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-- Mark Byington is a permanent deacon at St. Joseph Church in a suburb of St. Louis near Ferguson, Missouri. He is a former police officer, and he was concerned by the tensions in that area in light of recent events.

-- He wanted to do something to promote peace and reconciliation. So he organized an inter-denominational weekend of reflection open to police officers in the St. Louis area. It is taking place at a retreat center overlooking the Mississippi River.

-- Over 40 officers have signed up. His goal is to give them an opportunity to reflect in quiet, because there is little quiet in their work as police officers. He hopes this will be a step in the healing process that needs to go on there.

-- He heard a special call. He had already been called when he stepped forward to be ordained a deacon. Within that calling, he responded to God's grace and took a risk. Time will tell what practical results his efforts yield, but the important point is his openness to God's continuing call.

-- Jonah initially resisted God's call and took off in the opposite direction. But God was persistent. Finally, Jonah set out to do God's work, even though he cared little for those Ninevites. And they heard God's call to repentance and were saved from destruction.

-- Those four fishermen in our gospel heard the call of Jesus. They had probably seen him or at least heard about his preaching and healing. When he called, they responded promptly, leaving their means of living and their families.

-- In our culture we are attracted to stories of dramatic conversions, like ex-criminals, drug addicts and the like who suddenly give their lives to the Lord. We admire people who are willing to leave the good life and the security of their families to go out as missionaries in far-away lands.

-- While God's call sometimes comes in such a dramatic fashion, more often it comes in a less glamorous call to persevere in a vocation, a marriage, in family life and in service to others when that is not rewarded.

-- God's call is answered by a man or woman who continues to give daily care to a spouse with a chronic illness over months or even years. It's answered by a public official who refuses to accept bribes when his fellow officials take them.

-- It's answered by many priests or religious who have given over 50 years of faithful service, and continue to do God's work, even if only in limited pastoral service or in the ministry of prayer.

-- God's call is answered by many people in the Christian community, some of whom I've met, who have devoted many years of their lives to the goal of Christian unity, and have not been discouraged when obstacles to that unity have arisen.

-- Each of us needs to be open to God's call. Like Deacon Mark in suburban St. Louis, we may well experience a "call within a call" from God to use our unique gifts to promote the gospel message.

-- In some cases, they are dramatic calls. In most cases, they are very ordinary. Sometimes, they are somewhere in between those two, like what happened to Deacon Mark Byington.

-- He may not make the national headlines like the recent tragic events in Ferguson did. But, remember, Jesus and his disciples would have been, at best, a small byline in the "press" of the early first century.

-- They changed the world by answering the Lord's call. We can change some significant things in our own world if we are open to answering his personal call to us.