions, is intended for use by a church community. They represent some of the ideas found in books by Parker J. Palmer, Maria Harris, and Norma Cook Everist. Facilitators should read through the following materials before using them and make adjustments they deem necessary.

**Group Exercise**
**Meditation:**
I want you to close your eyes.
Imagine that you have been given a special pair of shoes.
Pick the color of the shoes, the texture.
They look like an ordinary pair of shoes
  and then you realize
  these shoes have wings;
  little wings like birds’ wings.
You try on the shoes, and they feel like ordinary shoes
  and then you realize
  these shoes can help you walk very quickly.
And then you jump, and you realize they can help you fly
  up over the rooftops and trees
  up into the clouds.
With the help of these shoes, you can go anywhere.
Now, I want you to take a walk with me.
We are going to travel to some different places.
Let’s start in your bed, when you wake up in the morning.
You walk through your home.
Now, I want you to be attentive to the people and the situations around you.
Who is celebrating or happy?
  Why are they celebrating?
  What makes them happy?
  If they are peaceful, why are they so?
Now, who around you is in need of something?
  Are they sad?
  Are they in pain?
  Are they frustrated?
  What keeps them from having peace?
Now, I want you to come with me outside of your home.
Even if there are others in need there, I want you to come with me.
We are walking onto the street.
We are walking past the places you see every day.
  Maybe it is a library or a school.
  Maybe we’re walking past a hospital or a store.
Maybe we’re walking through a neighborhood full of houses and apartments. Once again, I want you to be attentive to the people and situations around you. Once again, notice who is celebrating or happy.

- Why are they celebrating?
- What makes them happy?
- If they are peaceful, what makes them so?

Now, who around you is in need?

- Are they sad?
- Are they in pain?
- Are they lonely?
- Are they frustrated?
- What keeps them from having peace?

Now, we must continue our walk.

With the help of your shoes, in just a few steps, you will arrive at the place where you spend most of the day. Perhaps you are now in school, perhaps in an office building, or a factory.

This is a familiar place to you.

- You know the hallways and rooms.
- You are familiar with the smells and colors and sounds of this place.
- You recognize the people who are here.

And now, I want you to look at these people, their faces and movements. Perhaps you are looking at your fellow students or your co-workers, perhaps your teachers or boss, perhaps your customers and clients.

Again, notice these people and situations around you. Again, who is celebrating or happy?

- Why are they celebrating?
- Why makes them happy?
- If they are peaceful, what makes them so?

Now, who around you is in need?

- Are they sad?
- Are they in pain?
- Are they lonely?
- Are they frustrated?
- What keeps them from having peace?

Now, we are about to go on an exciting part of our journey; so bid the people around you a temporary farewell.

With the help of your shoes, and just a couple hops, you are flying. You are soaring

- over your neighborhood,
- over the city,
- over oceans and mountains.

And now you realize that you are flying over different countries.

You look below and see buildings different from those you see every day.
You can fly close to the ground, and you notice
   the smells below are new;
   the people come from different cultures than your own;
   you hear different languages, different songs being sung;
   you see different clothes;
   you touch different textures
   in the roadways, in the foods and in the green things you see growing.
You are attentive to the people around you.
And you notice that
   in some ways
   they are different from the people you see every day.
Some people are happy, others are sad.
Some look confident, others look afraid.
One more time, I want you to ask yourself, who is celebrating or happy?
   Why are they celebrating?
   What makes them happy?
   If they are peaceful, what makes them so?
One more time, ask yourself, who around you is in need?
   Are they sad?
   Are they in pain?
   Are they lonely?
   Are they frustrated?
   What keeps them from having peace?
We will now bid these people farewell.
Again with the help of your shoes, we begin the journey home.
Sail across the sky,
   back over oceans and mountains,
   through clouds,
   to where you see familiar streets.
You recognize buildings, and the people are familiar.
Finally you fly into this place and walk into this room.
You take off your shoes.
And now, remembering the people you have seen,
   remembering their joys and pains,
   open your eyes to this room.

Questions for Follow-up Discussion:
What were the people celebrating?
What were they grieving?
(It would likely be helpful if each person had a chance to write about or draw some
of the people he or she met in the meditation.)
Switching gears, think about the activities at your church in which you have
participated in the last couple weeks. Consider these activities, asking yourself the
question, what have I learned from them? How have these activities shaped me or
provided me with new insight or skills? Consider activities spent in community,
such as fellowship time, conversations, singing, preparing a meal or cleaning up
afterward. Consider activities of prayer, by yourself or with others, inside a worship service or outside of it. Consider activities of teaching, such as classroom experiences. Consider proclamation, such as speeches, sermons, or those things someone has proclaimed to you in a private conversation. Consider activities of service, such as Habitat for Humanity projects, tutoring sessions for neighborhood children, or clean-up projects in the church. Consider any of these activities, and ask yourself, what have I learned from them? How have I been shaped by them? (Again, it might be helpful to write down some thoughts here.)

Now, consider that the people you met during the meditation intersect with the things you have learned here as a member of this church. How could the things you have learned affect the people you met? How might the things you learn here help you to celebrate with others? How might the things you learn here help you to grieve with others? How might the things you learn here help you to respond in words or actions to those who were in need? What opportunities for ministry is God presenting to you this year? This week? Today?

Further Reflections

This group exercise aims to synthesize some key ideas from Palmer’s To Know as We Are Known, Harris’ Fashion Me a People, and Everist’s Ordinary Ministry, Extraordinary Challenge. The central thrust of the exercise is to have people consider how God calls and equips them to lives of ministry.

One of my favorite definitions of vocation is, that place where our talents and gifts intersect the world’s deepest needs. Palmer calls us to realize that education is not merely for its own sake, nor for the sake of personal advancement. Rather, we teach obedience to truth, and this obedience must find expression in love and care for the world. Palmer’s sense of education has a vocational ring, because the student, according to Palmer, is not ultimately accountable to a professor or to a boss who will measure and reward the accumulated knowledge with grades and salary. Ultimately, the student is accountable to herself or himself along with the world to which her or his future is bound. Only by a life dedicated to the service of the world’s well-being does the student demonstrate that any learning has indeed taken place.

In the exercise, it is hoped that participants will see that the things they have learned from the church are to be put into practice in the world. Written exams are not the true test of Christian Education; we can measure what we have learned by how we practice love with the people in our homes, our communities, and the world at large.

For those who have read Harris, her wisdom is easy to spot in the exercise. If we are to respond to the world’s deepest needs, then we need education, and this cannot come from classrooms alone. Every aspect of the church’s life prepares its people for ministry, and the people of God must be aware of that fact. Education needs to claim its rightful place within the church: it happens beyond the classroom and is for more than the children and youth. This group exercise is, of course, one kind of education in a broader spectrum of education in the church. It is a starting point to open people’s thoughts to the wider means of education in that spectrum.
The people whom one encounters in the meditation are those through whom we hear God’s calling. Like the vast situations that called forth faithful responses in Everist’s book, so do the people we meet in our lives give us our callings to ministry. The stories in Everist’s book show that God’s people, led by the Spirit, respond to ordinary situations with love and compassion. Sometimes, situations call for creativity, while other times, they call for perseverance. By staying aware of the events and people that flow through our lives, we can hear God asking us to put our talents and resources to work for God’s kingdom.